

Divine Hiddenness: Part 1 ***(Recent Work on the Hiddenness Argument)***

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Only six years have passed since I last published a critical survey article on the divine hiddenness discussion (Schellenberg 2010a). But more than 60 papers and books dealing with hiddenness themes have been published in that time. Not all can be addressed here. Moreover, to enable a reasonable treatment of those that will make an appearance, I'll break the present survey into two parts. I begin in this piece with recent work – including my own – on the argument descended from Schellenberg 1993, which started the discussion. Part 2, yet to come, will consider ways in which this area of inquiry has recently been enlarged beyond its original parameters.

I. THE HIDDENNESS ARGUMENT

In Schellenberg 2015a, I provide a statement of the hiddenness argument in its essentials little changed from the statement I would have given in 1993 or 2010, but using the concept of *openness to personal relationship*. So let's start with that. Note that a capacity for personal relationship with God on the part of nonresistant nonbelievers is assumed but left tacit in this statement. (For the latest statement of the argument in which all the *is* are dotted and *ts* crossed, see Schellenberg 2015b, 24-25.)

1. If a perfectly loving God exists, then there exists a God who is always open to a personal relationship with any finite person.
2. If there exists a God who is always open to a personal relationship with any finite person, then no finite person is ever nonresistantly in a state of nonbelief in relation to the proposition that God exists.
3. If a perfectly loving God exists, then no finite person is ever nonresistantly in a state of nonbelief in relation to the proposition that God exists (from 1 and 2).
4. Some finite persons are or have been nonresistantly in a state of nonbelief in relation to the proposition that God exists.
5. No perfectly loving God exists (from 3 and 4).
6. If no perfectly loving God exists, then God does not exist.
7. God does not exist (from 5 and 6).

Now, a great deal in the way of clarification is required for the various moves of

this argument to make it fully persuasive. Here I will offer a few points I've emphasized of late (Schellenberg 2015a), some of which involve the broader evolutionary framework I've recently developed for discussion of religious matters (Schellenberg 2013).

My philosophical starting point is not what any theistic religious tradition has had to say about the divine but the more general idea of a religiously ultimate reality, which can be given a personalist elaboration. The ultimist idea (the idea of a reality ultimate in the nature of things, in inherent value, and in the value it can bring to creaturely lives) is a more fundamental religious idea than many that philosophers of religion have considered. It can be elaborated in various ways. *One* of these involves the idea of a person, a being that can be aware of itself and other things, has moral properties, and can act intentionally.

This idea of a personal ultimate, which I call 'theism,' can and should be tested by argument. The hiddenness argument is one such argument. It proposes (at item 6, a premise) that a personal ultimate would have to be perfectly *loving*. This notion, I suggest, all the resources available to philosophical reflection combine to make evident. These resources include certain results of cultural evolution in the previous century, which help us to consider such matters without the distorting effects of sexism and outmoded thinking about family roles – in particular images of the strong solitary male and the distant father – that have long influenced our thinking about God.

So what can we do with the idea of love? We might follow it into the problem of evil. But what the hiddenness argument tells us is that we can also go another direction. (Here again it is aided by positive cultural evolution.) The relevant divine motive is a *pro-relationship* motive, not an anti-bad motive or even a pro-good motive. What is deepest in this connection is the best love's tendency to value relationship with those loved for its own sake. This, it seems to me, is part of what makes the present argument so interesting. *Pace* C. Stephen Evans (2010, 164-165) the hiddenness argument is not reducible to the problem of evil. It can stand on its own two feet, and adds to the case for atheism in a fundamental way (Schellenberg 2010b, 2015a, 2016).

Now, the sort of relationship the hiddenness argument has in mind is *conscious reciprocal* relationship, the availability of which in some form we all take for granted when one of us – whether parent or sibling or spouse or friend – is said to love another. Even if the pro-relationship motive tied to love should not lead us to say that a loving God would *desire* or actively *seek* conscious reciprocal relationship with those whom God loved, it certainly does mean, as premise 1 of the hiddenness argument has it, that God would always be *open* to such relationship, in the minimal sense of *never being closed* – never shutting off the possibility of participating in such a relationship just by trying. (Notice carefully that there is no implication that such participation would always be pleasant or easy.) Of course God wouldn't force anyone into such relationship or force anyone to remain in a position to participate in such relationship, and so such a possibility might still be shut off by what *creatures* do in resistance of the relationship.

Perhaps it will seem that conception of God I've been developing is too anthropomorphic. Let me pause to point out two things. One, even if we think of God as a loving person, it has to be allowed that the mode of God's loving behaviour and the texture of God's inner life might be rather different from that of any human person. Two, since we are purposely testing *one way* of thinking about the ultimate, we must deliberately stick to the concept of a person. If we don't, what we say in description of God threatens to collapse back into the more generic ultimistic idea we have elaborated, and the point of the exercise is lost.

At this stage, we should take note of an important fact: a person A can't always be in my sense open to a conscious reciprocal relationship with another person B if A ever prevents B from believing in A's existence, since B's belief in the existence of A at a time is a necessary condition of then being able to participate in such relationship with A. Thinking of the present case: how could you be grateful for what you've experienced as a gift of God's grace or vacillate over how to respond to your sense that God is calling you to a higher level of moral commitment or do any other thing involved in a conscious reciprocal relationship with God *if you don't believe that God exists*? It follows, given that the possibility of entering into relationship with God can only be shut off from our side (better: from the side of persons created by God, whoever they may be), that the only sort of nonbelief we should find in a world created by a loving God who is open to personal relationship with finite persons is *resistant* nonbelief: nonbelief caused by a creature's resistance of relationship with God. In the absence of resistance, belief in God would be like a light that turns on when one becomes capable of relationship with God and stays on, even if the degree of its brightness should fluctuate.

This point is recorded in premise 2 of the hiddenness argument. And it allows us to draw the first conclusion of the argument, at 3. But of course what 3 tells us about how things should be if there is a loving God does not correspond to how things really are in the world. This new information appears in 4, the only other premise of the argument not yet mentioned. Notice here the interesting fact that it is not only the apparently honest *doubt of reflective* nonbelievers to which we can appeal; the absence of belief in a loving personal God, over aeons of evolution, of those occupied with *other* ideas and never even able to resist personal relationship with God will do perfectly well as a relevant indication of nonresistant nonbelief. And from here it's clear sailing to 5 and 7, the remaining conclusions of the argument.

II. NEW DISCUSSIONS OF NONRESISTANT NONBELIEF

One way to answer the hiddenness argument would involve showing that 4 is false or dubious. Discussions of 4 prevalent early on in the discussion of the hiddenness argument tended to be onesidedly influenced by Calvinist ideas of sinfulness and ignored the nonbelief of vast ages prior to the development of theistic religion. Here and there one still finds this sort of opposition to the existence of nonresistant nonbelief (see, e.g. Azadegan 2013). But recent work on the subject has generally been quite different, with appeals to cognitive psychology and social epistemology replacing unquestioned religious doctrine.

Miles Andrews (2014) suggests that interesting work in cognitive psychology about the unreliability of affective forecasting casts doubt on the existence of nonresistant nonbelievers, since the claim that there is an individual S fitting that description (call this claim p) entails that

S *would* form the belief that God exists if evidence of the sort I have sometimes stressed were to be made available to S, and this latter claim (call it q) amounts to an affective forecast. Andrews' own argument is marred by the (mistaken) assumption that the relevant sort of belief, on my view, combines both propositional and affective elements. But perhaps a version of the argument could still be developed after that assumption is excised. Suppose so. Does the claimed entailment from p to q hold? There are complicated issues here, but let's assume it does. Is that a problem, assuming the relevant results of cognitive psychology can be trusted? I think it is rather a solution. Andrews supposes that we should think of q as amounting to an affective forecast which we need some independent reason to regard as reliable. But it is hard to see why this should be the case if we have lots of evidence (independent of facts about S's reliability in relevant matters) for p, *and can assume that p entails q*.

Other new arguments in this vicinity defend the existence of nonresistant nonbelief instead of opposing it. Helen De Cruz, in an interesting article on the bearing of results in the cognitive science of religion (CSR) on hiddenness (De Cruz 2015), supports the view that "both cultural and individual psychological factors can give rise to nonbelief" even among the nonresistant (57). In the former category we have non-exposure to "religious displays" and the "rise of secular institutions" which functionally displace religion. In the latter we find such individual psychological variations as those represented by the autism scale, with people higher on the autism spectrum less likely to hold theistic belief. Cruz says some people with autism may represent normal cognitive variations, not mental disability, and be nonresistant nonbelievers simply "because it is hard for them to represent supernatural beings (especially their mental states)" (58). Of course CSR is a young discipline, and, as De Cruz explains, it has also been used to make a case for the 'naturalness' of religious belief, so we shall have to wait to receive its final verdict on such issues.

The epistemologist John Greco takes another tack (Greco 2015). He distinguishes "acquisition activities" pertaining to the flow of information from "distribution activities" (118), arguing that when it comes to the latter, and in particular to testimonial exchange, things can go wrong in a complex variety of ways. In the case at hand, these might involve the speaker (e.g., a believer) or the informal community (e.g., a family) or a formal institution (e.g., a church) (125). Greco appears to be saying to traditional theistic philosophers such as Alvin Plantinga who interpret nonbelief as sinful: 'Look, even if your religious community has *acquired* the truth about God, maybe its *distribution* has run into normal human difficulties.' According to Greco's argument, social epistemology makes the 'sin' response to nonbelief entirely optional, and indeed supports the claim that much nonbelief is nonresistant.

But there is also something else going on in Greco's argument. He says that to know God would be to know a person, and persons typically "self-disclose in a selective manner," for idiosyncratic reasons (113). Here he has apparently got two audiences in mind. To traditional theistic philosophers enamoured of the sin response he is saying that they should prefer the response to the hiddenness argument appealing to *reasons* for God to remain hidden; to a wider audience including proponents of the hiddenness argument, and after the most cursory discussion, he is suggesting that good reasons should be no more difficult to find than in the case of the problem of evil (116). To his credit, Greco notes that it might be thought that the

person who is *God* would in some respects be disclosed *non*-selectively, and that he (Greco) has hardly attended to all the relevant issues.

III. NEW INVESTIGATIONS OF THE DIVINE NATURE

In this section I'll concentrate on new responses to some issues that are among those left undiscussed by Greco, issues about the nature of God (including but not restricted to the nature of perfect love) thought to have a bearing on one or other or both of the first two premises of the hiddenness argument.

Ebrahim Azadegan (2014) distinguishes agape and eros as the forms of love God might possess. Agape is impartial, he says, unlike a relational love moved by particular qualities of the beloved. So if God's love is agape, it won't be what the hiddenness argument describes. And divine eros would require from us more than just nonresistance: one would also have to do the various things (e.g., praying) that are needed to be in the relationship it seeks. So even if we assume God's love is eros the hiddenness argument fails.

What Azadegan tends to forget is that relationship with God would be good for *all* capable creatures, and so if agape, a generous love, is moved by this shared property to make relationship available, it will be at once impartial and relational. As for eros: though Azadegan himself distinguishes being able to choose a relationship with God from already being *in* one (115), he generally fails to see that the hiddenness argument is talking about the former, not the latter. The hiddenness argument certainly doesn't say that nonresistance should be sufficient for the latter. If God loves creatures, their nonresistance should be sufficient to ensure that they are *in a position* to enter into personal relationship with a loving God through such things as believing prayer, *able* to do so. And so Azadegan's second point evaporates. For certainly it cannot be true that to be able to do certain things one must already have done them!

Jeff Jordan (2012), without speaking of eros, builds the partiality Azadegan sometimes associates with it into the very nature of love. Love, he says, must identify with, and thus take as its own and "seek to promote," the interests of the one loved (65). But the interests of different people will conflict. So we should not expect God's love to be "maximally extended and equally intense" (54) in relation to everyone as – so Jordan supposes – the hiddenness argument requires.

Jordan's reasoning is original and interestingly developed, but Thomas Talbott (2013) and Ross Parker (2013) think it is mistaken, arguing, respectively, that the partiality of love is a contingent rather than an essential feature of love, reflecting human limitations, and that Jordan builds rather too much into the concept of 'identifying' with another's interests; if we lighten that concept's load the result will be that God can indeed love everyone equally.

Jordan's basic response, as evidenced by his reply to Talbott (2015), is that such moves come with a cost: restricting God's attention to interests creatures have in *common* with each other. He thinks they imagine God unlovingly treating us as interchangeable with each other, as

fungibles, rather than identifying with our individual interests in all their particularity, which would inevitably mean *not* identifying with certain *incompatible* interests of others.

But this is problematic. As Parker's piece suggests, the concept of 'identifying' with the interests of another can be taken in different ways, and it's not clear that Jordan's interpretation is the best one for love. I would say, for example, that you can express the attitude of caring about the opposed interests of two people if you're *sad* that they can't both be realized. And such caring seems to suffice for the love-relevant sort of identification. But then any of us, and any God as well, can identify with opposed interests and Jordan's problem is solved.

Suppose this is mistaken. We might still insist that, *as far as possible*, divine love would extend to all equally. And that would leave us with a reason to speak of universal openness to relationship. For here we have something God can do for all. Indeed, we could leave love out of it, using a different term for a universal and, so far as possible, equally intense concern for everyone. In that case, Jordan's critique would turn out to be trivial, amounting only to the claim that the quality to which the hiddenness argument refers, though assuredly belonging to the divine nature, should not be called *love*.

Another recent discussion of the nature of love, as it relates to hiddenness, appears in a paper by Imran Aijaz and Markus Weidler (2013), who seem strongly influenced by something like the 'deep and wide' intuition about divine love that Jordan rejects. Like Azadegan, these writers think the hiddenness argument faces a dilemma, though they have a different one in mind: either the argument insists that for God's love to be shared explicit recognition of God is necessary, in which case certain handicapped people are excluded from God's love, or it doesn't require this, in which case *all* can have a loving relationship with God and there is no hiddenness problem (97). But the hiddenness argument requires only that for God's love to be shared *explicitly*, as is appropriate for those with the relevant capacities, explicit recognition of God is necessary, and so the dilemma is inapplicable. (Aijaz and Weidler, unfortunately, slip all too easily – see, e.g. 105 – from the idea that God doesn't love someone explicitly to the idea that God doesn't love them at all.) If a God would create persons bereft, say, of the cognitive capacities involved in believing that God exists, then no doubt various implicit relations of love would still exist between God and such people, were God to exist. Nothing in the hiddenness argument suggests otherwise.

A more general discussion of the nature of God is brought into contact with hiddenness issues in a novel way by Michael Rea (2012), who suggests that hiddenness might just be an "expression of God's personality" (271) and that it might be "deeply good for God to live out his personality" (274). We focus too much on what God could do for *us* instead of noticing that we haven't a clue what the inner life of God would be like and how it would perhaps most beautifully be expressed in ways not immediately advantageous to ourselves. This point is well taken. But it is hard to see how it requires hiddenness. Indeed, Rea himself seems inclined to deny that it does, revealing by the end that his concern is more with persons who expect evidence of God to be made available *in a certain way* than with the claim that God would be knowable by creatures in *some way*. As Ross Parker (2014) has helped to clarify, Rea's solution for the hiddenness problem requires not just his sort of reflection on the divine personality but

this *in conjunction* with an acceptance of Rea's claim that through biblical narrative and church liturgy a means of finding God has been made available. And the latter notion, as Parker rightly suggests, won't do much work against the hiddenness argument because many nonbelievers are not in the right "epistemic position" to benefit from such evidence (134). Rea's argument, one is inclined to think, would be more successful if Christianity, or at any rate biblical religion, (a) were the only sort of religion in the world, (b) had throughout the history of hominins been available to the participation of everyone, and (c) leaves no one who has participated in it seriously a nonresistant nonbeliever. But none of these things is true.

IV. NEW REASONS FOR DIVINE HIDDENNESS

A further, larger cluster of recent responses to the hiddenness argument is unified not by a focus on the nature of God but by a preoccupation with *reasons* even a loving God might have for temporarily being non-open to relationship through the permission of nonresistant nonbelief. Such reasons, if we could generate them, would cast the first premise of the hiddenness argument into question or prove it false. The indefatigable Travis Dumsday has produced nearly a dozen reasons of this kind in the past half dozen years, appealing to such goods as responsibility, divine humility, justice, and the avoidance of alienation. Considerable ingenuity is displayed by this work. But some of Dumsday's reasons are less plausible than others. His humility argument (Dumsday 2014), for example, builds on Rea's suggestions about the divine personality, but runs into the problem that if God is self-revealed from *love* and if creatures know this, as of course the hiddenness argument is asking us to imagine, then even a revelation employing rearrangements of stars needn't display a lack of humility! Other reasons Dumsday develops exaggerate or view too onesidedly what the hiddenness argument says about revelation.¹ Others still rest on theological assumptions (or reflect a fairly conservative theological sensibility) and so are not, in my view, suitable for philosophical consumption. But that still leaves some arguments standing! Here I select for discussion an interesting and representative Dumsday argument of this latter kind.

It appears in Dumsday 2010, which notes that if God permits wrongdoing to be a result of free will, many may suffer. Now suppose that those who suffer as a result of wrongdoing are often aware of God, perhaps as a result of an experience of God's presence, which would have to be made more intense during suffering for belief to be sustained through it. If their suffering is not prevented by God because this is not consistent with God's purposes, then even if God lets them know those purposes, may they not be led into *hatred* of God and a *rejection* of relationship with God as they blame God for their victimization, especially if they are young and immature? So, says Dumsday, it is quite possible that God would remain hidden from many such people until appropriate maturity is reached as a way of "safeguarding" relationship with them (431).

¹ Dumsday sometimes suggests that I view experience as the only way belief in God might come, when I have said that it is one quite natural way (there are others; belief might even be made innate), and he also sometimes represents religious experience in my arguments as constant and constantly forceful, when I have emphasized that it might ebb and flow according to the spiritual and moral and emotional needs of the believer.

But it is unclear why God would or might create beings who, at any stage, would be thus disposed on being given a sense of God's loving presence and even an explanation for their suffering. Perhaps it will be said that this is because God might create beings like us. What is wanting then is empirical evidence that *we* are like this. (In a piece on 'hiddenness' experienced by devout believers subjected to torture in a Japanese context, in which the explanations for apostasy are invariably bound up with not knowing why God would permit such suffering, Yujin Nagasawa [2015] provides some empirical evidence against this claim.) But set this point aside. An important principle I have recently argued we should accept – call it the Openness Principle – has it that a loving person maintains openness to relationship with the one she loves whenever she has the resources to accommodate the consequences of such openness, bringing them into harmony with the flourishing of the beloved and of any relationship that may come to exist between her and the one she loves (Schellenberg 2015a, 44-45). And a God would be in the best possible position to satisfy this condition always. In other words, the relationship with God can be safeguarded *without* hiddenness. Suppose there are individuals of the sort in question who lash out in hatred and reject God in the midst of their suffering. Unless they are subjected to suffering *eternally* or can never be provoked even by God to reach a deeper maturity when *not* suffering, a positive relationship with God need not be sacrificed. And it is not plausible to suppose that either of these conditions is satisfied if God exists.

However for this sort of move Daniel Howard-Snyder's most recent work on hiddenness (Howard-Snyder 2015) offers a response, and an additional leg for Dumsday's argument to stand on, by suggesting that even if everything is smoothed out over the long run, God still, in such a case, has to accept a *poorer start* for the relationship than might seem desirable. Maybe God wants "a better start" (137). Howard-Snyder has his own ideas as to what might make a poor start likely, offering an analogy involving Mary, who has some desire for a romantic relationship with Joe but holds off until Joe's capacity for long-term faithfulness is tested or until she's more sure of his motives. Let's consider this analogy. Notice that what Mary gives up for a better start is *time with Joe now*, whom we're assuming Mary loves. So the choice for Mary is not as simple as a choice between a superior and an inferior start to the relationship. What we really have to ask – keeping in mind that Mary is an analogue for God – is whether Mary would prefer (a) to give up time with Joe now so that the whole relationship, start to finish (which of course will now start later), can be good or (b) to spend time with Joe now, accepting a wobbly but earlier start for this reason, and also because she knows Joe will improve thereafter.²

I myself cannot see why Mary would prefer (a) to (b), if she really loves Joe. The weight of the 'better start' is cancelled by that of not being with Joe. Another problem for the response Howard-Snyder wants us to give is that the desire for a 'better start' seems to depend on a kind

² Here I add an important clarification, directed to those who may say that God cannot know ahead of time that things will go well in the relationship (whatever may be said of Mary), unless God is willing at some point to 'wipe out' any contrary dispositions and 'force himself on' the previously ill-disposed creature (Howard-Snyder 2015, 132). If God gradually reveals more of the divine beauty, as much as is needed to fully illuminate the situation, there would be no need for any of this; the creature would respond naturally to such increased knowledge-by-acquaintance of God as opposed to being forced into anything.

of moral parity being possibly achieved between Mary and Joe. (Apparently we are to assume that Mary doesn't suffer from Joe's defects or similar shortcomings!) And this makes the application of Howard-Snyder's story to God rather difficult, because there could never be such parity between God and creatures. If God considers relationship with creatures at all, it is while knowing that *they will always be relatively immature*. But the most fundamental problem with Howard-Snyder's analogy (a similar problem besets several of the other stories he tells in his paper) is that it's not at all clear that the sort of 'unavailability' he describes as resulting from Mary's decision to wait amounts to the relevant sort of non-openness to personal relationship in the first place. After all, Joe and Mary are aware of each other's existence, and of the mutual interest. Joe could make a move, and if it were of the right sort, Mary would respond. Indeed they have already 'connected' in the relevant sense; a personal relationship has already begun between them (perhaps it is not yet a romantic relationship, though even that is dubious). Here there is an important lesson: we should not conflate openness to personal relationship with a willingness to be *experientially present* to the other. As I have often pointed out, it can be an important move *within* a relationship when one withdraws experientially from the other, so long as the appropriate response would not be refused.

Another new discussion of reasons for hiddenness appears in a fine imaginative essay by Andrew Cullison (2010). Unfortunately, Cullison exhibits the strange habit of some philosophers to put forward in their own way an argument somewhat like (but also importantly different from) the argument advanced by philosopher P and then say that this is the very argument P has put forward. Fortunately, at least one of the responses to the argument Cullison develops can be used as a response to the hiddenness argument. The response I have in mind draws on the work of Erik Wielenberg and maintains that *genuine sacrifice of one's own life* is or can be a great and noble good that belief in a loving God would make impossible (or at least reduce to a weak and morally diluted good). So God remains hidden to make this good possible.

The potential value of this response is evident from the fact that if it works, then many different forms of nonresistant nonbelief, in many different contexts, would become explicable. But does it work? Here are some points to consider. First, the sort of fear sufficient to make for great and noble courage in self-sacrifice might be made *irrational* by belief in God, but especially if natural biological impulses to self-preservation are assumed, it would likely not be removed. Second, it would be easier to get the result Cullison wants if one conflated belief in the existence of God and a constant sense of God's presence, but as we saw above, these two must carefully be distinguished. Third, as already suggested, the good here brought to our attention belongs to a wider *type* of good we might call *great courage*, and it is because of the great courage it exhibits that we so admire self-sacrifice. But there are other ways in which God might provide us with opportunities for great courage. (Perhaps various transitions from immaturity to maturity in 'everyday' life will call for it; no doubt a life with God infinitely extended, featuring endless occasions for further development, would do the same.) Now because of the Openness Principle mentioned above, we should not expect that God would be hidden for the sake of genuine sacrifice if goods of the same type can be had even if God remains open to relationship. Thus we shouldn't expect that God would be hidden for the sake of genuine sacrifice.

Where goods we know of seem insufficient to provide reasons for God to be hidden, theists sometimes appeal to unknown goods. This is the approach of Justin P. McBrayer and Philip Swenson (2012). After arguing that extant responses to the argument fail, they develop against it a version of skeptical theism, apparently on the ground that we would inappropriately be regarding God as bound to behave as we ourselves would behave, if we accepted the argument. “We don’t think that atheists or theists can say with any serious degree of confidence why God does what he does or why he would or wouldn’t do a certain thing” (145). ‘A certain thing’ as understood here is meant to cover particular things like God not being open to relationship with someone at some particular time. At the end of his piece, Howard-Snyder (2015) takes a similar line, arguing that an openminded and humble inquirer will conclude that she is in no position to rule out unknown good reasons for God to permit nonresistant nonbelief, even if she is left unconvinced by such reasons as Howard-Snyder has developed, discussed above.

In response to skeptical theism, it is important to strike a balance. We don’t want a conception of God so uninformative that it collapses back into the general religious proposition I have called ultimism, or a conception with details that have no rational support. Also, paraphrasing C. S. Peirce, we don’t want to place unnecessary and rationally unmotivated obstacles in the path of inquiry. One way to respect both desiderata implicit here is to explore what can be done when we add the idea of a person to that of ultimism. If, given that combination, you can go on to add love, I suggest you have enough content to generate results at odds with various applications of skeptical theism. (It would be much more conducive to the success of skeptical theism if we could say that although God must be a person, we don’t know what *sort* of person God would be.) For to think carefully about the nature of love is precisely to learn something about the sorts of reasons a personal God will act on.

But how do you know what God will or won’t do in particular circumstances? In the present case this is actually not so difficult. For if one generates a perfectly general and inclusive disposition, as one can with love and openness to personal relationship, then its existence *implies* that particular behaviours at odds with the disposition will not occur. But why does the general have priority over the particular here? Isn’t this rather too convenient – too good (for the hiddenness argument) to be true? Wouldn’t a humble and openminded inquirer, as Howard-Snyder argues in response to this sort of point, refuse to accept that God would prevent all nonresistant nonbelief until she has “satisfied her natural curiosity” about unknown reasons for God to behave otherwise (137)? Well, the deepest issue here is not about the prevention of nonresistant nonbelief but about *openness to relationship* (the former is dependent on the latter), and, if I’m right, curiosity about unknown reasons for a loving God not to be open to relationship reflects only a misunderstanding of the implications of love in the divine case. (A discussion of *known* reasons of the sort we’ve just had, though unnecessary if we already see this, can gradually educate one to a belief that this is so.)

The central fact is that the Openness Principle mentioned above identifies a *structural* fact about loving behaviour which, in the case of God, has the consequence that there will be no reasons, ever, for God not to be open to relationship with those whom God loves. It’s easy to miss this because, due to human limits, we may in certain odd cases *lack* such resources as are

mentioned by the Openness Principle. But a God clearly would suffer from no such limits. So the Openness Principle can be used to show that a loving God would always be open to relationship with those loved. To see the point here, it may be helpful to think of a loving father or wife or sister or friend who *never* lacks resources of the sort mentioned. So long as she remains *loving*, will she ever fail to be open to relationship with the one she loves? Clearly not. Noticing this, we will therefore *not* refuse to accept that God would always be open to relationship with those whom God loves until the idea of unknown reasons for God to behave otherwise has been explored. Instead, we will see that by becoming acquainted with the consequences of love in the divine case, we have *already* turned up all the information on that subject that the curious inquirer will need.

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