

HIDDENNESS, HUMILITY, AND HUMAN IMMATURITY

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ABSTRACT

In this paper I consider the bearing on the hiddenness discussion of the injunction to cultivate intellectual humility conjoined with awareness of human immaturity in deep time. I conclude that the stance of the hiddenness arguer is if anything enhanced by my results, but that this stance, whether the argument is believed by the arguer to be sound or not, should in inquiry be that of a *position*, which is not the same thing as a belief. Such a shift from beliefs to positions in inquiry, I argue, is one that the joint emphasis on intellectual humility and our place in time strongly underwrites.

Introduction

I start with these questions: Does an emphasis on intellectual humility make the stance of the hiddenness arguer in philosophy firmer or more precarious? Or does it have no consequence of note for that stance at all? Given my recent focus (Schellenberg 2013) on human immaturity, including in particular the temporal immaturity of inquiry obscured from us by our difficulty with scientific timescales, I might be invited to enrich these questions. Call the injunction to cultivate intellectual humility IH. And call T the conjunction of the following propositions:

Deep Time. Planet Earth was hosting life for several billion years before *Homo sapiens* appeared on the scene and will be habitable for up to a billion years more.

Our Place. In between the billions of years behind us and the billion to come, *Homo sapiens*, still a youthful species by hominin standards, has just started systematic inquiry on our planet; the roughly 5,000 years we've spent on this make up about the *first two hundred thousandth* of that potential billion-year future.

Then we can put the questions I might be invited to ask myself as follows: Does (IH & T) make the stance of the hiddenness arguer in philosophy firmer or more precarious? Or does this twofold emphasis have no consequence of note for that stance at all? I accept the invitation. The enriched questions provide the focus for my inquiry in this paper.

It is important to note that anyone aiming to accommodate scientific results who emphasizes intellectual humility in philosophy will have to accept (IH & T), given that T is not at all controversial but represents the consensus of relevant opinion in science. Of course determining what T *means* for us in philosophy is a challenging task, and one that cannot be addressed fully and in its own right here.ⁱ Very little will be assumed on this in the present paper beyond what I have used in arguing against religious belief in other contexts: that, speaking temporally and in scientific terms, inquiry on our planet is still in its infancy, and that when we have fully absorbed this, together with what is already known about other facets of human immaturity, we will rightly allow that on many matters of great concern deep insight may require a great deal more time and effort than we have yet put in – this is epistemically possible (by which I mean that there is no adequate reason to believe the relevant proposition to be false).ⁱⁱ

The hiddenness argument that has received most attention to date can be stated as follows (Schellenberg 2015b):

- (1) If God exists, then God is perfectly loving toward such finite persons as there may be.
- (2) If God is perfectly loving toward such finite persons as there may be, then for any capable finite person S and time t, God is at t open to being in a positively meaningful and reciprocal conscious relationship (a personal relationship) with S at t.ⁱⁱⁱ
- (3) If God exists, then for any capable finite person S and time t, God is at t open to being in a personal relationship with S at t. [1, 2].
- (4) If for any capable finite person S and time t, God is at t open to being in a personal relationship with S at t, then for any capable finite person S and time t, it is not the case that S is at t nonresistantly in a state of nonbelief in relation to the proposition that God exists.^{iv}
- (5) If God exists, then for any capable finite person S and time t, it is not the case that S is at t nonresistantly in a state of nonbelief in relation to the proposition that God exists. [3, 4]
- (6) There is at least one capable finite person S and time t such that S is or was at t nonresistantly in a state of nonbelief in relation to the proposition that God exists.
- (7) It is not the case that God exists. [5, 6].

Other hiddenness arguments may also turn out to be important, but since this is the one I have defended in previous writing, and because of its place in the present debate, it will be interesting to see what alterations of viewpoint may be required in relation to this argument by (IH & T).

What about intellectual humility? How will that be characterized in this paper?

Discussions of the virtue of intellectual humility may take a broadly Aristotelian approach that locates it in the intellectual sweet spot between diffidence at one extreme and something like arrogance at the other. But we humans display a decided preference for manifestations of the associated vice that put us toward the *latter* end of the spectrum of relevant dispositions. And so perspectives on the virtue often come with an emphasis on how it moderates an inappropriately inflated view of oneself involving beliefs, desires, and emotions that come all too easily to human agents. This is certainly true of the influential perspective of Robert C. Roberts and W. Jay Wood (2007), who say that intellectual humility is opposed not just to intellectual arrogance but to intellectual versions of all of the qualities in the following long list: “arrogance, vanity, conceit, egotism, hyper-autonomy, grandiosity, pretentiousness, snobbishness, impertinence (presumption), haughtiness, self-righteousness, domination, selfish ambition, and self-complacency” (2007, p. 236). Following the recent work of Samuelson et al. (2013: 4-5, 21-46, 67-74), one might extend this list even further, adding overconfidence in one’s own views, being overswift to judge, closed to the views of others and unhelpful to them in their own inquiry-related efforts as well as unforgiving of their mistakes, absolutist in one’s stance, dogmatic, unreflective, and more concerned for closure than for accurate cognition. All of these things seem opposed to intellectual humility. But Dennis Whitcomb, Heather Battaly, Jason Baehr, and Daniel Howard-Snyder have recently (2015) advanced a narrower view, suggesting that we ought to distinguish between improper pride and intellectual humility, and identifying the latter

with being properly attentive to, and owning, one's limitations. Who is right here? And what is the best overall characterization of intellectual humility?

It won't hurt to leave these questions open. Indeed, I am happy to accept a broad and disjunctive understanding of intellectual humility to allow for a large space in which arguments having *something* to do with it, and also interestingly related to hiddenness, may be found. This might be ill-advised if there were a consensus among philosophers as to what intellectual humility is, but no general consensus on precisely how that virtue should be characterized has yet emerged. (There is however a general consensus that intellectual humility is important and should be cultivated). Indeed, intellectual humility has only in the past few years become the subject of renewed and intense discussion in philosophy.

Here is the approach to my topic that I have selected. In each of the following sections, I will begin by identifying a connection between hiddenness reasoning and (IH & T) that could be proposed by someone suggesting that the stance of the hiddenness arguer is here made more *precarious*, and showing how it might be defended. Then I will both assess that defence and consider whether any *other* (IH & T)-based argument might in the same context plausibly be adduced by the hiddenness arguer to regain or add to the *stability* of his stance. (In some cases assessment of the first argument may already suggest ways in which the second could be developed.) By the end we should be able to see whether any definite headway can be made, on either side of the hiddenness debate as here construed, by reference to the undoubted value of intellectual humility and the undoubted reality of deep time.

Deductive atheistic reasoning

Even if the activity of philosophizing is unthreatened by (IH & T), as one must assume to work on the present issue in the present context at all, perhaps certain sorts of philosophical results are not so fortunate. Specifically, perhaps deductive arguments, such as the hiddenness argument, for so ambitious a conclusion as atheism are not. After all, few philosophical arguments proceed deductively these days, and perhaps humility has something to do with this – or would if we got to thinking about the matter. Deductive arguments hope to *prove* their conclusion in a very strong sense, and successful proofs in that sense of any substantive philosophical conclusion are thin on the ground, so it may be said – we've learned this by doing philosophy across many centuries, and, more specifically, by repeatedly seeing rationalist proofs assembled by the likes of Spinoza and Descartes and Leibniz come tumbling down. Add now to our picture the scientific work that has resulted in T. Applying scientific rather than human timescales, we will see that we may still be at a very early stage of intellectual development. Against the backdrop of the unproductive history of deduction in philosophy, this should make us wonder whether we are *ready* for such intellectual successes as successful deductive proofs would herald. Specifically on religious matters: perhaps we should expect to spend a great deal more time clarifying our concepts and getting straight about methodological matters before obtaining the sorts of results a successful proof of atheism would represent. Contrary views seem inattentive to human limitations. Accordingly, when someone marches into this terrain claiming to have a deductive proof of an important philosophical conclusion that philosophers have puzzled over, members of the philosophical community might be forgiven for finding his behaviour somewhat lacking in intellectual humility! More specifically, given that our circumstances are as described, what we see here is arguably evidence of grandiosity, of overconfidence in one's own views, of being overswift to judge, of unreflectiveness, and of being more concerned for closure than for accurate cognition.

This reasoning faces problems. First, some deductive arguments are far simpler than others, applying, for example, only a few elementary rules of inference from propositional logic, and the hiddenness argument as set out above is one of these. Philosophy could hardly be bereft of elementary logic even at the beginning of its career and left with any kind of methodology at all.

As to the premises used in the hiddenness argument, most of which are said to be necessary truths: some necessary truths are simpler and more easily spotted than others, and the spotting of conceptual connections rendering some claims necessarily true is something else that could hardly be removed from philosophical methodology, even if philosophy were to be in its infancy. It belongs to our job as philosophers to do this sort of thing. For its part, the hiddenness argument claims to spot three such connections: between the concept of a personal God and that of perfect love; between perfect love and openness to personal relationship; and between openness to personal relationship and opposition to nonresistant nonbelief. Together with the uncontroversial empirical claim that there is or has been nonresistant nonbelief and some elementary propositional logic, that in fact gives you the whole argument.

To continue our answer to the reasoning we are evaluating, in terms supported by or at least unthreatened by (IH & T), we should notice the relevance of an important distinction between theism and a proposition I have elsewhere named 'ultimism' (Schellenberg 2005). Ultimism is the more general and fundamental religious claim that there is a reality triply ultimate: metaphysically, axiologically, and soteriologically. Theism entails ultimism, but the converse does not hold. Now we are told by the reasoning in question, quite plausibly, that at an early stage of inquiry we should pay attention to making our concepts clear. Well, this precisely is what that distinction helps us to do. And what we notice when we make it is that theism is a far more *accessible and tractable idea* than ultimism, and one, moreover, that philosophers have spent many hundreds of years examining. Although that's but a blip in evolutionary time, we have had sufficient time to get far clearer about the concept of a personal God than about many other religious concepts, and its accessibility to our minds (given the centrality to it of an idea understandable by extrapolation from ourselves) means that our reason can get a grip on it both expositionally and evaluatively. If theistic religion instead had as its central focus an idea of earth shattering splendour – one that strikes us as incredible, completely out of the ordinary, something humans should never have been able to come up with on their own – then we might be more impressed with even this early attempt to identify the ultimate reality. But what we find when we examine theism is just what we might expect to find from early hominins, the limit case of something that is in fact found all over the world: namely, the concept of a divine person and a supernatural enlargement of ourselves. In these circumstances, precisely by getting clearer about the concept of theism we may discover reasons to suppose that it is not instantiated. In the most general terms, precisely this thought is applied by the hiddenness argument. Ultimism, on the other hand, is logically equivalent to a large disjunction of propositions including theism but many other religious propositions too, some of which, for all we know, remain hidden to our understanding. At an early stage of inquiry, sensitive to IH, it is good for us to see all this, the better to see how much remains to be done even after theism has been understood and evaluated. And seeing the accessibility of theism and how arguments against it may arise precisely from conceptual examination, we should, even at an early stage of religious investigation, be open to deductive arguments showing it to be false, contrary to what is claimed in the reasoning presently under discussion. And we should be open to moving on in the investigative task to other elaborations of ultimism, the understanding of which also belongs to the early stages of

religious inquiry. Someone who says these things cannot justly be accused of grandiosity, overconfidence, unreflectiveness, or of being overswift to judge and more concerned for closure than for accurate cognition. Indeed, how could it not be an expression of intellectual humility were philosophers who have been preoccupied with theism to see and concede these points?

So much for the argument that seeks to make hiddenness reasoning more precarious by showing that purported deductive disproofs of theism must betray a lack of humility. Is there an argument from (IH & T) – or any additional argument therefrom (since some relevant reasoning already appears in my replies) – that would *support* choosing deductive argumentation in religious investigation today? Here it will be useful to recall that not just arrogance is a threat to humility; diffidence is too. And to avoid diffidence, we need to affirm that at any stage of inquiry, and so at an early one too, an inquirer will appropriately seek to produce results. Humility doesn't mean never putting forward or defending a view at all. But isn't it a bit hard to imagine that it should favor defending a view *deductively*? Actually, it isn't. Deduction we can claim to know something about, even at our stage, and there is much agreement among philosophers as to how it works. But a good deal of the inductive realm remains obscure and contentious. Humility therefore would seem to favor admitting our perplexities and *where we can* using deductive instead of inductive reasoning to explore and support our views. Now it may be that we won't often be in a position to do so, or to do so in relation to important philosophical propositions. But we have already seen why we might expect the investigation of theism to be one region where this does become possible. And within the context of this understanding, and the points just made, it makes perfect sense for the deductive hiddenness argument to be developed and put forward even by someone properly committed to IH and properly cognizant of T. Thus, in the end, reasoning on the basis of (IH & T) if anything brings more stability to the use in inquiry of deductive arguments like the hiddenness argument rather than casting it into question.

What a loving God would do

So far we've been looking at a quite general point of contact between hiddenness and humility, one concerning the very notion of a deductive argument for atheism, which notion the hiddenness argument exemplifies. Now we turn to a central premise of the hiddenness argument itself, according to which the claim that a perfectly loving God exists entails the following: for any capable finite person S and time t, God is at t open to being in a positively meaningful and reciprocal conscious relationship (a personal relationship) with S at t. "How can you know this?" someone might ask. "Isn't it fairly presumptuous to say that?" And: "Shouldn't human beings who are possibly at an early stage of intellectual and spiritual development be led by humility to a great deal more uncertainty as to just what a loving God would do? Own your limitations!" The premise in question may seem rather complicated at first glance, and this, together with the idea that God is unlimitedly great and we are limited and immature, will only add to the sense, for those who say such things, that they are true. Of the dispositions earlier mentioned in connection with a lack of humility, at least the following may seem to apply: arrogance, conceit, egotism, impertinence (presumption), and overconfidence in one's own views.

What is to be said about this? First, remember that it is part of the philosopher's job to nudge out the entailments of such claims as the claim that a loving God exists. And the more surprising and potentially illuminating the noticed entailments, the better. Maybe it would be presumptuous for a non-philosopher – say, a popular atheist who's a biologist – who hasn't

thought about it much to make a claim concerning such an entailment, but why should this be so for a philosopher who has ruminated over the matter for some time?

The thought that we're talking about an unlimited being here and that philosophy is limited as well as temporally immature and perhaps developmentally immature too might still seem to apply. But this sort of thought should again be far more convincing in relation to ultimism than it is for theism. The theist, as it were, sticks her neck out by saying that God is ultimately *loving*. She doesn't have to say that. She could hold back and say we can't be sure just how the divine reality's metaphysical, axiological, and soteriological ultimacy is realized. But, risking a charge of arrogance herself, she says more than this, claiming that the divine is a perfect person, which takes us fairly swiftly to the understanding that it must be perfectly loving. And concepts like that of perfect love have *content* which even our immature minds can get a grip on. (After all, they are our concepts!) Furthermore, the emphasis on God's unlimitedness can backfire for the theist. A principle one might appeal to in displaying the entailment in question – 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). And a God relevantly unlimited in love and in other properties would be in the best possible position to satisfy this condition always.

“But look at how complicated the premise is,” you may again say. Well, this is just a matter of dotting all our *is* and crossing all our *ts*. The basic *idea* is actually fairly simple. It is just that of wanting someone's ability to interact with oneself consciously never to be interrupted or to end. But the *linguistic expression* of this simple idea of openness to personal relationship can get complicated. For example, perhaps not just any finite person has the cognitive and affective properties required to be in a personal relationship with God – to believe that the God-concept is instantiated, to feel the presence of God, to respond with trust and obedience, etc. And so we have to say, in the premise, that it applies only to those who have the relevant capacities. This makes the premise more plausible though it also makes our formulation of it more complicated.

One final point to be considered here, which also weighs against the argument from (IH & T) that we are evaluating, is this. In the various things one might say about what a loving God would do or feel, different *levels of generality* may be discerned. Compare, for example, saying that a perfectly loving God would care about Gina with saying that a perfectly loving God would help Gina find her keys when she loses them. Perhaps a number of non-humble or anti-humble dispositions such as presumption are evinced when someone says the latter sort of thing, but pretty clearly that's not true of the former. Now maybe very specific alleged entailments won't always suffer the fate of the keys example, but many of them will. And this helps us see why someone might find a link to humility in being careful about what one says concerning what a loving God would do. But very general alleged entailments may fare better.

So where is the hiddenness argument's claim within this range? Well, sticking to a claim so general as that which imputes caring about finite persons to a loving God may not get you very far in inquiry about whether there is a God. So perhaps we should hope for a claim less general and bland than that but still general *enough* to be plausibly viewed as discernible by the questing human intelligence, when properly focused and carefully reflective. There would be no reason of the sort we've described for viewing such a claim as lacking in humility. And here

precisely, so I suggest, is where the hiddenness argument's claim about what a loving God would do should be located.

Having acquitted the one who makes that claim of the charge of a lack of humility, can we also go further and *defend* her stance on the basis of (IH & T)? It would seem that we can. For we can say this. At such an early stage of development as the one we are in, we might expect cultural evolution to be capable of delivering startling new insights that our immaturity in some regard had previously obscured from us. Proper appreciation for this fact, which should follow from thinking about T, together with due attention to IH might therefore lead us humbly to expect that unseen or neglected facets of such a concept as that of perfect love could still emerge. And although for a theist it might take great humility indeed to imagine that such might result from the work of atheists, perhaps even so humble an attitude as this would be possible for one who truly absorbs (IH & T).

Here are some more specific reasons for thinking that love's openness to relationship might only be becoming really clear to us now. In fact, it is arguable that several interwoven sorts of cultural evolution had to take place before this could become obvious to us.

First there is social/psychological evolution. Influenced by a movement toward gender equality, we are gradually taking our leave of certain images that once dominated our social consciousness and made the idea of a hidden masculine God seem plausible to us: images of the strong, solitary male and of the distant father. Another relevant sort of evolution is moral in nature. We today *value* more a relational love pictured as expressible by men and women alike, or at least we value *less* the alternative involving what might be called 'benevolence from a distance.' Of course this moral evolution may in various ways be intertwined with the social/psychological evolution previously mentioned. Finally, there is also what we might term philosophical/theological evolution. Each of the sorts of cultural evolution already mentioned appears to be having consequences in philosophy and theology. In theology there is today a movement away from the picture of God as masculine and father. Even where God is still called father, the father brought to mind is less aloof and distant than the one formerly conceived.

Now of course there are still those who oppose the sorts of changes I have mentioned. Cultural evolution need not be progressive or bring improvements, and some will think that what we see here are not improvements – though I expect many readers of this journal will have a different view. But however they may have arisen, and whether improvements or not, changes evidently *have occurred* in the areas I have distinguished, and in ways making the hiddenness argument's claim about love seem quite plausible to many. And it is not too hard to see that (IH & T) supports a humble openness to having one's previous view affected in the relevant way by such changes rather than opposing it.^v

Nonresistant nonbelief

The empirical premise of the hiddenness argument referring to the occurrence of nonresistant nonbelief has, through clarifying discussion, become relatively uncontroversial in the past twenty years. But I imagine some will think that one of the results of humble awareness of our place in time should be that it becomes *more* controversial that there are examples of nonbelief not caused by resistance of God. Why might this be the case?

Let's begin by ensuring that it's not because of the sort of misunderstanding of the premise just alluded to. Some (e.g., Henry 2001) have treated the argument as requiring that *reflective* nonbelief be always nonresistant. But this is an error. If you follow the argument's process of reasoning from its starting point in thoughts about divine love, you will see that what

becomes troublesome for theistic belief is nonresistant nonbelief *of whatever kind* – and this of course includes the nonbelief of those relevantly capable individuals in the distant evolutionary past who were not in a position to resist God, never having had the relevant concept brought clearly before their minds. That is why the premise, properly understood, will be uncontroversial: it is clear that the world either does now contain or has in the past contained instances of reflective or unreflective nonbelief that are not caused by resistance of God.

What this means is that the following reasoning, which may be tempting here, can be ruled out: Due humility in the context of an awareness of our place in time should lead us to regard as epistemically possible that those who appear nonresistant in their reflective doubt or disbelief *are all in that state due to (perhaps well hidden) resistance of God*. Therefore, we should regard it as epistemically possible that the nonresistance premise of the hiddenness argument is false. This conclusion manifestly does not follow from the highlighted premise, given the clarification above.

Does this mean that nothing can be done with (IH & T) to oppose the hiddenness argument's nonresistance premise, contrary to initial appearances? Maybe not. What someone might say is that a 'divide and conquer' approach should be allowed which leads us to welcome different reasons for regarding as resistant the different sub-types of nonresistant nonbelief. All we need to do is revise the conclusion that was said not to follow in this way: Therefore, it is epistemically possible that the *part of the nonresistance premise of the hiddenness argument referring to reflective nonbelief* is false. Even if humility considerations help us deal only with the reflective nonbeliever sub-type, opposition to the hiddenness argument will be better off than it would be otherwise.

But the sub-type that needs to be 'conquered' here is still being too broadly characterized. If God would ensure that, unless resistance closes our eyes, everyone sees the truth of theism, then resistant nonbelief would have to mark a *transition*, brought about through self-deception, from belief to nonbelief. It follows that if God behaved thus then no one would *always* have been in a nonbelieving state. But some reflective nonbelievers – John Stuart Mill is a famous example – appear always to have been in a nonbelieving state. To avoid taking on the onerous obligation of showing that this impression is mistaken, the argument we are considering must narrow its scope still further, to reflective nonbelievers *who once believed*. So can the argument successfully be applied to this more limited sub-class?

To see, we need to get a better sense of how the *premise* of this little argument, suitably precisified, can be defended. Why suppose that due humility in the context of an awareness of our place in time should lead us to regard as epistemically possible that those who appear to have nonresistantly made the transition from belief to reflective doubt or disbelief are in fact in the latter state due to (perhaps well hidden) resistance of God? Well, given the travails of previous arguments that resisted the nonresistance premise by discriminating between believers and nonbelievers in respect of sinful tendencies, perhaps the only way to go will be to work with the idea that *all* are resistant to God in some way. So suppose we start with the suggestion that given deep moral and spiritual immaturity, which has members of *H. sapiens* loving their autonomy and pursuing self-interest disproportionately, *everyone* familiar with theistic concepts is resistant to a real relationship with God, expressing this in different ways. Some express it as believers, maybe even coming to a comfortable sort of belief that allows one to avoid God's demands, or staying in it, due to such immaturity. Some however express it by becoming *nonbelievers*, coming to nonbelief from belief because it's a convenient way of hiding from oneself God's demands. The next step would involve asking reflective nonbelievers themselves humbly to

concede that the latter description (epistemically) might apply to them. After all, reflectively they will have noted that a perfect being would have rather high moral standards; their own selfish ambition and desire for autonomy might very well have taken care of the rest, using cultural conditions of secularism as cover. The final step would be to say that if such a concession results, everyone else should accept it, at least assuming that it is sincere and the product of adherence to IH. And even if it doesn't result, everyone else should conclude that the relevant part of the nonresistance premise might well be false on the basis of the reasoning offered to the relevant reflective nonbelievers here.

Is this reasoning forceful? It appears in fact to face insuperable difficulties, given (IH & T). An immature desire for selfish autonomy may exist in all of us, but here more is needed: namely, that this may be what brought one to nonbelief. And in many cases there seems to be another and sole cause: namely, the very reflection that lends to the relevant case of nonbelief its name. Indeed, this often seems as plain as day – a long list of careful and seemingly conscientious thinkers whose thought processes led to nonbelief could be composed. The concession made by the argument for the sake of greater humility and plausibility, that *everyone* suffers from this defect, doesn't help here. For if some can suffer from it while believing in God (as must then be allowed), why, when it appears that someone clearly is a nonbeliever due to reflection, would we attempt to overrule the appearances by saying that this state must be caused by selfish ambition instead? After all, *we have already agreed that persons can suffer from this problem without becoming nonbelievers because of it*. If one persists in seeking to overrule the appearances in such circumstances, then the best explanation may well be that a very un-humble adherence to some inflexible ideology concerning the causes of nonbelief is responsible.

Another problem with the argument, which may also indicate ideological interference, is that we are being asked to accept that a rather large generalization – everyone in the relevant sub-class fails to believe because of selfish desires involving autonomy – is epistemically possible, and this in the face of evidence, for each of various members of the sub-class, that considerable headway has been made in dealing with the relevant sort of immaturity. We have, for example, people who are engaged in projects as demanding and focused on the needs of others as might have been thought to be pressing given belief in God. Some, indeed, are engaged in the very same projects; they would love to believe in God, and remain committed to the values they had when they did. A more general point is lurking here: that we need a more finegrained understanding of the critic's suggestion that there are many different ways of expressing the sort of moral immaturity at issue in this discussion. Who's to say that for *each* of these people the way of expressing moral immaturity might be one making belief in God unattractive, especially when we have relevant counterevidence? Perhaps their moral immaturity will instead be, say, self-righteousness over how well they have completed demanding tasks! And perhaps one will find that the reflection they claim led to their nonbelief was difficult but that they persisted in it precisely because of their commitment to IH, which led them seriously to countenance the view that in their previous theistic belief they might have been mistaken. Pretty clearly, to retain intellectual humility here – to avoid such things as arrogance and impertinence, being overswift to judge and closed to the views of others – a critic of such claims would need to have carried out careful qualitative studies of the lives of the individual nonbelievers in question, something that no one has done.

Finally, even if such studies had been carried out with results supporting the epistemic possibility in question, it would only allow one to say, of *each* of a certain class of individuals, that for him or her that result should be accepted. It is quite another thing to say, as the argument

requires us to say, that *all* of its members fall under this result, and the well known problem of the conjunctivity of belief combined with (or as illuminated by) IH should prevent us from saying it, for one should humbly allow that one could well have made a mistake somewhere.

A number of the points we have arrived at while investigating the bearing here of (IH & T) have, whether singly or in conjunction, amounted to rebutting defeaters, showing not only that the argument we've been evaluating is unsuccessful, as an undercutting defeater too could do, but that its conclusion is false. Even – and indeed especially – at our location in deep time, due humility should prevent us from allowing ideology from overriding a sensitive response to the relevant appearances. But whatever more may be said about that, here we are also forced back to the point with which I began: that it is a mistake, anyway, to suppose that the truth of the nonresistance premise depends on what is to be said about *reflective* nonbelievers. Deploying humility to nurture a more careful reading of the argument, one that opens up this insight, will be another way in which proper attention to (IH & T) will lead to the recognition that that premise is true, and uncontroversially true among those who take the time to understand it.

The humility of God

Might humility be something that characterizes an unsurpassably great personal God? And might it be from humility that God is sometimes elusive in a way leading to or perpetuating nonresistant nonbelief? Perhaps not, if, as Whitcomb et al. have argued, humility is deeply linked to owning one's limitations, for God has none. But that view is only one disjunct in the disjunctive understanding of humility that we are allowing to influence us, so perhaps there is still a way forward here. If so, then humility might be relevant to the hiddenness argument in a very different way from any I have yet considered. For then we would have something to set against the considerations leading to (5) in the hiddenness argument, which says that God would prevent nonresistant nonbelief, and something that had nothing to do with our own adherence to IH. It would, however, have something to do with T, and so still give us an alleged consequence of (IH & T), broadly construed, for it would be something that we could say our limited religious inquiry, so far, had prevented us from seeing.

Of course, we need the relevant divine virtue to be *intellectual* humility, and it may at first seem that it is not the intellectual but rather the *moral* variety of the virtue of humility that would be relevant here, if any is. This impression is consistent with some related suggestions in the recent literature, to be found in a paper by Travis Dumsday (2014). For example, he says that on account of humility God “feels no need to make His accomplishments known or to seek praise” (Dumsday 2014: 56). This sort of humility is non-intellectual but can still be seen as relevant to hiddenness if it would lead God to avoid the most grandiose or vain sorts of self-display (of the sort that would perhaps be realized were the name of God to be written in the stars). Dumsday recognizes that the hiddenness argument is consistent with the avoidance of such displays, but he finds even the experiential sort of evidence I have emphasized to be such as God might avoid providing because, so he suggests, it would “presume” upon our “regard” if God were near to us as an “overwhelming” (Dumsday: 60) as well as “universal, constant, and unsought presence from early childhood onward” (Dumsday 2014: 58). The avoidance of such presumptuousness is still, it seems, a moral sort of humility.

But an argument featuring intellectual humility is not far off. After all, the evidence we've been talking about would, among other things, provide an important piece of *intellectual information*: namely, that God exists. This the hiddenness argument says a perfectly loving God would want everyone to have, because only when we believe that God is there can we choose

then to be in a personal relationship with God. Dumsday's suggestion can be turned into something relevant to our concerns if we imagine it to be that a humble God might choose not to presume upon our interest *intellectually* in the way that would be realized were God to reveal the divine existence by being for us that "overwhelming" as well as "universal, constant, and unsought presence from early childhood onward." Or approaching the matter from a slightly different slant: God would not thus *dominate* us intellectually if God is the perfect exemplar of intellectual humility. God's humble character we might expect, as Dumsday suggests, to lead to a less 'in your face' approach.

What should we say about this? Unfortunately, Dumsday's argument is built on misunderstanding. First, notice that even if his "universal, constant" presence were indeed an example of God's self-revelatory ability that I had used, the hiddenness argument would not be limited to it any more than it is limited to examples involving celestial showing off. Belief in God might be for us, say, a Moorean belief rather than something sustained by the presence of God. It is important not to conflate what the hiddenness argument actually emphasizes – unceasing belief for the nonresistant – with something quite different which it does not mention at all – unceasing experience of God. Second, Dumsday's way of characterizing what I say about religious experience is in fact subtly distorting in a way that makes it more likely to be perceived as helping his argument. (I am not saying the distortion is conscious and intentional.) God's presence could only be regarded as 'universal' if we ignored the possibility pressed by the humility argument discussed in the last section: that some or many, at an early and possibly immature human stage of development, might resistantly and self-deceptively put themselves in a position where the divine presence could not be discerned, with God humbly stepping back and not overriding such resistance. It could only be viewed as 'constant' if we ignored a possibility that I have constantly emphasized: that experience of God could be modulated according to the moral and spiritual needs of finite persons, and even withdrawn in a 'dark night of the soul' that tests one's faith or for some other reason, without evidence sufficient for belief in anyone who was nonresistant being thereby lost. And we could only think of experience of God as 'overwhelming' if we ignored the previous two points and also the many times I have emphasized explicitly the inapplicability of that term. In short: there is ample room for everything Dumsday thinks a humble God would find appealing within the very framework he rejects, when the latter is properly understood.

But there is a deeper point here. It seems we have no more reason to say that God would be lacking in humility by being non-hidden than to say that a mother would be thus lacking in the analogous circumstances. As this point helps to bring into focus, it matters a great deal what God's *motive* is in sharing information with us. If God is self-revealed from *love* and creatures know this, as of course the hiddenness argument is asking us to imagine, then even rearrangements of stars needn't display a lack of humility! (Consider how differently such behavior would appear to us if we thought that behind it lay the aim of showing how much God loves us.) Then presumption and domination aren't even in the picture. Of course we might still think that a bombastic love is insensitive to something, whether in the neighborhood of humility or elsewhere. But in that case we would only need to notice, as was clarified in the previous paragraph, that a direct 'in your face' approach is in no way implied by love or (therefore) by any of the claims of the hiddenness arguer. As one might expect, the virtue of love is quite consistent with other virtues, including that of humility.

I think that the point about motives shows the basic problem with an argument of the sort Dumsday attempts from God's humility. To make this easier to see, let me show how an

analogous argument can be constructed on the other side, with the conclusion that a humble God would *prevent* nonresistant nonbelief, and how this argument would invite from Dumsday an analogous response. Consider this. Here we are at an early stage of development, in the midst of a very messy world, and the creator of that world and of us, who therefore has responsibilities to us analogous to those of a parent, won't even let us know that we *have* a creator? Even when we are in no way resistant to seeing ourselves as children of God? This looks more than a bit like snobbishness, haughtiness, and (if in service of a love of privacy) like selfish ambition. These, as noted at the beginning of the paper, are all ways of missing the boat on intellectual humility. And what about this additional way – being unhelpful to finite persons in their inquiry-related efforts? Many seek to know God, if God is there, inquiring diligently, but without finding. So it looks as though there are reasons based on (IH & T) *against* hiddenness.

To this it would be natural for a critic of the hiddenness argument who emphasizes God's humility to reply by saying that the argument moves far too quickly: God could only be snobbish and haughty and so on in these circumstances if the divine motive for the relevant behavior were not bound up, as such a critic would want to say, with something else – perhaps even something quite innocuous or praiseworthy like the expression of a humble character. Behavior that *could* receive an interpretation at odds with divine humility *need not*, if a suitable alternative motive is detected. Well, what's good for the goose is good for the gander. The same basic reply from the other side to Dumsday's sort of argument will do the job quite nicely.

In the end, I'm doubtful about the humility of God doing any serious work on either side of our issue. Love, as we have seen, can be expressed humbly, and this even when construed as the hiddenness argument construes it. And to say that either the provision or the prevention of belief would display dispositions at odds with intellectual humility ignores how actions or omissions can reflect a variety of different motives, depending on the circumstances. Of course this doesn't mean that the hiddenness arguer has to back away from the claim that failing to prevent nonresistant nonbelief would be something that God's virtue would disallow. It's just that the relevant virtue is love rather than humility.

What sort of stance?

In this paper I have looked at a number of issues that concern the hiddenness arguer's stance, to which (IH & T) might be thought relevant. None of the views or arguments we have discussed makes the hiddenness arguer's stance more precarious. Many actually contribute to its stability. In this final section of similar discussion, I want to focus attention on the stance itself. Suppose that both in form and content, the hiddenness argument is free of (IH & T)-based problems. Suppose also that there are no other problems with the argument that an investigator can see, and indeed that it appears all-things-considered sound. Could we still properly object on grounds of (IH & T) to certain ways in which such an investigator might *embrace* the argument and *hold* its conclusion?

In this case I think the answer should be yes rather than no as it has been in the other sections of these papers. Perhaps it will seem that this is because the atheist who regards the hiddenness argument as sound could be triumphalist about his finding, and triumphalism is always proscribed. But such exultation as one sees in triumphalism has more to do with how one relates to others concerning one's stance than with the stance itself. What I have in mind here is rather that the atheist's stance might be a *believing* stance, and perhaps one also involving *certainty* and *closed to the emergence of contrary evidence* in the future.

Now it seems to me that (IH & T) does rule out the last of these three attitudes. But this is not a very interesting result because it is ruled out anyway: quite apart from (IH & T), for general reasons having to do with the nature of inquiry and the issue concerning the conjunctivity of belief mentioned earlier in this paper, one should always be open to finding an error somewhere among one's beliefs as a result of further inquiry (one's own or that of others). Is there, however, something about (IH & T) and the *distinctive manner* in which it rules out the third attitude that yields problems for one or both of the other two attitudes as well? Aware of our place in time and our possible immaturity, would an intellectually humble atheist convinced by the hiddenness argument still be less than certain of its conclusion, or perhaps refrain from emphasizing her belief, instead bringing her stance into inquiry with others in some other way?

I reject the first of these options, but I agree with the second. Subjective certainty, like belief itself, is involuntary. And especially within the context of other arguments made earlier in this paper, I imagine that a hiddenness arguer faced with seemingly necessary truths and a seemingly obvious empirical premise, put into an argument using only elementary deductive rules of inference, might very well as a result feel certain that there is no person-like Ultimate.

But how then, you may ask, could she fail to have a *believing stance*? After all, certainty entails belief. Yes, it does, and I am not denying this or suggesting that belief is here somehow inappropriate simpliciter. But I would suggest that in inquiry, especially given T, *what believing attitude one has and how it interacts with other believing attitudes is not the important thing*. To believe a proposition reflectively will lead one to think it true, and a true proposition arguably cannot but be supported by the Total Evidence (the relevant information as it would be seen by an omniscient being). So one will naturally veer in this direction believably as well. But such an attitude will often be more of a hindrance than a help if brought into inquiry, producing more heat than light. Especially given the truth of T, what is important in inquiry, certainly in philosophical inquiry, is the *position* one brings to it on what the *available* evidence seems to one best to support, with everyone open to today's available evidence being enriched in the future in ways that leave it not aligned with the Total Evidence. What's important is how one brings one's position into conversation with other positions and uses it to fuel and direct further inquiry. This position is one's stance. Hence one can make a distinction between beliefs and stances in inquiry. Since an emphasis on positions is also favored by IH, what we can say is that moving away from an emphasis on beliefs and toward an emphasis on positions is underwritten by (IH & T) and should influence the hiddenness arguer when thinking about what *she* brings to religious inquiry.

But we need a bit more clarity about this concept of holding or having a position. Let's say that S has (or holds) the position that p 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. I mean "accepts" to be taken in L. Jonathan Cohen's sense (Cohen 1992). According to Cohen, "to accept that p is to have or adopt a policy of deeming, positing, or postulating that p – i.e. of including that proposition or rule among one's premisses for deciding what to do or think in a particular context, whether or not one feels it to be true that p" (Cohen 1992, p. 4). Believing that p, on the other hand, is for Cohen a matter of being disposed to feel it true that p.^{vi} One might believe and accept at the same time, as in the case of the convinced hiddenness arguer, but one can also accept without believing. And one can accept that p without making it one's position simply by being disposed to keep what one accepts to oneself and not introduce it into discussion in contexts of inquiry.

So why favor positions over beliefs? Again, at an early stage, what inquiry needs are not beliefs put forward as such, with all the bitter conflict that can result between people equally sure that inquiry on the relevant matter need proceed no further, but rather beliefs deliberately put aside and positions put forward that engage other positions in useful discussion – discussion that in some way moves inquiry forward by, say, exposing and exploring in detail new ideas that, even if false, are stepping stones to eventual discovery; finding new uses that are similarly profitable for old ideas that have been discarded; helping inquirers to set aside conventionally accepted ideas that only distract from true insight or potentially profitable new inquiry; suggesting questions for further investigation which ends up having one of these consequences, and so on. There is every reason to think that such positions can be found even at an early and immature stage of inquiry if inquirers accept and defend the views that the available evidence then seems to them best to support.

Now it may be that, as in the present case, the available evidence seems to tell us the truth of the matter and leaves us quite sure that we are right. Though this will bring belief with it, when one goes into further inquiry, the fact of one's belief should disappear to the rear. Even where the proposition embedded in one's position appears as the conclusion of a deductive argument presented to other inquirers, and *everyone* regards the argument as to all appearances sound and regards all of the relevant available evidence as singing the same tune, the result need not for anyone be the sort of "finalizing" attitude that (IH & T) proscribes. What one brings to inquiry can instead be a case of acceptance that – to the extent that it is uncontested – gets passed on with the cheerful and humble acknowledgment that future inquirers, better equipped, may see things differently.

This is how I would recommend that even the convinced hiddenness arguer should relate to her argument and its conclusion for the sake of inquiry. Clearly intellectual humility can have a lot to do with such a stance and make it a different stance than it would otherwise be for atheists. The humility we see here is moreover humility with the particular coloring afforded by T. It is a humility that, because it recognizes our place in time and our possible immaturity, wants to own its limitations in relevant ways, seeking to avoid conceit and self-complacency and having no desire to be absolutist, dogmatic, or unreflective, but wishes to avoid *diffidence* too and to promote inquiry, which all intellectual virtues serve, and so is willing to take a stand.^{vii}

Notes

ⁱ My own view continues to develop: I am presently working on a book to be called *The Humility of Reason: From Limits to Immaturities in Inquiry* in which I seek to identify the proper place of inquiry's temporal immaturity amid an array of other human immaturities.

ⁱⁱ Of course we may not endure much longer as a species, but if we should pass swiftly from the scene, and not be replaced, it would not be appropriate to adjust our age or level of development upward but to say that we and inquiry died young. Even assuming that such *will* be inquiry's fate leaves everything I shall be relying on in place.

ⁱⁱⁱ A *capable* finite person is to be understood as one who has the cognitive and affective capacities required for being in a personal relationship with God. For God to always be *open* to personal relationship with a person S is for God to ensure that there is never something *God* does that prevents S from being able, just by trying, to participate in personal relationship with God. Let us say that if S is thus able, at a time, then S is *in a position* to exercise her relevant

capacities at that time and to then participate in personal relationship with God. (Notice that none of this implies that participation in personal relationship with God, should S decide in favor of it, would be easy: perhaps it will be hard to relate properly to God.) S may not want relationship or even to be reminded of her religious options, and so may through resistance of God, which would have to involve self-deception, herself at some time produce a situation in which she is unable to relate personally to God just by trying. But unless S is resistant in this way at a time, S will find it possible to participate in personal relationship with God, and to do so then, if God is then open to personal relationship with S in the relevant sense.

^{iv} One is nonresistantly in the state here referred to just in case resistance to personal relationship with God is not the cause of one's being in that state.

^v In the previous three paragraphs I draw on material in Chapter 3 of Schellenberg (2015a).

^{vi} We need not assume that this is the correct analysis to agree with Cohen that belief is involuntary and for this reason importantly different from acceptance.

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