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Divine Hiddenness: Part 2 ***(Recent Enlargements of the Discussion)***

ABSTRACT

Offered here is Part 2 of a two-part critical survey of recent work in philosophy on divine hiddenness. Part 1 surveyed recent development of the discussion initiated by my 1993 book on the subject. Here I examine some related work that expands the scope of the hiddenness discussion. Some of the enlargements take further the discussion of Stephen Maitzen's work on the demographics of theism. Others introduce new hiddenness problems and ways of dealing with them. A third category of new work urges theological constraints, of one sort or another, on hiddenness reasoning, thus raising new methodological issues.

This is the second of two articles critically surveying recent work on divine hiddenness in philosophy. More than 60 papers and books dealing with hiddenness themes have appeared in the past six years, since an earlier survey article of mine was published (Schellenberg 2010). Realizing that I could not address all of these, and wishing to enable a reasonable treatment of those I did include, I decided to break my present survey into two parts. Part 1 (Schellenberg 2017) looked at recent philosophical work on the hiddenness argument for atheism descended from my book *Divine Hiddenness and Human Reason* (Schellenberg 1993). Now, in Part 2, I consider recent work not easily seen as belonging to that stream of discussion but related to it by family resemblance – work on arguments about hiddenness other than my argument, some of them quite new, and work that, though sometimes applied to my argument, more decidedly than any that came before seeks insight on a range of hiddenness issues from theology, raising a number of methodological issues as it does so.

I. NEW WORK ON THE DEMOGRAPHICS OF THEISM

Ten years ago, Stephen Maitzen expanded the number of hiddenness issues to be considered by arguing that the highly uneven or lopsided distribution of theistic belief in the world is much more likely on naturalism than on theism (Maitzen 2006). This problem he called a problem about the 'demographics' of theism. A recent reply to Maitzen comes from T. J. Mawson (2012). Maitzen had argued that responses appealing to free will are inapplicable to the demographics problem. But Mawson observes that neglected in Maitzen's discussion of free will is the fact that, through the exercise of free will, people can affect how much and where belief in God spreads, with an uneven distribution of belief easily being the result. Once this is noted, he suggests, a solution to the demographics problem emerges. For perhaps God indeed wants everyone to come to believe but wants even more not to interfere with such exercises of free will. It might be otherwise, Mawson admits, if the lack of *ante-mortem* belief in God's existence could prevent one from achieving salvation, for God would very much want us to achieve salvation. But, says he, a wholly good God would never allow salvation to be thus prevented.

Mawson behaves as though God would deeply value the existence, at some time, of creaturely belief in God's existence only if, at that time, it is necessary that one thus believe if one is to be saved. This alone, it seems, brings the relevant sort of "urgency" (199). The cause of his operating in this way is at least in part Mawson's assumption that Maitzen proceeds in the same way. But now two points. First, Maitzen does not proceed in the same way. He draws on *both* the idea of evangelical theism that salvation requires belief and the more general notion – familiar from discussion of my work – about perfect love naturally making available to creatures some measure of a belief-presupposing relationship with God (2006, 179). Mawson apparently does not notice Maitzen's appeal to the latter idea, and thus does not notice a response to his argument that Maitzen can deploy. Second, it is hard to see why that response should not be deployed, and in a manner that it would be hard for Mawson to reject. This is because intuitions about the nature of love support it at least as strongly as intuitions about goodness (on which he relies) support Mawson's claim about God ensuring that salvation is lost to no one.

Another recent reply to Maitzen is from Max Baker-Hytch (2016). Baker-Hytch notices what Mawson overlooks, and indeed devotes some effort to dealing with the view about perfect love mentioned above. His main point in this regard is that there are ways of having a certain kind of personal relationship with someone even when one lacks the explicit belief that they exist. As he notes (385), this is ground that others have covered, though he provides some interesting new examples of what such writers have had in mind. And the fact that others have covered this ground goes with another fact: that several replies to this sort of move appear in the literature (see, e.g., Schellenberg 2007). Baker-Hytch has nothing to say that engages these replies. He does introduce a new point in this connection: that someone who has been related to God non-explicitly will, if God exists, have a special sort of experience when the conversion to explicitness occurs – "It was you all along!" (389) But he does not note that this exclamation might soon be followed by a question: 'And why was it necessary for you to hide until now?'

However it is likely that Baker-Hytch would say he has provided a possible answer for that question in the rest of his article, in which his main response to Maitzen is developed. Here he argues (i) that a state of affairs he calls "mutual epistemic dependence" (MED) is about as likely on theism as on naturalism, and (ii) that MED's obtaining should lead us to expect the evidence (E) to which Maitzen appeals. As he puts it: "Pr(E/MED) is high" (379). The conjunction of these two claims, he says, gives us good reason to "doubt Maitzen's contention" (385).

Baker-Hytch appears to expect that defenders of the Maitzen view will oppose the first of his two claims, (i). But he has provided a nice defence for (i) by noting how MED facilitates a balance between three sets of competing goods: (a) exercising interpersonal trust and being invulnerable to deception, (b) sharing responsibility for one another's acquisition of epistemic goods and practicing epistemic self-reliance, and (c) having opportunities to acquire, practice, and perfect the intellectual virtues and freedom from intellectual obstacles and challenges. I myself think that the second of Baker-Hytch's two claims, (ii) – the claim that Pr(E/MED) is high – is the more vulnerable. Consider how Baker-Hytch characterizes MED:

[We are] cognitively constituted in such a way that it is a practical necessity that we rely upon testimony for much of what we know about the world and in such a way, moreover, that we are liable to be significantly influenced by what those around us believe, particularly when it comes to matters that aren't readily susceptible to empirical investigation, including religious matters (377).

To avoid assuming that God must create *humans* and actualize *our* world, as to his credit Baker-Hytch tries to do (379-380), and to make it a significant question how probable E is on MED, we should mentally remove from this description all the references to *us* and consider MED in such a way that it could obtain in various possible worlds. This Baker-Hytch fails consistently to do (see 378-379), and that, I suggest, is why it seems to him that $\Pr(E/MED)$ is high. In other words, he fails consistently to distinguish the *type* of state of affairs MED is from the *token* of it we find in the actual world, in which of course E is to be found. When we do explicitly make this distinction, we will find reason to suppose that MED could, without losing the properties Baker-Hytch finds valuable, obtain even if everyone believed in God's existence. I can't fully show this here, but to get a sense of what I have in mind, just go over that description of MED again, mentally changing the third-last word 'including' to 'excluding,' and think about how many occasions for mutual epistemic dependence would remain.

II. NEW HIDDENNESS PROBLEMS

In a wide-ranging piece, Jason Marsh (2013) develops what he calls "the problem of natural nonbelief" (350). Marsh is thinking about nonbelief that comes early in the human story, before belief in a morally perfect High God emerges. This has been referred to before as an example of nonresistant nonbelief in connection with my work, but Marsh's is the first developed discussion of the phenomenon, with details from cognitive science and elsewhere to support his claim that it is a feature of the actual world. He suggests that it should be a particularly troubling form of nonresistant nonbelief, for here even the *concept* of God is absent. This, among other things, is relevant, he says to the claims of those who have said that a personal relationship with God is possible without explicit belief, for surely one would need to possess at least the concept of God to be in any relevant kind of personal relationship with God (367). Now Baker-Hytch might resist this thought, and his related work, mentioned above, has some subtle points that deserve to be taken into account in any fuller discussion of it. But even Baker-Hytch looks for "the appropriate sorts of emotional attitudes towards God" to be displayed in any relationship with God, however attenuated (2016, 386). And Marsh would be able to use this point to develop and defend his own, for he finds evidence that many humans have seen themselves as related to supernatural beings that were not just limited in power but downright nasty and untrustworthy (358-359), and so incapable of inviting emotional responses of the required sorts.

What we've seen so far is that Marsh reinforces earlier arguments and fills lacunae left by them. But these are fringe benefits of his main contribution on hiddenness issues, which is a new evidential hiddenness argument, whose central claim is that natural nonbelief is much more probable on naturalism, which can explain it by reference to Darwinian evolution, than it is on theism. This is a new argument because Marsh's evidential focus on natural nonbelief is

new. True, Marsh is developing an idea noted as a temporally structured version of his own but left aside by Maitzen (2006, 109, n. 1). Marsh himself sees that “shifty patterns of nonbelief” are the most general concern in both cases (367). So one could see Marsh as building on or augmenting Maitzen’s argument. But natural nonbelief, as Marsh observes, makes for a separate problem in much the same way that natural evil makes for one. By ‘natural’ he here means “being built into the physical or biological structure of the world, and being generally outside the scope of human agency and control” (355). Because of this distinctive feature of the nonbelief with which he is concerned, Marsh maintains that his argument can resist popular free will arguments such as those that Hick and others have developed (367-369). By the same token it appears immune to the free will reply that, as we saw above, Mawson was tempted to try against Maitzen. Furthermore, Baker-Hytch’s MED seems inapplicable. Since analogous points lead us to regard arguments from natural evil as distinct from their moral cousins, I am inclined to agree that Marsh has a new hiddenness argument that in a significant way enlarges the discussion beyond the point to which Maitzen had already taken it.

A second new hiddenness argument appears in the work of Brooke Alan Trisel (2012). Though there are ways of supplementing it that would yield the conclusion that God does not exist, the conclusion Trisel explicitly supports is more modest: that humanity was not created by God (or indeed by any similar being with good intentions) *as a means to some end*, or for a purpose. Of course since theists typically believe otherwise, Trisel’s argument can still be seen as a hiddenness argument against (a) theistic belief.

So what is the argument? For God to possibly achieve a purpose for humanity, says Trisel, we would need to have been made to understand our role in its achievement by now, and we haven’t been. If God had such a purpose, it would be self-defeating, a failure of means-ends rationality, to remain silent about this. So God’s silence about a purpose for humanity shows that there is no such purpose. Drawing on educational and business literatures (388-390), Trisel makes an interesting distinction between information (such as that generated by biblical interpretation or philosophical reflection) and feedback (to fill in gaps in understanding or to correct misunderstandings). Then he argues that even if we have relevant information, as theists will argue, we lack the sort of *feedback* that God, as an omni-competent leader and teacher would have provided by now, given human religious confusion, if God had created us for a purpose. This distinction, it seems to me, may prove useful in the hiddenness discussion whatever the merits of the argument Trisel seeks to sustain with it.

A word or two now on that argument. Though his view on this matter is not perfectly clear, Trisel appears to be assuming that God’s (or indeed any similar being’s) having a purpose for creatures *entails* creatures having the sort of role in its being achieved that he constantly refers to. Since this role he clearly regards as one that creatures might not play – that depends on their acting in one way rather than another – and since he wants to construe the nature of God loosely enough that arguments about God’s purpose of loving relationship might not apply, I don’t think he has a basis for this assumption. After all, shouldn’t he suppose that God might have a purpose for creatures that would be achieved *no matter how* they behaved (say, the purpose of having them experience the wonders of consciousness, or having them display God’s remarkable craftsmanship)? If not that, might it not still be a purpose that would be

achieved no matter how creatures behaved through millennia that to creatures appear long but to a divine being might be just the first moments of a plan's unfolding? If so, then Trisel should allow that there might be a divine plan and purpose for humanity even if we never receive a supernatural communication of it, or even if it hasn't been communicated to us *yet*.

At the end of his paper, Trisel briefly suggests several moves distinct from his main one that might also be developed as hiddenness arguments with purpose-related concerns. Interestingly, these appear to support the stronger conclusion that God does not exist. Even if creatures lack a purpose – suppose their creation is, for God, an end in itself – shouldn't we expect God to inform us *whether we have* a purpose and a role in its realization? There is much uncertainty and anguish among humans about such things, Trisel reminds us, and this he suggests is something we would not find if we had been created by God. (Here the hiddenness reasoning turns into a version of the problem of evil.) Suppose God, as Michael Rea (2012) has suggested, simply prefers to be silent, having something like an introverted personality. Wouldn't God tell us *that*? It seems to Trisel that it would be inconsiderate or disrespectful of God not to do so. Further discussion will be needed to assess the prospects of this reasoning.

In a recent paper by Meghan Sullivan (2015) we find a third new hiddenness problem. This interesting and – given renewed attention to social issues in epistemology – quite timely piece of reasoning is not an argument against God's existence or against the claim that God has a purpose for us, but rather against an epistemic claim on which many religious people rely: that religious testimony received from sources such as scriptures, the religious ideas of diverse theistic traditions, academic articles, and the experiences of friends can be a source of evidence for fairly detailed beliefs about the nature and will of God. This claim presupposes that all of these sources are referring to *God*. But given divine hiddenness, which Sullivan construes largely in terms of religious experiences apparently of God being "limited in content and susceptible of doubt" (37), this belief about reference runs into a skeptical problem. Sullivan calls it "the semantic problem of hiddenness" (37). Surveying various ways of fixing reference to God and settling on Kripke's causal-historical account, which she calls "reference by deference" (42), Sullivan points out that "the current linguistic community is very large and very diverse, with many different forms of religious discourse," and even a believer will have to allow that "initial divine naming events are very remote"; so there is a serious threat of competing causal chains having entered the linguistic community causing either semantic "shift or pollution" (45). Again, the problem would not arise but for the fact that God is experientially hidden, since suitable religious experiences would allow us to "acquire knowledge of him directly or to verify information received indirectly" (37). (Here one is reminded of Trisel's notion of feedback.) Surveying several responses to this problem, Sullivan tentatively, and with due acknowledgement of its own difficulties, proposes what she calls the "semantic inspiration response," according to which the Holy Spirit works in faith communities to prevent such distortions of meaning (49).

Sullivan realizes that insular communities could solve the problem with a kind of "quarantined deference" (48). But, living in a large pluralistic society, she would like to preserve the possibility of communication *across theistic traditions* about one and the same God. (Recall here that she wants to include, as justification for religious belief, the testimony of people in

various diverse theistic traditions.) The result, in her tentatively proposed solution, is the deployment of a partisan idea assumed to be effective in a non-partisan way. Specifically, the idea of the work of the Holy Spirit is a partisan Christian idea, which appears to be applied on the assumption that it can be made operative in a non-partisan fashion in precisely those cases where one has drawn on non-Christian traditions to develop one's theology. This seems subject to an arbitrariness complaint. Moreover, one wonders whether Sullivan has given short shrift to the solution that would find reference-fixing descriptions that are uncontested across traditions (40). A few inter-faith – and good faith! – conferences might produce such descriptions, and then it would be possible for believers to work outward from them in a larger community-making endeavour of the sort that Sullivan sees as providing God a reason for having us rely on testimony in the first place (it is instructive that she herself says “church-making” (36)). Finally, even if reliance on testimony when testimony is questioned can escape criticism because of the unavoidability of epistemic circularity (50), might that reliance rationally come in the form of non-doxastic acceptance rather than belief? Might it be a worthwhile human community-building exercise to restrict the emphasis on *belief* and the search for *epistemic* justification to doctrinal generalia which all theistic traditions share?

A fourth new hiddenness problem is developed by Yujin Nagasawa (2015) and also discussed by Ian DeWeese-Boyd (2015), who writes with knowledge of, and against the background of, Nagasawa's work. Nagasawa calls this problem “the problem of divine absence” (246). What he has in mind is God's hiddenness from devout believers who suffer horrendously. His central example throughout is the truly horrific torture of Kakure Karishitans (Hidden Christians) in seventeenth-century Japan. As suggested, Nagasawa thinks of the problem of divine absence as combining the most severe form of the problem of hiddenness with the most severe form of the problem of evil (246, 250).

By ‘hiddenness’ (the word ‘silence’ also frequently appears) Nagasawa means an *experiential* form of hiddenness consisting in the failure of God to do either of two things: intervene and relieve the suffering of devout believers, or explain to them why this cannot be done (255). It is worth noting here that such hiddenness is different from experiential hiddenness as often construed, which involves a sense of God's presence (whether that comes with help for human problems or not), and also different from the sort of hiddenness relevant to the problem I have developed, which is not the absence of experiential confirmations of God's existence for nonresistant nonbelievers, as Nagasawa appears to assume (250), but rather the fact of nonresistant nonbelief itself or (for believers) this together with the fact that God does not prevent nonresistant nonbelief in one way or another (Schellenberg 2015a).

Nagasawa sensitively considers how the problem of divine absence might be construed and dealt with by believers. He identifies but sets aside an intellectual version of the problem, focusing instead on an experiential and practical version involving “emotional puzzlement and confusion” (252) that can lead to one's theistic faith being undermined (255). Apparently the problem may exist either for those who actually go through the horrendous suffering in question or for other believers looking on who are analogously troubled (255, 256). Nagasawa thinks a solution to the problem is impossible, since this would require God not being, and perhaps not having ever been, silent. But he nonetheless proposes what he calls a “response”

(256) which he thinks may suffice to prevent, for those who internalize it, the loss of theistic faith. This response, developed in conversation with the work of the novelist Shusaku Endo, has it that faith *begins* from suffering, rather than being the sort of thing that might end with it, and includes an “opportunity to embrace cognitive and epistemic humility” by choosing to hold “an attitude of hope that the gap in our cognitive and epistemic capacity corresponds to the puzzlement raised by divine absence” (258). Nagasawa calls this attitude “cosmic optimism” (258).

I expect this response may be practically effective in many cases – which means that Nagasawa is already more successful than most of us are, who must wait for wide agreement on our solutions to intellectual problems! But it seems questionable whether it would work for those devout persons who, like the Kakure Karishitans, need a confident belief to have their faith saved, not thinking of faith as “90 percent doubt” (257). Such persons would need to have their understanding of faith changed, which means that there is still a healthy intellectual component in Nagasawa’s practical response. I also wonder whether, as Nagasawa says, “the problem of divine hiddenness is most forceful when it is formulated in terms of God’s [experiential] hiddenness from devout believers” (250). After all, even if Nagasawa’s response doesn’t work for them, devout believers can always take experiential hiddenness to be a *test* of their faith. Many, indeed, have done so.

DeWeese-Boyd, as noted, sees himself as dealing with much the same sort of experiential or existential or practical hiddenness problem for devout believers as Nagasawa has discussed, with the differences that his examples of suffering are generally non-horrendous and often include suffering caused precisely by a sense of God’s absence. He likewise eschews a solution and offers a practical response, which, in his case, recommends the use of lyric poetry of the sort found in the work of Gerard Manley Hopkins. By entering into such poetry, especially when it expresses suffering and issues lamentations, one can be touched by and share the deepest emotions and insights of the poet, and so come to feel that one is not alone. Moreover, if it is religious poetry, which expresses a complaint *to God*, “a complaint that makes sense only in the presence of God” (268), one can come to feel that one is not alone in the most relevant sense: oddly enough, by lamenting and asking *why*, one can come to feel that *God* is there, for, after all, one is talking to God! This furthermore permits such poetic utterances to be “acts of hope’ that hold God responsible and anticipate transformation” (270). These features of the experience of religious lyric poetry can carry one through suffering, even relieving the suffering that comes from the sense of God’s absence. DeWeese-Boyd adds that for Christians, there is also the possibility, through poetry that expresses Christ’s own sorrow and grief, of “solidarity with Christ” (274); and if God became flesh in Christ and we think of a poetic lamentation as expressing *God’s* human suffering, we can even hear *God* speaking in the poetry, and so in yet another way feel God’s presence rather than God’s absence.

These are interesting and provocative thoughts, though – more so than in the case of Nagasawa – their philosophical usefulness is sometimes limited by a Christian provenance. It would be interesting to see what DeWeese-Boyd could do with Hopkins’s own understanding of incarnation, which he says “is complex, embracing far more than the historical incarnation of God in the person of Jesus” (272). Jointly, what Nagasawa and DeWeese seem to me

successfully to resist is the common idea that philosophers qua philosophers have little of value to say about practical or existential versions of problems for religious faith deriving from evil or hiddenness.

III. A NEW TURN TO THEOLOGY

A number of articles and books discussed in my earlier survey articles, like DeWeese-Boyd's article, have made use of ideas from the theology of Christian or other theistic traditions when dealing with hiddenness issues. But recently this emphasis has become even more more explicit, and it has been more self-consciously applied as a methodological constraint on discussion of hiddenness themes. Two questions arise, in connection with any such theologically constrained work on hiddenness: (1) what motivates the turn to theology? (2) Does this turn permit an advance in the philosophical discussion of hiddenness themes?

Here are four ways in which question (1) can be answered. First, it may be felt that philosophy has taken over a notion – the hiddenness of God – that is originally theology's, and that philosophy should pay more attention to theology if it wishes to see hiddenness issues aright. Call this a *gatekeeping* motivation. Second, people may be supposing that I or other philosophical hiddenness arguers are using some hiddenness-related idea on the assumption that a certain theological tradition accepts it, and be questioning the accuracy of this assumption. Call this a *fact-checking* motivation. Third, it may be thought that some theological response to a related matter satisfactorily responds to a philosophical worry too. Call this the *problem-solving* motivation. Fourth, someone may think that theology opens up new intellectual vistas in connection with hiddenness themes that philosophy ought to recognize, perhaps holding as well that these render some philosophical hiddenness preoccupation an instance of misplaced attention or concern. Call this the *consciousness-raising* motivation. Of course these motivations may often coexist and overlap in various ways.

I will now give examples, from recent work of the theologically-constrained kind, of each of these four motivations in action (fairly commonly more than one motivation appears in the same work; occasionally we find all four), and offer an answer to question (2) for each case.

Let's start with gatekeeping. Signs of it appear in Sarah Coakley's recent paper on hiddenness (2015). Coakley alludes to how theology was the first to occupy the hiddenness turf when she speaks of expecting a "scream of protest from our modern atheistical discussion partners" (232). She also says that by following a theological approach inspired by John of the Cross, we can develop resistance to "asking the wrong kind of philosophical questions about God's "hiddenness"" (237). Clearly, in her view, philosophy should be open to seeing theology as some sort of authority when speaking of the subject. Similar sentiments appear in a recent article by Michael Rea (2015). He chides me and many respondents to the hiddenness argument I have developed for "thinking that the salient questions about the nature of divine

love and personal relationship can mostly be settled a priori rather than by taking a more systematic or historical theological approach” (225).¹

If a philosophical advance is made possible here, it is through the provision of an opportunity to offer some methodological clarifications. Although theologians, whether Christian or other, may be experts in their particular way of bending an understanding of the nature of God to the hard facts of the actual world, which theologians must assume God has permitted to obtain, there is no reason to suppose that all interesting hiddenness questions will be encountered by gaining acquaintance with their traditions. Philosophy may have its own questions about hiddenness. These need not be “wrong” if they are not theology’s, as Coakley suggests. And philosophy may, by the same token, have its own resources for *developing* questions and setting up plausible arguments; it may, for example, draw on the broad fund of human experience, including recent cultural evolution, when seeking to discern how a perfectly good and loving person would behave. Deferring here to systematic or historical theological approaches, as Rea recommends, would be a dereliction of its duty, especially if, once again, we notice that theology must in the nature of the case be developed on the narrowing assumption that a God would create a world like ours, and so has a built-in resistance to whatever a broader view might suggest to the contrary.

Having said all this, philosophers should of course entertain, and may critically discuss, theology’s *answers* to the arguments they develop, which will naturally be given in terms of divine hiddenness literally construed. It may be because philosophers are willing to do this that it is sometimes – mistakenly – inferred that they are addressing theology directly, and primarily concerned to query hiddenness notions thus construed, when in the first instance *developing* their arguments. This point is relevant to our second theological motivation, the fact-checking motivation, which Rea’s article also displays. He says, for example, that my argument in particular is “an attack on a straw deity” and that it “depends on certain theological claims that are not commitments of traditional Christian theology” (2015, 211). Developing a Barthian point about revelation, he says that, if it’s correct, my claims about divine love are conceptual truths only if grounded in divine revelation. He adds: “I have no argument for the conclusion that this is *not* the case; but neither has Schellenberg done the exegetical or systematic theological work that would be required to show that it *is* the case” (224). In a similar vein, though with Islamic rather than Christian theological beliefs about divine love in mind, Jon

¹ Paul Moser’s recent work on hiddenness (2015; see also his 2010) seems animated by gatekeeping too. Human beings, we are told, are given to “self-destruction and moral failure by God’s standards” (2015, 71), and “left to our merely human resources” (76) we will not be able to respond to God in the proper way. Fortunately, the suitable sort of Christian theology knows of all this and so can provide for philosophy “an important correction here” (77). Unfortunately, as Evan Fales (2015, 94-95) points out, philosophy could accept such a correction only by overlooking a large begging of the question and ignoring non-Christian theological corrections of *Christianity* and also Moser’s invitation to acquiesce in social-psychological conditions that are known to bias our thinking. Given, further, that Moser chooses not to interact with the current philosophical discussion, no philosophical advance seems forthcoming here. Fales charitably suggests (95) that Moser might somehow still be right, but whether the latter has evidence for his views that philosophy can use remains to be seen. (A fuller response to Moser, for anyone who thinks I have here given him short shrift, appears in Schellenberg 2008.)

McGinnis (2015) writes that “from an historical point of view, a conception of person does not appear to be a necessary requirement of divine love or theism more generally” (169). And, ironically, he points out what he takes to be “Christian elements or presuppositions in Schellenberg’s argument against theism” (174), which theologians from other traditions have not shown any inclination to accept.

McGinnis’s paper contains some interesting historical information. But it is odd that he thinks views about God must be lifted by a philosopher from some theistic tradition or other instead of, at least in part, constructed from resources more widely available, and by independent means. This seems to me to fundamentally misunderstand philosophy, even where its peculiar concern happens to be religious. A philosopher can be thinking about, and hold to be uninstantiated, the idea of a personal God without supposing that what she has in mind has been endorsed by any theology, and also without seeing herself as mounting her case against it *because* it has been thus endorsed. Theologians and their supporters too easily assume – and incorrectly assume, where my argument in particular is concerned – that a philosopher’s main aim is to attack theology. Having frequently had their views attacked by philosophers in the past few centuries, theologians, and people such as Rea who see themselves as representing theology, understandably have developed too narrow a sense of the possible motivations of *philosophers*, who may indeed – as in my case – be discussing an idea of God while recognizing that for reasons peculiar to its own tasks, theology would not see it the same way. Moreover, it has to be said that for theologians – or at any rate philosophers thinking about certain general ideas which theology in its own way has taken up – to be *rationally* committed to a certain view about divine love is something quite different from being committed to it in the historical sense Rea has in mind. I fully recognize that the deity I have discussed is not always theology’s deity; and so recognizing that what I have had to say about God does not always correspond to what theology has said is merely a small step toward understanding my view rather than the basis for a legitimate criticism of it. In sum, then: certainly a philosophical advance is made possible if a philosopher has incorrectly supposed that theologians believe *p* and a theologian points out that they don’t believe *p*, or believe not-*p*. But the former is not shown by the cited examples from recent theologically-minded work on hiddenness.

How about what I’ve called the *problem-solving* motivation? This is central in Coakley, who writes that “a rich response” to purely theological issues about hiddenness “may, by back-formation, nonetheless throw light” on the philosophical discussion (2015, 230, n. 3). And such a response, with such light, is what she sees herself as providing through her discussion of ideas from John of the Cross. To the philosophical hiddenness problem associated with my work, which she means, throughout, to address, Coakley responds by saying that if with John of the Cross we see God aright (and here we get traditional Christian thoughts about “fallen human inadequacy and depravity” (239)), we will practise an “ascetic detachment from anything *other than* God” (236) promoted through “prayer in the form of contemplation” (242). The atheistic hiddenness arguer, she very strongly suggests, merely evinces the qualities John calls the spiritual “childishness” and even “gluttony” of “beginners” (229), who demand that God show Himself fully and right now!

I certainly agree, in principle, with the notion that theological results are legitimately examined in the hope that they may have good philosophical side-effects. The strategy Coakley has in mind might turn out to be worthwhile. But such things must be considered on a case by case basis. And the case of Coakley yields less light than she hopes. Like Rea, Coakley shows few signs of having deeply engaged philosophical hiddenness arguments in their own terms, and so we find her assuming – mistakenly – that atheistic hiddenness arguments like mine are always made by those concerned about the fact that “there is no manifest appearance of God to many of those who might be interested in rationally considering His existence” (235). Likewise, we read about “characteristic atheist anxiety over divine absence” (240). This simply misses the mark. No fully evolved hiddenness argument is in view here. Mine, in particular, could be endorsed even by someone who thought God would never be experientially present to creatures (Schellenberg 2015b). And the empirical claims Coakley makes or suggests, both about the alleged expectations other people – not hiddenness arguers – have had about God’s self-revelation and about the extent to which a sense of God’s presence would be engendered for them by spiritual practices like those informed by John of the Cross, if only they undertook them, might rightly be viewed as not just false but as insulting by aspirants such as Mother Teresa of Calcutta – though certainly not only by her.

Finally, we have the *consciousness-raising* motivation. Such a motivation could be linked to some of the things said by Rea or Coakley or McGinnis, but it is especially marked, and in a manner allowing the introduction of different ideas, in two other recent theologically-informed contributions. So I will focus on them, as I conclude. The first is an essay drawing on Jewish theology – and in particular on the thought of the eighteenth-century Hasidic rabbi, Rabbi Nachman of Breslov – by Jerome Gellman (2015). The portrait of God presented in this paper is “an empty portrait” (190). Gellman’s theme is the “infinite inaccessibility of God” (180). The best we can do is to yearn for God, knowing well that our “yearning can never find realization” (180). Nick Trakakis (2015) writes similarly, drawing on the theological views of Eastern forms of Christianity to give expression to the idea of “the ineffability and incomprehensibility of God” (195), contrasting this understanding with the “anthropomorphic tendencies of perfect being theology” (194) which he finds in standard philosophical work on hiddenness.

Since on such views we should not expect to become personally acquainted with God, those who develop them may think they have thus solved philosophical problems of divine hiddenness. Trakakis occasionally speaks in this way (208-209), though in the same context he also seems to recognize that it does not follow from the fact – if it is a fact – that God *as Trakakis understands God* could not be personally revealed that God *as atheists have understood God* could not be thus revealed. But at the end of the day the central philosophical advance aimed at in both these works appears to be a different one: raising our sights to a more interesting conception of God, and using the hiddenness discussion to do so. Trakakis in particular seems impatient to see philosophers grappling with a conception of God more worthy of their efforts.

I think it might well make for a philosophical advance if more philosophers advocated such aims. But I think it would be good if philosophy developed its own framework for discussing various conceptions of a divine reality, sensitive to many of the world’s actual religious

differences and our own perhaps ameliorable cognitive and spiritual immaturities, instead of only or mostly examining broader conceptions that emerge in particular theological traditions, swiftly acquiescing in the absolute apophaticism frequently to be found in them (Schellenberg 2015b). Moreover, we may make less headway toward the utilization of such a framework by presupposing, positively, that there is a radically transcendent divine reality than by, at least initially, proceeding negatively and seeking to identify what the divine is *not*, thus freeing up philosophical attention for the vistas beyond. As it happens, this is a task that atheistic hiddenness arguments – those very hiddenness arguments focused on the notion of a perfect *personal* being that Trakakis is so impatient to leave behind – may be well equipped to further.

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