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Original Article

The Axiological Solution to Divine Hiddenness

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Abstract

Philosophers have recently wondered whether the value impact of the existence of God on the world would be positive, negative, or neutral. Thus far discussions have distinguished between the value God's impact would have overall, in certain respects, and/or for particular individuals. A commonality amongst the various positions that have been taken up is to focus on the goods and drawbacks associated with both theism and atheism. Goods associated with atheism include things like privacy, independence, and autonomy. I argue that it is better overall and for everyone to prefer a hidden God to no God. This is because it is possible to experience many of the goods attributed to atheism if God is hidden even if they do not really obtain, while also gaining many of the additional goods connected to theism. This amounts to a new solution to the problem of divine hiddenness: God might hide in order to increase or maximize the axiological value of the world.

axiology of theism; divine hiddenness; pro-theism

I. INTRODUCTION

Let God refer, minimally, to a being who is omnipotent, omniscient, omnibenevolent, and the creator and sustainer of everything contingent. Philosophers of religion often focus on the ontological question of whether or not God exists. More recent epistemological questions tend to focus on whether it is epistemically rationally to believe that God exists. But philosophers have also lately wondered whether the value impact of the existence of God on the world would be positive, negative, or neutral. This is the axiological question about God and the literature about it is known as the *axiology of theism*.

An initial objection to the legitimacy of this topic is that any conditional with God's existence as the antecedent is a counterpossible and hence trivially true. Since God is a necessary being, God exists in every possible world. The question of whether it would be better or worse for God to exist is trivial. But with the rest of those working on this topic I am going to assume that it is possible to discuss this question. Guy Kahane explains the relevant comparison:

We are not asking theists to conceive of God's death—to imagine that God stopped existing. And given that theists believe that God created the universe, when we ask them to consider His inexistence we are not asking them to conceive an empty void...

I will understand the comparison to involve the actual world and the closest possible world where [the opposite about the truth of God's existence is true] (Kahane, 2011, p. 676).

A novel solution to the counterpossible objection has been proposed by Joshua Mugg (2016) which I do not have space to discuss here. Related is the worry that since God exists necessarily and is an infinitely good being, every possible world necessarily has the identical infinitely good axiological value. I assume that there is a response to this worry too, since I think it is obvious that a world with one less instance of genocide is better than a world that is otherwise identical to it, regardless of whether or not God exists. I will not spend any more time on these worries.¹

Pro-theism is the view that it would be a good thing if God exists. Anti-theism is the view that it would be a bad thing if God exists. Both of these positions can be subdivided to account for the value impact of God's existence on a particular person (personal scope), or all persons more generally (impersonal scope). Further subdivisions can be made to account for things that would be better in some particular respect (narrow scope), or overall (wide scope) (Kraay & Dragos 2013).² It has been noted that these categories 'cut across each other, and generate four varieties of anti-theism [and also of pro-theism]' (Kraay & Dragos, 2013, pp. 159):

Wide Impersonal Anti-Theism:	It would be far worse overall if God exists than if God does not.
Wide Impersonal Pro-Theism	It would be far better overall if God exists than if God does not.
Wide Personal Anti-Theism:	It would be far worse overall <i>for me</i> if God exists than if God does not.
Wide Personal Pro-Theism:	It would be far better overall <i>for me</i> if God exists than if God does not.
Narrow Impersonal Anti-Theism:	It would be far worse <i>in certain respects</i> if God exists than if God does not.
Narrow Impersonal Pro-Theism:	It would be far better <i>in certain respects</i> if God exists than if God does not.
Narrow Personal Anti-Theism:	It would be far worse <i>in certain respects, for me</i> , if God exists than if God does not.
Narrow Personal Pro-Theism:	It would be far better <i>in certain respects, for me</i> , if God exists than if God does not. ³

¹ See also Kraay & Dragos, 2013, pp. 160-162; Lougheed 2017; Penner & Lougheed, 2015, p. 60.

² Two other possible stances are agnosticism and indifference but I will not discuss these here (Kraay & Dragos, 2013, p. 159).

³ This list is modified from Kraay & Dragos, 2013, pp. 159-160.

Thus far a successful argument for *wide* impersonal or personal anti-theism has not been offered in the literature. Such an argument would have to: (i) enumerate the downsides to a theistic world; (ii) argue that (i) represents a complete or sufficiently representative list; (iii) enumerate the upsides to a theistic world; (iv) argue that (iii) represents a complete or sufficiently representative list; and (v) demonstrate that combined downsides of a theistic universe are larger than the combined upside of a theistic universe.⁴

The most promising arguments for preferring God's non-existence defend *narrow* impersonal and personal anti-theism since the burden of proof for doing so is easier to meet than defending wide anti-theism. Defenses of narrow anti-theism typically focus on certain goods that only obtain in a full and complete sense on atheism. Sometimes these goods are explicitly connected to a meaningful life, such that one's life might lose meaning if it turns out God exists (Kahane, 2011; Penner, 2015; Lougheed, 2017). But the success of such arguments does not depend on the goods connection to meaning. Goods associated with atheism can exist independently of meaning (Lougheed 2017).

The goods discussed in relation to atheism often include things like privacy, independence, autonomy, and certain types of dignity (Kahane, 2011; Penner, 2015; Lougheed, 2017; Penner, forthcoming). I argue even if it is true that these goods only obtain at all or in an important sense on atheism, they can still be *experienced* on theism provided that God is sufficiently hidden. In other words, the experience of the aforementioned goods is possible if God exists but remains hidden. So for those who hold that theism is consistent with a hidden God, one relevant axiological comparison is between the existence of a hidden God with the non-existence of God. I address the objection that there could be theistic goods that only obtain only in a world where God is not hidden. I conclude that wide pro-theism is true and narrow anti-theism is false. This amounts to a new solution to the problem of divine hiddenness: God might hide in order to increase or maximize the axiological value of the world.

II. EXPERIENCE OF GOODS VERSUS ACTUAL GOODS

Before surveying some of the specific goods associated atheism and showing why they can be experienced on hidden theism, it is important to understand that a key assumption in my argument is that the experience of a good is axiologically equivalent to the actual obtaining of that same good. Elsewhere I argue that the burden of proof is on the pro-theist to demonstrate that this is the case, so I will now attempt to meet that burden (Lougheed, 2017, pp. 351-352) Consider three different possible worlds:

Atheistic World: God does not exist.

Hidden Theistic World: God exists and is hidden from humans.

Unhidden Theistic World: God exists is not hidden from humans.

⁴ This list comes from personal correspondence with Klaas J. Kraay.

I leave the details of these worlds intentionally sparse. After all, there will be debate about what each of these worlds, if actual, is supposed to look like to us. For instance, how different is Hidden Theistic World from Unhidden Theistic World? Clearly there are theists who believe that we are currently in Hidden Theistic World, while there are other theists who believe that we are currently in Unhidden Theistic World. But I am going to assume that whatever Hidden Theistic World and Unhidden Theistic World are supposed to look like, that they are significantly different. In particular, they will be phenomenologically different to humans in them. Likewise, how different is Unhidden Theistic World from Atheistic World? Again there are those who are convinced we are in Atheistic World right now, and likewise those who are convinced we are in Unhidden Theistic World right now. I am going to assume that whatever Unhidden Theistic World and Atheistic World are supposed to look like, that they are significantly different.

For my purposes the most important comparison is between Hidden Theistic World and Atheistic World. Various philosophers think that God is hidden in our world (or at least our world is consistent with a hidden God). And of course, the majority of philosophers are atheists and thus necessarily think there is no God in our world. It is possible that these two worlds are, as far as humans can tell, phenomenologically identical (or very similar). This is perfectly consistent with them being very different ontologically. So assume for the sake of argument that Hidden Theistic World and Atheistic World are possibly phenomenologically equivalent.

To say that Hidden Theistic World and Atheistic World are the same with respect to human experience is not to say that they necessarily share the same axiological value. As I will explain below, there are certain goods that have been associated (exclusively) with atheism. These goods have been used to defend the rationality of personal anti-theism. They create an axiological difference between a theistic world and atheistic world, at least for certain individuals (in certain respects). I argue that all of the goods associated (exclusively) with atheism can be *experienced* in Hidden Theistic World. I will defend that claim further in the next section. If this is right then the atheistic goods in question cannot be used to justify an axiological asymmetry between theism and atheism even for particular individuals. These goods are purported to obtain only on atheism but it turns out that they are experience in Hidden Theistic World. It becomes difficult, then, to see why everyone should not prefer Hidden Theistic World to Atheistic World once we reflect on all of the additional goods gained if theism is true.

There are two possible initial objections that can be raised to this line of argument. First, why think that the *experience* of a good is axiologically equivalent to the *obtaining* of that good? The answer comes from reflecting on the fact that from a first-person perspective there is no difference between the experiences of privacy, say, and the actual obtaining of privacy. There is no reason from a first-person perspective to choose one scenario over the other. Indeed, there is no way from a first-person perspective to even tell the difference between the two scenarios. The intuition here might be something similar to that of Harry Frankfurt's famous counterexamples to the Principle of Alternate Possibilities in the free will debate (1969). In these counterexamples the agent in question would be coerced into performing a particular action if she does not chose to do it on her own. This demonstrates that she need not have had the ability to do otherwise in order to be morally responsible for her action. Indeed, from *her phenomenological perspective* it is as if she has the ability to do otherwise. Of course, she is not free to do otherwise because there is a mechanism in

place to ensure she pursue a particular course of action. Frankfurt's examples suggests that the Principle of Alternate Possibilities is not necessary for an action to be morally significant.

Part of the reason why Frankfurt's example is so powerful is because with or without the mechanism ensuring the agent will perform a particular action our intuitions about the morality of the example seem to remain the same. This is relevantly analogous to the difference between experiencing a good and the actual obtaining of that good because in both cases the first-person perspective does not change. There is no phenomenological difference between Atheistic World and Hidden Theistic World with respect to goods. One might wonder whether this is the case when reflecting on the same scenario from the third-person perspective. But notice that reflecting on Frankfurt's counterexamples from the third-person does not seem to change our intuitions. If the scenarios are relevantly similar, then they should not change when comparing goods obtaining in Atheistic World and the experience of such goods obtaining in Hidden Theistic World.

The second objection is that one might argue that there are goods that obtain on Unhidden Theistic World that do not obtain (or cannot be experienced) on Hidden Theistic World. So even if Hidden Theistic World and Atheistic World are equivalent, the goods associated with theism cannot be appealed to in order to give Hidden Theistic World an axiological advantage over Atheistic World. It is not obvious to me what goods would be touched by this objection. In any case, the objector who wishes to raise this objection would have to show what goods obtain on Unhidden Theistic World but not on Hidden Theistic World.⁵ Consider an example of a good associated with theism to see why this objection is difficult to raise: One good is the logical impossibility of gratuitous evil on theism.⁶ As Klaas J. Kraay and Chris Dragos note:

Philosophers typically maintain that while it may be morally acceptable for God to permit some evil to occur, God cannot permit any *gratuitous* evil to occur: on theism, any evil that occurs is permitted either for the sake of *obtaining a sufficiently significant, otherwise-unobtainable* good, or for the sake of *preventing a sufficiently significant, otherwise-unpreventable evil*... This is no *ad hoc expansion* of [theism], it is generally taken to be a logical consequence of the essential divine attributes of omnipotence, omniscience, and perfect goodness (2013, pp. 166-167).

Kraay and Dragos argue that it is likely that the good of the *impossibility* of gratuitous evil on theism will always outweigh any goods associated with atheism, and hence make wide impersonal anti-theism impossible to defend (2013, pp. 167).⁷ Whether this is the case, it does not change the fact that this good obtains on Hidden Theistic World in the same way it obtains on Unhidden Theistic World. The same can be said of goods like cosmic justice, and the possibility or guarantee of a (positive) afterlife. Finally even the good of a relationship with God can be had on Hidden Theistic World just as it can be had in Unhidden Theistic World. This has already been proposed as possible solution to the problem of divine hiddenness (Cullison, 2010).

III. GOODS THAT OBTAIN ON ATHEISM

⁵ I will say more about this in Section V.

⁶ Penner and Lougheed, 2015 argue that morally good agents add value to states of affairs and that God is the penultimate example of such an agent.

⁷ Some theists claim that God and gratuitous can co-exist. See Hasker, 1992 and van Inwagen, 2006.

To complete my argument an explicit discussion of the goods in question is important. Elsewhere I argue that certain goods (e.g. privacy) only obtain at all if God does not exist (Lougheed 2017).⁸ When I defended this claim I never considered the different implications of Hidden Theistic World versus Unhidden Theistic World with respect to certain goods. I now argue that while the goods in question do not obtain on Unhidden Theistic World, the experience of them obtains on Hidden Theistic World. In what follows I outline many of the most commonly mentioned goods appealed to in defenses of personal anti-theism and show why the experience of them also obtain on (hidden) theism.

1. Privacy

Privacy has been used to defend personal anti-theism in the context of its connection to a meaningful life (Kahane 2011; Penner 2015; Lougheed 2017; Penner, forthcoming). If privacy is so intimately connected to the meaning of an individual's life, then if God exists her life would lose (or have less) meaning. For instance, elsewhere I argue that:

[I]f God does not exist, however, then (minimally) both physical and mental privacy are logically possible. If one only has relationships with other humans, then one is in complete control of how much of her thoughts she devolves to other people. Likewise, she has more control over the amount of physical privacy she experiences. As social beings, it is rare that humans are ever completely physically isolated, but one can be isolated, at least for some time, if one so chooses (Lougheed, 2017, p. 348).

If God exists then humans do not have any physical or mental privacy. On Unhidden Theistic World humans would presumably be consistently (if not constantly) aware of this fact. If privacy is connected to meaning, or more generally it is a good that adds to the axiological value of the world, then this is a value that would indeed be lost on Unhidden Theistic World. But on Hidden Theistic World one still plausibly has the experience of privacy from God. Indeed one could have exactly the same experience of privacy that obtains in Atheistic World.

Elsewhere I speculate that even if we never found out that the National Security Agency was spying on us that it is still a bad thing (i.e. it still decreases the value of the world). There is also an important sense in which it does not matter how the information about you is being used (Lougheed 2017, p.348). The problem is that you have not consented to the information being obtained in the first place. If this is right then it does not matter that God is necessary benevolent, while the National Security Agency is a fallible human agency. But from the first-person perspective, what is the difference between Hidden Theistic World and Atheistic World with respect to privacy? It is not clear that there is a difference (or at least that there necessarily has to be a difference). Notice that even if there is a relevant difference with respect to privacy from a

⁸ My claim is in the context of rejecting some of Myron A. Penner's (2015) criticisms of Kahane's (2011) Meaningful Life Argument. Penner claims that many of the goods associated with a meaningful life on atheism still obtain to a certain extent on theism. My main objection to Penner is that many of the goods he discusses actually do not obtain at all on theism. Here I think the distinction between Unhidden Theistic World and Hidden Theistic World is extremely important. I think my objections to Penner are correct on Unhidden Theistic World, but not correct on Hidden Theistic World. So this is not a rejection of my prior view, so much as further clarifying it. Penner (forthcoming) responds to my objections.

third-person perspective that it does not matter for this particular good. In the context of the axiology of theism literature privacy has always been associated with *personal* anti-theism, so the first-person perspective is all that matters here. Once this is understood it is difficult to see the difference between Atheistic World and Hidden Theistic World when it comes to the good of privacy.

2. Independence and Autonomy

Two other goods associated with personal anti-theism are independence and autonomy:

If God exists, then humans have been created by a maximal being and hence there necessarily exists a being superior to them. It is true that everyone is dependent on humans in some way (e.g., we all have biological parents), but this is different from the existence of a maximal being who is literally responsible for the existence of everything in the universe. The constraints that the existence of such a being places on our autonomy and independence in virtue of logical necessity, such as the impossibility of complete knowledge, do not exist if God does not exist. Autonomy and independence are not, then, goods that come in degrees at least when considered this way (Lougheed, 2017, p. 349).

But on Hidden Theistic World the experience of autonomy and independence are plausibly the same as on Atheistic World. Related is the worry that “[i]f God created people for a specific purpose, this constitutes a violation of our dignity. Consider that parents are able to create children for the wrong reasons and that this applies by analogy to God” (Lougheed, 2017, p. 350).⁹ On Hidden Theistic World, however, it is not obvious that humans are made for any specific end, let alone God’s specific ends if it turns out that we are made for a purpose. In other words, we have the experience of not having our dignity violated in this way, even if we have been created for a specific end and this in turn constitutes a dignity harm.

3. Cooperation

If God does not exist then humans have no choice but cooperate with one another in order to solve problems (that they cannot or do not want to solve on their own).¹⁰ They cannot rely on God to miraculously intervene to help solve problems. Humans are alone in the universe and must rely on themselves. Again, consider that the experience of needing to cooperate to solve problems on Hidden Theistic World and Atheistic World may very well be phenomenologically identical. Indeed I suspect that many theists would reject the notion that God will or ought to help them very often or at all. Within certain theological traditions there are good reasons to think God will not always intervene in human affairs. Finally God’s hiddenness is perfectly consistent with God rarely, if ever, intervening in human affairs. This is further reason to wonder why we would expect Hidden Theistic World and Atheistic World to be different in this respect. So the good of cooperation can be experienced on Hidden Theistic World just as well as on Atheistic World.

4. Bravery

⁹ See Metz, 2013 and Bair, 1957 for more on this point.

¹⁰ Richard Swinburne (2004, ch.11) proposes this as a possible reason for divine hiddenness.

The final good I discuss is a certain kind of bravery in the face of uncertainty about existential questions. If God does not exist then we cannot have the benefit of the psychological comfort offered by God. If God does not exist then God cannot be the source of meaning or the explanation for our existence. Without God there is less clarity about why we are here and how we are supposed to live. This means dealing with the existential angst and despair that possibly comes with uncertainty about these questions. In this sense there is opportunity to exhibit the good of bravery in the face of the unknown. But again, this is only so when comparing Atheistic World to Unhidden Theistic World. On Hidden Theistic World one could face all of the same existential angst in the face of uncertainty about whether there is a God.¹¹

IV. HIDDEN THEISTIC WORLD IS SUSCEPTIBLE TO THE EXPERIENCE OBJECTION TO HEDONISM

Thus far I have tried to establish the following two claims: (i) the experience of goods is (morally) equivalent to the actual obtaining of goods and; (ii) all of the goods associated exclusively with atheism can be experienced on Hidden Theistic World. I have also claimed that the goods associated exclusively with theism will obtain on both Unhidden Theistic World and Hidden Theistic World. In the final section I address the worry that there could be theistic goods that only obtain on Unhidden Theistic World. In this section I examine the most promising objection to my argument which is that it is susceptible to powerful counterexamples to hedonism.

In similar ways, both Robert Nozick (1971; 1974) and Thomas Nagel (1970) have objected to hedonism with what I will call the *Experience Objection*. Andrew Moore nicely summarizes their worry by explaining that they both:

[P]resent schematic descriptions of lives that have all the appearance but none of the reality of self-understanding, achievement, loving relationships, self-directedness, and so on, alongside lives that have these appearances and also the corresponding realities. On the face of it, hedonism is committed to the hedonic equality and thus the equal value of these lives. Commenting on his more fantastical and more famous ‘experience machine’ case, Nozick added further detail, claiming that it is also good in itself “to do certain things, and not just have the experience [as if] of doing them”, “to be a certain way, to be a certain sort of person” and not just to be an “indeterminate blob” floating in a tank, and “to make a difference in the world” rather than merely to appear to oneself to do so. He concluded: “something matters to us in addition to experience (Nozick 1974: 43–44). (Moore, 2013).

The main thrust of their examples is that it is possible to imagine a scenario where society agrees to deceive someone for some form of malicious fun and provide them with the experience of a successful life even though everyone is in the on the joke, or a scenario where one simply voluntarily enters into a machine where one can live out such experiences in order to maximize

¹¹ Relatedly, Lovering (2004) argues that argues that God’s hiding could cause incapable moral nihilism. This could be an example of the interconnectedness of certain goods and evils. Perhaps certain goods (e.g. bravery) cannot obtain without the existence of certain evils (e.g. moral nihilism).

good experiences even though they do not really occur. Call such a world Hedonistic Deceived World.

The objection against my argument is that in Hedonistic Deceived World, just like in Hidden Theistic World, all of the goods in question are *experienced*. But our intuitions about Hedonistic Deceived World suggest that there is something wrong. The phenomenological experience of the goods cannot be the (only) feature that makes them valuable. From the first-person perspective nothing changes between Hedonistic Deceived World where someone is (self) deceived into thinking the goods obtain and a world where they are not being deceived and the same goods genuinely obtain. It is from the third-person perspective that this example acquires its force. This is because we would not choose to be deceived and many of us would not choose to enter an experience machine either. Thus, the objection is by way of analogy, just like my defense of experience was by way of analogy in Section II. The objection is that Hedonistic Deceived World and Hidden Theistic World are relevantly analogous and hence axiologically equivalent. Therefore, Hidden Theistic World and Atheistic World are not axiologically equivalent after all.

Reply:

It might be tempting to reject the imagined objector's use of intuition. But this is not a move available to me. I appealed to intuitions in my use of Frankfurt counterexamples. Likewise, I think Nozick's and Nagel's counterexamples are correct inasmuch as I share the intuitions they are attempting to generate with their examples. In other words, I agree that their examples provide a rational basis for rejecting hedonism. Another possible reply might be in attempting to distinguish the cases based on who is doing the deceiving. But drawing on this distinction will not help me. In Hidden Theistic World, humans have not consented to being deceived by God.¹² So this maintains its similarity to examples where someone is being deceived by everyone about the success of her life.

The best response to this objection is simply to concede that while it is valuable to experience a good, it is not the only thing that makes it valuable. It is indeed more valuable to experience that good *and* have that good actually obtain. While this concession does weaken my argument, my conclusion can still be defended. Refining the choices in light of this can help show why:

Possible World	Ontology	Phenomenology	Value
Atheistic World	God does not exist	Not Unhidden Theistic World. Possibly Hidden Theistic World	Atheistic goods No Theistic goods
Hidden Theistic World	God exists and is hidden from humans	Not Unhidden Theistic World Possibly Atheistic World	Experience of Atheistic goods Theistic goods
Unhidden Theistic World	God exists and is not hidden from humans	Not Atheistic World	Theistic goods No Atheistic goods

¹² Or at least humans haven't consented to God's existence being hidden, if deceived is too strong.

		Not Hidden Theistic World	
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In light of this it still appears that Hidden Theistic World is the most rational world to prefer. One gets the complete set of goods of one ontology (theism) and the experience of another set of goods from another ontology (atheism). Neither Atheistic World nor Unhidden Theistic World can offer both. Part of what I wanted to show was that versions of personal anti-theism cannot be defended when the relevant comparison is to Hidden Theistic World. This might not be the case, however, if the goods of atheism swamp the goods of theism or heavily outweigh them. In such a scenario the mere experience of atheism might not be enough for certain individuals to prefer Hidden Theistic World. But if the goods of theism outweigh the goods of atheism or if they are axiologically equivalent then my conclusion that Hidden Theistic World should be preferred against Atheistic World, even with respect to personal anti-theism remains intact. At the very least, this shows that the literature would benefit from further reflections on the axiological significance of the *phenomenological experience* of goods. Interestingly, this may involve drawing on the hedonism literature in ethics.

V. THE AXIOLOGICAL SOLUTION TO DIVINE HIDDENNESS

In this final section I show how what I have presented can be employed as a possible response to the problem of divine hiddenness. There is a large and technical literature on the problem of divine hiddenness. It is true that the problem of divine hiddenness has been around for ages in the sense that people have experienced existential angst and despair at being unable to have awareness of God's presence (e.g. Mother Teresa). However, John L. Schellenberg is the first philosopher to explicitly appeal to hiddenness as evidence against theism. In his ground-breaking book *Divine Hiddenness and Human Reason* Schellenberg argues that if God exists then one of the greatest goods a human can experience is a relationship with God (1993). The existence of non-culpable non-belief serves as evidence that God does not exist since a relationship with God is impossible in such a scenario. And Schellenberg claims that there are cases of non-culpable, non-belief. So God does not exist.¹³

Many possible reasons for why God might hide have been proposed in the literature. Such reasons include the fact that one might reject God if God were to reveal himself to the person in question. So God's hiding is really an act of mercy (Howard-Synder, 1996). It has also been argued that it is possible to formulate a relationship with God even if one is an atheist. So God's desire to ensure a relationship need not presuppose that God would not hide (Cullison, 2010). Interestingly, the claim that non-culpable non-belief is even possible has been challenged (Henry, 2001; Lehe, 2004).¹⁴ Finally, some have suggested that God hides in order to ensure that humans are genuinely free and not overtly coerced by God (Swinburne, 2004, pp. 267-272).¹⁵ The Divine Hiddenness literature continues to grow and I make no attempt at comprehensiveness in this brief survey.¹⁶

¹³ It is not important for my purposes whether this argument is formulated deductively or inductively.

¹⁴ Schellenberg 2007 adds *non-resistant belief* to the argument. Schellenberg 2005a responds to Henry and Lehe.

¹⁵ See Schellenberg 2005b for a response.

¹⁶ See Kraay 2013 for an excellent annotated bibliography on hiddenness. See Schellenberg 2017a and 2017b for a critical survey of recent work on hiddenness. Schellenberg (2017a) notes that there have been 60 papers or books published on hiddenness in the last five years alone, which is why a comprehensive survey is impossible in this paper.

But there are, I think, interesting connections between the axiology of theism and divine hiddenness.

The ideas I discuss earlier suggest that one might be tempted to prefer God's non-existence if the relevant goods can't be experienced on Unhidden Theistic World. But if God is hidden then all of the goods in question can be experienced even if it turns out to be true that they don't actually obtain. This is a possible justification for God's hiding. God hides to ensure people can experience a whole host of goods they would otherwise not experience, the result of which is a more valuable world than one in which God's existence is obvious. Additionally, this enables people to avoid preferring that God not exist, which some theological traditions hold is a sin. This also makes the world better. In other words, Hidden Theistic World has a higher axiological value than Atheistic World or Unhidden Theistic World. I don't propose this as a conclusive solution to the problem of divine hiddenness. But this does appear to be a novel solution to problem of divine hiddenness: *God might hide in order to increase or maximize the axiological value of the world.* This solution to hiddenness deserves further exploration.

Here's one such related issue that needs further exploration if this line of argument is to be a successful solution to the problem of divine hiddenness. It could be objected that my discussion has overlooked important details regarding the comparison between Unhidden Theistic World and Hidden Theistic World.¹⁷ Part of the force of Schellenberg's argument is that a world where God isn't hidden and effectively communicates unconditional love for humans along with a desire for a relationship with them, will look very different from a world where God is hidden. In other words, when we move from Unhidden Theistic World to Hidden Theistic World there is a lot of value lost. We might think that at the very least, this results in a stalemate between Unhidden Theistic World and Hidden Theistic World. But while the experience in Atheistic World and Hidden Theistic World are the same (though the underlying metaphysical reality is very different), the phenomenology in Unhidden Theistic World compared to Hidden Theistic World are completely different. Indeed, the experience might be so different that Hidden Theistic World appears to lack any of the relevant theistic goods. If this is right, then it's difficult to see how Hidden Theistic World borrows value from Unhidden Theistic World when the experience of each is so different. So Hidden Theistic World is consistent with the experience of Atheistic World, but not of Unhidden Theistic World.

One initial response is to simply argue that the goods in Unhidden Theistic World are mostly independent of experience, while the goods in Atheistic World are heavily experiential. This could constitute a relevant difference, though there needs to a positive reason for thinking this to be the case. Perhaps certain theological traditions could help one to make this point, but it is not something I think can easily be defended.¹⁸ A different response is to concede that there is a significant experiential difference between Unhidden Theistic World and Hidden Theistic World. But suppose God's hiddenness is connected to time. It's possible to imagine a world where God is hidden in the here and now, but not hidden in the afterlife.¹⁹ This can account for any value gap in

¹⁷ I am very grateful to anonymous referee for bringing this objection to my attention. The rest of this section is a result of their insightful comments on this project.

¹⁸ I have in mind here the ascetic traditions. Though sometimes an ascetic lifestyle is pursued for the very purpose of achieving religious experience, so it very much depends on the details.

¹⁹ Indeed, this seems consistent with many Christian theological traditions, if only implicitly.

experience between Unhidden Theistic World and Hidden Theistic World. This move ultimately involves modifying Hidden Theistic World to something along the lines of *Hidden Theistic World: God exists and is hidden from humans in the here and now, but not in the afterlife. Admittedly, this response does involve a modification of my original argument. Furthermore, it requires taking on a number of theological commitments such as the afterlife, and possibly some version of universalism. After all, if the afterlife were to consist of some people going to hell, purgatory, or being annihilated, they could hardly experience the goods associated with theism.

One objection to appealing to the afterlife in this way is that it seems false that no goods are lost. For instance, if my father pretends to be dead to ‘grow me as a man’ but then reveals himself after 20 years, it is simply not that case that I have not lost any goods associated with having my Dad around for those 20 years.²⁰ In reply, it is first worth noting that I do not require it to be the case that the theistic goods are of identical quantity and quality with respect to Unhidden Theistic World and *Hidden Theistic World. I only need it to be the case that the atheistic goods in *Hidden Theistic World push its value past Unhidden Theistic World (or brings them so close together as to make it rationally permissible to prefer *Hidden Theistic World). Second, this is a serious objection only inasmuch as one’s life is for a finite period of time as opposed to an infinite time. In a world where one lives for a finite period of time, then not having a relationship with one’s father for years is a significant loss, even if one gets certain other goods because of it. But in a world where you live forever this is not as problematic. This is because the goods associated with not having a father will obtain (because of his 20 year absence), plus all of the goods associated with having a father will obtain in the subsequent finite amount of time after his absence is over. In other words, when applied to God’s hiddenness, the point is that the hiddenness is for a finite period of time but the subsequent unhidden God in the afterlife is for an infinite amount of time. Of course, this adds the further assumption that not only is there an afterlife, but it is eternal. This is, however, consistent with most theistic understandings of the afterlife. Thus, appealing to the afterlife is one possible answer, but it does involve taking on theological commitments which some may find unpalatable.

Finally, the most direct response to this type of worry is to deny that there is a significant phenomenological experience between Unhidden Theistic World and Hidden Theistic World. This is the most ambitious response, and I will not aim to complete it here. Here is one example of how it might go with respect to one good, that of a relationship with God. As mentioned above one response to hiddenness is that one need *not* believe that God exists in order to form a relationship with God (Cullison 2010). For instance it is possible for someone to believe that she is conversing with a computer program, when in reality there is another human on the other end of the connection. From this person’s perspective there is no phenomenological difference between conversing with the computer program or a human. By analogy, it is possible that the good of forming a relationship with God in Unhidden Theistic World and Hidden Theistic World is phenomenologically equivalent, or at least similar. Even if there is some difference and hence some value drop between Unhidden Theistic World and Hidden Theistic World with respect the good of a relationship with God, the fact that in Hidden Theistic World one also gets the goods associated with Atheistic World still makes it rational to prefer Hidden Theistic World to Unhidden

²⁰ This objection is taken directly from the comments of a very helpful anonymous referee.

Theistic World.²¹ Of course, in order for this type of response to be complete, one would have to survey a representative list of theistic worlds and make the same argument for each (or at least for most). This represents a much larger project than I have space to cover here, but my example shows it is a response that is worth pursuing.

VI. CONCLUSION

Many, if not all, of the goods associated with atheism can be experienced if theism is true but God is hidden. Such goods include privacy, independence, autonomy, and bravery in the face of existential uncertainty. I argued that there is no axiological difference between the experience of a good and the obtaining of a good by reflection on Frankfurt's counterexamples. More needs to be done to explain why this line of argument is not subject to Nozick and Nagel experience-based objections to hedonism. But even if their objection applies it is still true that in a world where God is hidden the experience of the goods of atheism obtain plus all of the goods associated with theism. How the goods of atheism and goods of theism stack up against one another will indicate whether personal anti-theism is reasonable. Finally, to complete the argument, more work has to be done to show that there isn't a significant value drop from Unhidden Theistic World to Hidden Theistic World. What I have argued for gives rise to a tentative new solution to the problem of divine hiddenness: God might hide in order to increase or maximize the axiological value of the world.

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²¹ It could be objected that there is indeed a value drop between these two types of relationships. I suspect one's assessment here will depend on one's assessment of the plausibility of the example. Additionally, it is possible that there is value gained in eventually finding out that one is in a relationship with an actual person. Finally, it is worth noting that even if there is a value drop, I do not need to claim that the theistic goods are of identical quantity and quality between Unhidden Theistic World and *Hidden Theistic World. I just need it to be the case that the atheistic goods in *Hidden Theistic World push it past Unhidden Theistic World (or brings them too close together to distinguish the values between the two).

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