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Introduction

In this thesis, I critique J.L. Schellenberg's divine hiddenness argument against the existence of God as presented in his 2015 book *The Hiddenness Argument*. To borrow a phrase from Max Baker-Hytch, my approach might be called a sin-based response to divine hiddenness (see Baker-Hytch, 2023) because it attempts to respond to Schellenberg's argument by focusing on the phenomenon of human moral failing/corruption. My goals in this thesis are threefold: (1) to question Schellenberg's definition of non-resistant non-belief by arguing that there is a broader kind of resistance that is relevant to the discussion which Schellenberg has not adequately considered, (2) to argue that once this deeper kind of resistance is acknowledged, it becomes much harder to argue that anyone is truly non-resistant to God, and (3) to defend the idea that God has the right to hide (that is, not make his existence known) from persons who are resistant in this deeper sense. I hope to defend (3) without questioning Schellenberg's basic claim that God is maximally loving, rejecting his interpretation of love or wholeheartedly jettisoning the Love-based framework of the divine nature that he seems to be working with¹.

I plan to accomplish these three goals by introducing two broad lines of argument – one focusing on the widespread phenomenon of interpersonal human injustice, and the latter focusing on the phenomena of flawed human character and human proneness to relational infidelity. Two of the claims² I defend are: (1) God can plausibly be regarded as a victim of human injustice and (2) any potential divine-human relationship can prove to be 'injurious' to God in some sense because of human proneness to relational infidelity.

¹ I get the phrase 'Love-based framework' from Mark Murphy (see Murphy, 2021) whose work I look at later in this thesis.

² These are not the only claims I defend, but two noteworthy ones.

My battery of arguments has a feature that is intended to have maximum dialectical force: I hope to engage Schellenberg on his own turf, utilizing a philosophical-theological methodology like his and conceding as many of his theological assumptions as possible. In this way, I hope to demonstrate that his own method can be used to undermine his argument. Hence, when theorizing about God, I will treat God as if he is (1) a person as in a centre of consciousness, (2) a moral agent possessing libertarian free will and (3) a being that is engaged in dynamic interactions with the world and with human persons and who can, in some sense, be affected by the world.

My methods might seem unorthodox to classical theists³. For example, some of my arguments can be read as implying that God can suffer. Similarly, as noted earlier, I might be read as saying that God is in time and has real relations with creatures. Read this way, my arguments would be unacceptable to those who wish to argue that God is impassible and timeless. However, I suggest there is a way for classical theists to appreciate the value of my work. Firstly, my arguments could be read in an *ad hominem* manner – I am engaging Schellenberg on his own turf as the previous paragraph noted and my argument might help persuade those who are influenced by his way of thinking and who utilize his methodology. Secondly, it is possible to read my arguments in a nonliteral way. Many classical theists belong to religious traditions – for example, Thomists are often Roman Catholic Christians – and these traditions often have scriptures that sometimes portray God as having emotions and changing his mind (for examples from the Bible, see Exodus 32:14, Deuteronomy 4:24). Classical theists tend to interpret these verses nonliterally or analogically – God doesn't *literally* have emotions, but the Biblical language of emotion picks out something real in God in an imperfect and analogous way. A similar hermeneutic could be applied to my arguments.

³ I understand a classical theist to be a person who (1) holds that God exists and (2) understands God to be simple, immutable, impassible and timeless.

For example, when I claim that God is the victim of human injustice, although I do take the injustice towards God to be literal, I need not be read as claiming that God literally suffers as a result of this injustice in the sense of his inner life being disturbed, although an advocate of divine passibility is free to read it in this way. I do not argue for or against classical theism in this thesis.

It is also important to clarify the relation between my approach and *de re* approaches. *De re* approaches are a kind of sin-based approach to divine hiddenness which involve “counting people who don’t have mental states that they would represent to themselves as being about God as nevertheless having mental states that are *de re* about God; that is, they have mental states that they would represent to themselves as being about X, and in actual fact $X = \text{God}$ ” (Baker-Hytch, 2023, p. 7). Such mental states, says Baker-Hytch, may include cognitive attitudes such as beliefs and affective attitudes such as longings or loathings. The proposal here is that “people who lack a monotheistic God-concept can nevertheless be viewed as having rejected God, in virtue of their having mental states that are *de re* about God” (ibid.). As an example, Baker-Hytch quotes William Wood who argues that to turn away from truth is to turn away from God. Similarly, it could be argued that Good is the Good, and to turn away from the Good is to turn away from God. This could be called a simple sin-based strategy.

My arguments in this thesis represent a novel sin-based approach that is not reducible to the *de re* approach. This is not to say that my approach is entirely different: indeed, there may be areas of overlap and thinkers who take the *de re* approach may find common ground with my arguments. However, my approach is quite distinct in several ways. *Firstly*, I draw attention to considerations that are often neglected in the literature and the reasons I give for counting certain humans as resistant to God are distinct from the reasons that are standardly

given by sin-based approaches. *Secondly*, my approach doesn't necessarily require humans to have mental states about God at all – *de re* or otherwise – for them to count as being resistant to relationship with God. How this is the case will become evident as the thesis progresses. *Thirdly*, whereas the simple approach emphasizes that humans have turned away from God, my approach *further* emphasizes that God has the right to withdraw from human beings in response to certain facts about human behaviour and human character, and this act of withdrawal does not imply a lack of love on his part. This is not an emphasis of *de re* approaches. Thus, my project is more ambitious than a simple sin-based strategy. I suggest that it could be called a *complex sin-based strategy*.

The core thrust of my arguments also differs from standard sin-based accounts in another important way. Whereas many sin-based accounts argue that non-belief is the result of human sin in a direct causal way (e.g., the noetic effects of sin or sinful self-deception), I do not make this claim. Instead, I claim that human beings are morally corrupt, and that God is entitled to respond to this corruption by hiding from them, thereby ensuring their nonbelief in his existence. To put it another way: even if non-belief is not the direct immediate result of human resistance to God, my claim is that all non-believers are resistant to God and that this fact is relevant.

I would also like to note that a strength of this dissertation is that my understanding of Schellenberg's hiddenness argument is informed partly by my personal correspondence with Schellenberg. As Chapter 1 makes clear, this personal correspondence has helped shed light on an important aspect of his argument – his understanding of what it takes for a person to count as a non-resistant non-believer.

Sin-based approaches are a “road less travelled” (Baker-Hytch, 2023, p. 13). I suspect this is partly because it is seen as an implausible or hard-to-defend approach. I hope to demonstrate in this thesis that a powerful sin-based response to Schellenberg can be made.

I shall proceed as follows. In Chapter 1, I shall (i) lay out Schellenberg’s argument in a relevant form, (ii) highlight four features of his argument and (iii) note the features I plan to critique. In Chapter 2, I shall introduce my first major set of arguments, focusing on the phenomenon of interpersonal human injustice. In Chapter 3, I shall introduce my second major set of arguments, focusing on flawed human character and human proneness to relational infidelity. In both Chapters 2 and 3, I shall highlight various implications my arguments have for Schellenberg’s hiddenness argument. In Chapter 4, I make some final remarks. In the Conclusion, I summarize my case, suggest a new definition of non-resistant non-believer and note avenues of potential future research.

Chapter One: Selecting, Expositing and Interpreting Schellenberg's Argument

In this chapter, my primary goal is to interpret core features of Schellenberg's argument. This is necessary for the following reason – a thesis that aims to critically evaluate an argument must have a clear understanding of what is being evaluated. This chapter will also help to highlight the bits of the argument I am challenging. This chapter is meant to help lay the groundwork for the arguments in chapters 2 and 3.

1.1. Selection: Why the 2015 book?

A fact that might confuse some first-time readers is that Schellenberg has presented different versions of his arguments over the years (see Schellenberg, 2006, Schellenberg, 2007 and Schellenberg, 2015 for examples). These arguments vary both in form and substance. As noted in the introduction, I will be focusing on the version of the argument found in Schellenberg's 2015 book *The Hiddenness Argument*. The reason I make this selection is threefold. Firstly, it is not possible to look at every version of the argument in a 30,000-word thesis if my goal is to carry out an in-depth and substantive analysis. Hence, a selection is practically necessary. Secondly, in his 2015 book, Schellenberg retracts some of his previous views, particularly those found in his 1993 publication. Whereas in the 1993 work *Divine Hiddenness and Human Reason* he focused on the category of reasonable nonbelief, in his 2015 book he clarifies that he now thinks this is an error and prefers to speak of nonresistant nonbelief⁴. Thus, the arguments in his 2015 book represent a substantive evolution in his thought. Finally, the argument in the 2015 book is the most recent version published in a

⁴ See Schellenberg, 2015, pp. 54-56.

book-length treatise on the topic⁵. It is thus an ideal candidate for studying Schellenberg's hiddenness argument at its very best.

1.2.Expositing and Interpreting the Argument

The argument runs as follows:

1. If a perfectly loving God exists, then there exists a God who is always open to a personal relationship with any finite person.
2. If there exists a God who is always open to a personal relationship with any finite person, then no finite person is ever nonresistantly in a state of nonbelief in relation to the proposition that God exists.
3. If a perfectly loving God exists, then no finite person is ever nonresistantly in a state of nonbelief in relation to the proposition that God exists (from 1 and 2).
4. Some finite persons are or have been nonresistantly in a state of nonbelief in relation to the proposition that God exists.
5. No perfectly loving God exists (from 3 and 4).
6. If no perfectly loving God exists, then God does not exist.
7. God does not exist (from 5 and 6). (Schellenberg, 2015, p. 103).

There are four features of the argument worth highlighting.

1.2.1. Feature One: Divine Love

Schellenberg, like many theists, accepts the idea that God is personal (see Schellenberg, 2015, p. 39). Moreover, he also adopts the Anselmian idea that God – if he exists – must be

⁵ Although Schellenberg, as of 2024, has published a new book titled *What God Would Have Known: How Human Intellectual and Moral Development Undermines Christian Doctrine*, this new book is intended to present a series of new arguments against Christian doctrine specifically. Thus, I think it is distinct from the hiddenness argument against theism in general, which is the focus of this current thesis.

unsurpassably great which implies that “God is the *greatest possible person*” (ibid., p. 95). This implies that God must be loving, because a being that is personal but not loving is not unsurpassably great. Schellenberg’s argumentation here mirrors Anselm’s perfect being method in the *Monologion* and *Proslogion*.

Schellenberg infers from God’s maximal⁶ greatness that God must be loving. So far, this is an assumption few theists would quibble with. Where Schellenberg innovates is in his interpretation of the nature of love. His interpretation is quite modern: whereas medieval thinkers like Aquinas argue that to love simply means to will the good of the other (see *Summa Theologiae* 1.20), Schellenberg argues that love is much more than this. Love includes this kind of benevolence but goes beyond it, for the simple reason that it is possible for a person to be benevolent to another and still maintain a kind of distance. For example: one might give money in charity to a homeless person out of pity and desire to never see that person again. Love, on the other hand, is “the desire of a loving person to come close, allowing us explicitly to share in her life”. In other words, “ultimate love would necessarily bring with it openness to personal relationship” (ibid., p. 40). Furthermore, love does not value such relationship merely because it is beneficial for the other – rather, “love values relationship *for its own sake*” (ibid., p. 43).

Furthermore, if God is maximally great, this implies that God’s love must be maximally great as well. This implies that the divine love is (i) universal and (ii) constant. This seems to be the inference underlying Schellenberg’s first premise – that, if perfectly loving, God is *always* open to personal relationship with *every* finite person. Mark Murphy attributes to Schellenberg a Love-based framework for divine action (see Murphy, 2021, pp. 80-108). A framework for divine action is “a scheme by which divine action can be explained

⁶ I treat the terms maximal and ‘unsurpassable interchangeably.

and predicted, and which applies to the divine being simply because that being is divine” (ibid. p. 81). According to the love framework “our ability to explain and predict divine action is both enabled and constrained by God’s being loving towards creatures” (ibid.). Considering the above, it is easy to see why Murphy attributes such a view towards Schellenberg.

1.2.2. Feature Two: Personal Relationship

The second feature worth looking at is the notion of personal relationship. Schellenberg has a very specific meaning in mind: he means “the general and familiar idea of a positively meaningful interaction between persons that they are aware of experiencing” (Schellenberg, 2015, pp. 39-41). In other words, the kind of relationship he is speaking of is one in which both parties are aware of each other and the fact that they are in a relationship and in which they interact with each other to show gratitude, trust, respect and so on.

1.2.3. Feature Three: Finite Persons

Despite what the term ‘finite person’ might suggest, it does not refer to nondivine persons in general: rather, it means specifically those persons who “*have the capacities needed for such a relationship*: the capacities of mind and heart needed to be able to be in a meaningful relationship with God, which include such things as a capacity to feel the presence of God [...] exhibit attitudes of trust, gratitude, and obedience to God and so on” (ibid., p. 40). Understood this way, Schellenberg’s claim is that God would make the possibility of a conscious, dynamic and mutually interactive relationship available to every person capable of being in such a relationship.

Before proceeding to the fourth feature, it is worth noting that, for Schellenberg, divine openness to personal relationship with every finite person “doesn’t require that God do

any particular thing to pursue relationship [...] It means *not through one's own actions or omissions making it impossible* for the other, whom one loves, to participate in personal relationship with one at that time should the other wish to do so" (ibid., pp. 40-41).

Schellenberg clarifies in his *Philosophy Compass* article that his claim is not that non-resistance to God is *sufficient* to ensure that one is actually in a relationship with him, but rather that every non-resistant person will be *able* to enter a relationship with God simply by trying (Schellenberg, 2017, p. 4). However, to be able to enter a relationship with God implies that one must be aware that God exists – the reason is that if one is not even aware of the existence of another, one cannot enter a relationship with that other that involves mutual awareness and interaction. Thus, every non-resistant person would at least be given an awareness of God's existence and would believe that God exists.

1.2.4. Feature Four: Non-Resistant Non-Believer(s)

This brings me to the fourth feature: in premise 4, Schellenberg refers to persons who "are or have been nonresistantly in a state of nonbelief in relation to the proposition that God exists" (Schellenberg, 2015, p. 103). For the sake of simplicity, I refer to such persons as non-resistant non-believers. What does Schellenberg mean by this? As far as I know, he has given no clear definition in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions of this in his published work. Thankfully, through personal correspondence with Schellenberg, I have been able to arrive at such a definition. In my correspondence, I suggested a possible definition of non-resistant non-believer, asking whether it was a faithful interpretation of his work⁷. He broadly accepted my proposal, while also suggesting some edits. The following definition is my original proposal with his suggested edits incorporated.

⁷ I based my original suggestion on a passage in Schellenberg, 2015, p. 55-56.

Non-resistant non-believer: A person S is a non-resistant non-believer iff (i) S does not believe in God, and (ii) S's non-belief in God is not due to a self-deceptive action in support of a desire on S's part to not be in a relationship with God or to be in a condition incompatible with relationship with God. (N.N., 2024 and Schellenberg, 2024⁸)

As far as I am aware, this is the first time a precise definition of non-resistant non-believer has appeared in print. I would like to stress again that the above definitions are approved by Schellenberg.

In the 2015 book, Schellenberg delineates different categories of non-resistant non-believers which are worth briefly looking at.

1.2.4.1.Pre-doubt

Pre-doubt refers to the era prior to the rise of classical monotheism. During this time, Schellenberg argues, "God didn't explicitly figure at all, let alone as the main character" (Schellenberg, 2015, p. 77). Many hunter-gatherer societies were polytheistic. Although some of these societies had a 'high god', Schellenberg draws from Robert Wright to argue that this god was not more important than the other deities and was not elevated in a moral sense, and therefore was not the same as the God worshipped by today's theists (ibid., pp. 78-79).

Schellenberg argues that these people were undoubtedly non-resistant nonbelievers. He also contends that it is not even possible for them to be resistant "since resistance of God presupposes *thinking about* God, and their whole picture of the world is shaped in such a way that thinking about God just won't happen" (ibid., p. 77). One could read Schellenberg as saying the following: to be resistant towards belief in God, one must self-deceptively block

⁸ I redact my name to preserve anonymity.

out evidence for God out of an implicit desire of some sort to not be in a relationship with God. But members of pre-monotheistic societies weren't even thinking about God and in fact lacked the very idea of God. Thus, it is not possible to ascribe to them a hidden, implicit desire to resist God.

1.2.4.2.Doubt

This category refers to persons (i) who doubt the proposition 'God exists' and (ii) whose doubt is not due to a self-deceptive action on their part that is due to an implicit desire to either not be in relationship with God or be in a condition incompatible with such a relationship.

Schellenberg gives an example of people belonging to this category: anguished doubters. An anguished doubter is someone who belongs to a religious tradition but experiences a crisis of faith which he/she initially pushes back against. And yet, eventually, belief involuntarily leaves. Moreover, in many cases, it is not a lack of information but rather “an *infusion of new information and reflection thereupon* that has caused it [the loss of faith], not resistance to God” (ibid., p. 80). Such people could not help losing their faith: “[t]he best they could do was to research the God-question carefully and open their hearts, hoping that the path of evidence would in time turn the other way and religious equilibrium would be regained. But it didn't happen” (ibid., p. 81). An example he offers is people who learn in university about the historicity of the Gospels and how the Bible was formed and who consequently lose their Christian faith because of it.

It is clear why Schellenberg sees the anguished doubter as a strong source of evidence for the existence of nonresistant nonbelievers. The anguished doubter does not wish to avoid relationship with God – on the contrary, she ardently desires such a relationship! And despite her desire, she cannot bring herself to believe.

1.2.4.3. Post-doubt

Schellenberg does not use the phrase ‘post-doubt’⁹, but it seems to me that he can be interpreted as laying out a third category: this refers to people who are raised in post-religious secular societies and see no need to believe in God. He appeals to the naturalness of non-belief in such cultures. In such societies, as opposed to religious societies in medieval Europe, even if one personally chooses to be religious, “an utterly nonreligious way of life is *imaginable*. Nonbelief is not *entirely* unnatural” (ibid., p. 85). He writes that it could be said that “many in the modern world live *after* doubt, meaning not that they have doubted and moved on but [...] that their location in time is such that they can flourish without ever considering the question of God at all” (ibid.).

I read Schellenberg as making the following argument. Many people in secular societies (1) are aware of the God-concept and (2) are raised in a culture in which nonbelief is ubiquitous. They do not become nonbelievers due to an implicit desire on their part to avoid God: rather, nonbelief is the default. In other words, their nonbelief does not seem to be due to a choice or an action on their part, but rather due to the cultural context in which they happen to be born. People in general in these societies live their lives not believing in God and yet are still able to make sense of the world and not have a deep existential crisis over it. These people don’t seem to be resisting God; rather, they seem to be neutral towards him.

1.3. Clarifying my Critique

In the chapters that follow, I will be challenging two of these four features.

1. As noted in the introduction, I will be challenging Schellenberg’s understanding of resistance that is implicit in the definitions laid out in section 1.2.4. In this thesis, I

⁹ He does, however, speak of “after doubt”, as I quote later in the paragraph.

will argue that there is a broader and deeper kind of resistance that is relevant to the discussion that Schellenberg has not considered. I will also argue that once this broader and deeper kind of resistance is acknowledged, it is hard to argue that anyone is truly non-resistant to God.

2. Without rejecting Schellenberg's claim that love implies a desire for personal relationship or the idea that God always loves all finite persons, I will argue that there are good reasons for God to not act on this desire by actualizing a personal relationship with sinful humans and God may act on these reasons. Thus, I resist the inference from constant divine love to constant divine openness-to-relationship, even if love is understood as a desire for such a relationship.

Chapter Two: Problematizing the hiddenness argument: part 1 (human injustice, divine goodness and divine solidarity)

In this chapter, I will seek to problematize the hiddenness argument by drawing attention to a phenomenon that is often neglected in the contemporary discussion of resistance: namely, the phenomenon of widespread human injustice.

I will start this chapter by sketching out four theological assumptions. I do this because these assumptions will help lay the foundations for the arguments in this chapter (and, to some extent, of the arguments in chapter 3) in the sense that the subsequent arguments will utilize these assumptions. In fact, these assumptions are crucial for the arguments that follow. After laying them out, I shall formulate two sets of arguments – the first is a more modest one that draws attention to the idea that God is entitled to be displeased with human beings for unjust actions committed by them; the second makes a stronger case, that God can be seen as being a victim of human injustice. The second argument can be read as building upon the conclusions of the first argument.

2.1. Assumption One: God as Perfectly Good

Traditional monotheisms typically depict God as morally upright and perfect. This is certainly the view of the Hebrew Bible (Deuteronomy 32:4, Psalm 34:8, 145:17). This is also an idea affirmed by historic Christian theology. As noted earlier, Schellenberg accepts this idea. He draws on Anselm's conception of God as "something than which nothing greater can be thought" (Anselm, 1996, p. 99). Schellenberg writes: "in thinking about God we're trying to conceive an *ultimate* person" and "God [*ex hypothesi*] is the necessarily existing, perfectly good, and complete originator and sustainer of all things!" (Schellenberg, 2015, p. 98).

Indeed, the hiddenness argument couldn't get off the ground if it didn't presuppose the idea of God's perfect goodness.

What does it mean that God is perfectly good? This is a rich theological concept with many layers of meaning. I will not get into all of that here. I will assert this: when we say that God is perfectly good, we imply that there is no moral flaw in God. God does not have any defects of character that human persons often suffer from. He is perfect in virtue and has no vice.

A natural way to understand such moral perfection is in terms of action. A morally perfect person would only perform moral actions – and that too, freely – and never perform immoral actions. This is obvious. But moral perfection extends beyond one's own personal actions. It also extends to things such as approval and disapproval. If a person approves of something immoral (e.g., bullying the weak), then that person is immoral insofar as he approves of immoral things. Similarly, if a person approves of something moral (e.g., feeding the poor), that person is moral as far as that approval is concerned. For God to be perfectly good, he must not merely do good and avoid evil, but also approve of every moral action and disapprove of every immoral action. This is not the only requirement, but it is certainly a prerequisite.

It's important to clarify that my claim is not that God is bound by a set of external moral norms that exist independently in a Platonic manner – indeed, I will repudiate such a notion in section 2.3.

2.2. Assumption Two: God as Supremely Good

God is also, I would argue, supremely Good. What do I mean by this? Look at it this way: according to many monotheistic traditions (for example, Christianity), certain human persons will be morally perfected and enjoy eternity in paradise. Such persons, once perfected, will approve of every good act and disapprove of every bad act. They will be, in other words, perfectly good. But does this mean they will be as morally good as God? I think many

monotheists will want to resist this idea, since this seems to entail that, in at least one aspect, a creature is on par with the Creator which could compromise divine uniqueness. So, God is not just perfectly good in the way a glorified saint would be, but rather Supremely Good – Good in an unsurpassably great way.

Where does the difference lie? This may be a bit of a mystery. One possible way of distinguishing perfect from supreme goodness could be in terms of intensity: God's disapproval of each immoral act and approval of each moral act is far more intense than that which any finite human being, however perfect, is capable of. This could be framed in terms of divine emotion, but not necessarily. Once more, given Schellenberg's utilization of perfect being theology, this might be an assumption he would be open to. Another possible way of sketching out the difference between perfect goodness and supreme goodness would be in terms of necessity and contingency. God is necessarily Good. Creatures, by contrast, are good contingently, often so by God's grace. They are, as Christian Platonists say, good by participation. Augustine famously wrote: "There would [...] be no changeable goods, unless there were an unchangeable good" (Saint Augustine, 1963, p. 249) and writes that God is "good not by another good, but is the good of every good" (ibid., p. 248). This can be aptly called Supreme Goodness.

2.3. Assumption Three: God as the Source, Originator or Ground of All Good

The Hebrew Bible doesn't just say that God is good; it also depicts Him as the legislator of commands which are binding upon humans (Psalm 19). The same could be true of other monotheistic Scriptures. But what is the exact relation between these two? Plato's famous so-called Euthyphro dilemma has often been posed to monotheistic philosophers. In Plato's dialogue *Euthyphro*, Socrates asks Euthyphro whether the gods love and approve of certain acts because those acts are pious/moral, or whether the love of the gods for certain acts is

what makes those acts pious/moral. Although the original question was aimed at a polytheist, critics have redeployed it against monotheists: does God command certain actions because they are good and forbid other actions because they are evil, or is it the divine command/prohibition itself which renders acts good and evil? The theist is said to be in a bit of dilemma here. As Peter Koritansky notes, “[i]f [...] rape and genocide are evil merely because God forbids them, and if forgiveness and justice are good merely because God commands them, it would follow that God’s commands and prohibitions are *arbitrary* [...] On the other hand, if God commands us to be forgiving and just because these habits of character are *already* good, then goodness appears not to derived from God and one must tacitly admit an alternative, more authoritative, standard of morality in accordance with which God’s commands are issued” (Koritansky, 2021, p. 1013). Both alternatives are unpalatable for many traditional monotheists – the former alternative seems to envision possible worlds in which God does command rape and, in which, rape is therefore moral; the latter seems to reduce God to the role of an executor of an already existing moral law to which he is subject.

Certain Christian philosophers have tried to resolve this dilemma by proposing an ontological link between God and the Good. Such a link was maintained by Augustine, Anselm, and Aquinas, even though these figures were not necessarily aware of the Euthyphro dilemma and weren’t trying to refute it. This idea – which has historical roots in Christian Platonism - has been revitalized in modern times, most famously by William Alston¹⁰. Alston writes: “we can think of God himself, the individual being, as the supreme standard of goodness [...] Lovingness is good [...] not because of the Platonic existence of a general principle [...] but because God, the supreme standard of goodness, is loving. Goodness

¹⁰ It should be noted, however, that these modern figures don’t necessarily interpret the idea in the same way as their predecessors did.

supervenes on every feature of God, not because some general principles are true, but just because they are features of God” (Alston, 2002, pp. 291-292). Linda Zagzebski, philosophizing in a similar vein, has proposed a moral theory, according to which “all moral properties of persons, acts, and outcomes of acts are defined by reference to the motives of God” (Zagzebski, 2016, p. 109). The Euthyphro dilemma seems to conceive of morality as either depending on God’s (arbitrary and contingent) commands or being entirely independent of God. By contrast, the line of thinking introduced in this paragraph conceives of morality as linked to who God eternally and necessarily is. Moral commandments are, in other words, a reflection of the nature of God.

The upshot is that God, is in some sense, the ground of the moral law to which humans are subject. Some philosophers have even offered moral arguments for the existence of God, arguing that God is the best explanation for objective moral values or intrinsic human dignity and so on (for a discussion of this argument, see Linville, 2012).

This is distinct from supreme goodness, because it seems possible for God to be supremely good without being the ground of the moral law. For example, it could be that God abhors evil and loves good with maximal intensity and necessarily conforms to the moral law, without being its source. However, this third assumption rules out this possibility and insists that God must be the ground of the moral law as well. Hence, being the ground of goodness is a stronger concept than supreme goodness.

In this way, this third assumption helps us to understand a way in which God might be understood to be perfectly good without making him subject to external moral norms. God is the source of moral norms which are binding upon humans, but these moral norms reflect his nature and personality. If God were to incarnate as a human, he would – as a human – flawlessly and freely obey every one of the commandments legislated by himself.

2.4. Assumption Four: God as Perfectly Loving

Divine love is an idea that Schellenberg makes heavy use of in his argument. Despite love and goodness being conceptually distinct, God's love can be seen as following from – or being entailed by – his goodness. A perfectly good being would be perfectly loving. I accept Schellenberg's claims that (i) God is loving, (ii) his love is perfect and (iii) his love extends to all finite persons and is constant. In what follows, I build upon this discussion by introducing ideas that are not often considered in the literature.

I suggest that divine love is much more than the seeking of personal relationship as an end-in-itself (although I don't deny that love involves this). Love also entails a kind of identification with the beloved. This seems to follow from the nature of love itself. There are many theories and accounts about love in the philosophical literature. Two prominent accounts are the union account and the robust concern account (see Helm, 2021). The former, as the name suggests, argues that love results in a union of sorts between the lover and the beloved. Roger Scruton, writing in this vein, argues that love exists “just so soon as reciprocity becomes community: that is, just so soon as all distinction between my interests and your interests is overcome” (Scruton, 2006, p. 230). Nozick, writing in a similar vein, albeit taking a slightly more moderate view, argues that love involves the desire to form a ‘we’. A ‘we’ is “a new entity in the world [...] created by a new web of relationships [...] which makes them [the lovers] no longer separate” (Nozick, 1989, p. 70). Robust concern theorists often criticize these accounts on the grounds that they are too egocentric – the argument is made that, under the union theory of love, care for the beloved is reduced to care for oneself, with the apparent implication that love is, therefore, selfish. Alan Soble, for example, argues that the notion of love as entailing a shared identity is inappropriate because love essentially requires concern for *another* (Soble, 1997).

However, what seems indisputable is that love necessarily involves caring. Caring does not seem enough for love – it seems possible to care for someone without loving them. But the converse is not true - it does not seem possible to love someone and not care for them (Jaworska, Wonderly, 2017). This seems to imply that an identification of sorts takes place. When I care for someone, I wish for them to prosper. And this means that I adopt their best interests. It really matters to me that they prosper. If I *really* love someone, then if they are hurt, the fact that they are hurt will cause me pain. Conversely, if they prosper, this fact will bring me joy. This does not necessarily mean that we must take a union theory of love. Bennett Helm, for example, critiques the union theory of love but still accepts that such identification with the other is necessary for love. He writes:

“in loving someone I must “take his identity to heart” so that I am concerned with it not merely in the sense that I might be concerned with things or projects or strangers; rather, the intimacy, the deeply personal nature of this concern ought to be understood in a way that is somehow analogous to my concern for my own identity – or, for that matter, to his concern for his own identity. This is to “identify” with him in a distinctively intimate, deeply personal way, and it is such *intimate identification* that seems to distinguish love proper from other, less intimate forms of concern such as compassion.” (Helm, 2009, p. 41).

Thus, it seems that if God loves a person X , God must ‘intimately identify’ (to use Helm’s language) with X ¹¹. This has some interesting implications: if X prospers, this brings

¹¹ I am not necessarily endorsing Helm’s theory of love. All I am saying is that an identification of sorts is necessary for love, which is a claim which many theories of love are amenable to. I imagine Schellenberg would be amenable to this as well.

God joy and if *X* suffers, it brings God grief. The Bible often depicts God as rejoicing or grieving in this manner (for e.g., Psalm 78:40, Zephaniah 3:17)¹².

Closely linked to love is the notion of solidarity. Solidarity is understood by some to be a “feature of relationships between persons” (Miller, 2017, p. 61). It is a social phenomenon that brings people together, sometimes in terms of a common cause. A distinction is sometimes made between solidarity *among* a group of people from solidarity *with* a group of people (O’Neill, 1996, p. 201). An example of the former would be Indians banding together in the struggle for independence; an example of the latter would be a member of out-group (e.g., a British person) expressing solidarity for group of people he/she does not belong to (e.g., the Indian people). According to some readings, solidarity with does not require symmetry: “I might act in solidarity with you as an earthquake victim when I wire money to an NGO that is operative in your city. Here I act in solidarity with you without your acting in solidarity with me (or even being disposed to act in solidarity with me were the tables to be turned)” (Sangiovanni, Viehoff, 2023).

It seems to be that love entails solidarity, even if love is understood in terms of desire for intimacy as Schellenberg seems to think¹³. How could one truly love someone and not be in solidarity with them? As argued earlier, love involves caring. In fact, solidarity seems to be a weaker notion than love since love – on Schellenbergian terms – is desire for personal relationship and it seems possible to show solidarity without desiring personal relationship with the person with whom solidarity is shown. Thus, I argue *a fortiori* that if God loves *X*, he is in solidarity with *X*.

¹² Advocates of divine impassibility will wish to interpret this in a manner consistent with the doctrine of impassibility.

¹³ Schellenberg thinks divine love entails divine openness to personal relationship (see Schellenberg 2015, pp. 38-43) and that love means to desire a personal relationship with the beloved for its own sake. This is what I mean when I say that, according to Schellenberg, divine love means desire for intimacy.

The notion of solidarity is thus similar to the notion of love with an important distinctive: solidarity can be interpreted as emphasizing concern for the *plight* of a person. For example, suppose that James is an American of German descent living just prior to the American Civil War. Suppose that James is a devout Baptist abolitionist and expresses solidarity towards the plight of enslaved Blacks in the American South. If James is truly in solidarity with the Blacks, he is angered by their present condition and longs for them to see justice. Despite not suffering directly from slavery, his intense concern for the enslaved Blacks means that their plight deeply affects him and causes him distress, at least at an emotional level. Solidarity could also take on stronger forms than this. Let us modify the example a little bit: suppose that Fred is a black American – a free man – living in the northern United States on the eve of the Civil War. If Fred is in strong solidarity with the plight of enslaved Blacks, he may even regard the wrongs perpetrated against them as wrongs against him, even though he is not the direct object of the injustice. This kind of thinking suggests that it is possible to (indirectly) harm a person *B* by (directly) harming a person *A* if *A* and *B* stand in a certain kind of relation to each other.

How might such a relation be sketched out philosophically? Criminal law distinguishes between two kinds of wrongs: public wrongs and private wrongs. Ambrose Lee writes that a wrong “properly concerns the public, in virtue of it violating the shared values that normatively define the political community in which fellow citizens are participants”, whereas private wrongs are those which “violate some values, but not these shared values” (Lee, 2015, p. 158). Gerry Johnstone, citing Lamond, notes that, in the literature, two rationales have been proposed for considering some wrongs as public rather than private. The first argues that certain wrongs “cause harm to a much wider group of people than the immediate victims”. The second “suggests that some wrongs are, at the same time, a wrong to an individual victim and a wrong to a wider group of people who identify and associate

themselves with the individual victim” (see Johnstone, 2020, p. 79). An example of the latter would be racially motivated attacks: a racist attack on a single Black person in the United States is taken by many Blacks to be an attack on the entire Black community as well. This is because of the solidarity that exists among them. (I will introduce a third possible reason in section 2.7.)

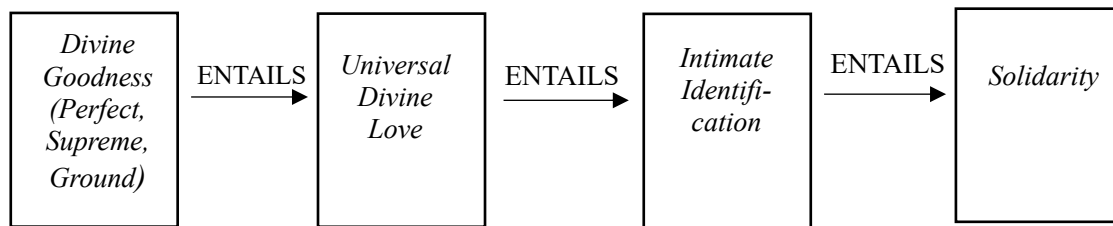
Based on this, I argue that if God is in solidarity with *X*, God must treat all injustice/attack against *X* as an attack against himself. This follows from the nature of solidarity. God may not be the direct or the immediate object of the attack, and, if God is conceived of as being transcendent and impassible, it is impossible to harm or injure God in the way we might a human being. Nonetheless, if there is a solidarity between God and *X*, God may treat an attack on *X* as if it were an attack on himself. The Bible seems to affirm such a notion: for example, Jesus accuses Saul of Tarsus of persecuting him (Acts 9:3-9) even though Saul was not directly attacking Jesus himself but rather his disciples. This suggests that the solidarity between Jesus and the disciples is so strong that an attack on them is an attack on him. Another famous example is from the life of King David: David, after killing Uriah and committing sexual immorality with Bathsheba, says in his prayer that it is against God alone that he has sinned (Psalm 51:4). Similar statements are made about reward: Jesus says that whoever feeds, clothes, visits, heals or welcomes one of his disciples welcomes him (Matthew 25:31-46). This is a theme strongly emphasized by liberation theologians. James Cone, provocatively asserting that ‘Jesus is black’, writes:

“The resurrection means that God’s identity with the poor in Jesus is not limited to the particularity of his Jewishness but is applicable to all who fight on behalf of the liberation of humanity in this world. And the Risen Lord’s identification with the suffering poor today is just as real as was his presence with the outcasts in first-

century Palestine. His presence with the poor today is not docetic; but like yesterday, today also he takes the pain of the poor upon himself and bears it for them.” (Cone, 2008, p. 148).

The core idea of God being in absolute solidarity with the oppressed is an idea which I imagine Schellenberg will be sympathetic to, given his treatment of the divine nature. I include the above quote to demonstrate that there is also a Christological bent to this which ought of be of interest to Christians.

In these four subsections (2.1-2.4), I have introduced important concepts. How do they relate to each other? In my view, they are closely related to each other by a chain of entailment which can be pictured as follows:



This diagram helps the reader to see why I began with divine goodness rather than divine love. In my view, divine goodness is more fundamental than love – at least at the conceptual level – and the latter is entailed by the former¹⁴.

2.5. The Argument

If what I have said above is correct, this has important implications for the hiddenness argument. In what follows, I lay out counterarguments to Schellenberg.

¹⁴ This is not incompatible with the classical theist emphasis on divine simplicity, for even if the *concept* of divine goodness is more fundamental than the concept of divine love, it could be that both concepts have the same referent.

2.5.1. Argument A – Divine Goodness

Suppose that a person Oswald commits an injustice against his neighbour Veronica. Oswald injures Veronica in some way, knowing fully well what he is doing and committing the action of his own free will. He is aware that what he is doing is immoral, but he prefers the pleasures and benefits that come from injuring her. How might God react to this? The assumptions sketched in the previous sections help us to answer this. In Argument A, I focus on the first three assumptions – perfect goodness, supreme goodness and the ground of all good.

It goes without saying that a perfectly good God would strongly disapprove of the injustice – after all, as section 2.1 noted, this is entailed by the notion of perfect goodness. But perfect goodness is a thicker notion than mere approval or disapproval: it also implies action. One might imagine that a perfectly good God would move to act against the injustice. One way would be to impose some kind of punishment on the evildoer.

But God is not merely perfectly good, but also supremely Good. In other words, such a being would love good and abhor evil far more intensely than finite persons. Indeed, it may turn out that certain immoral acts which human beings are accustomed to and which they, therefore, trivialize are taken very seriously by God. We can imagine a society in which the practice of adult men marrying pre-pubescent girls and having intercourse with them is commonplace¹⁵. In that culture, such that such a union is deemed acceptable and many persons enter such relationships almost unreflectively. It has become second nature to them. From a modern perspective, we would say that the moral intuitions of persons who live in this society are bound to be flawed. Even if it dawns on some persons in that culture that the practice is wrong and should be abolished, it may be that their disapproval of the action is not

¹⁵ Such societies have existed, and still exist.

as strong as it ought to be. After all, they have grown up in that culture and only now begun to realize that something might be wrong. A transcendent God, on the other hand, is not going to be subject to cultural conditioning of this sort: being supremely Good, he would abhor such evil far more strongly than any creature.

I finally come to the notion of God as the ground of all good. Note that God is understood here as the legislator of all the commands that are binding upon humans. Hence, if there is an obligation morally binding on humans which says: ‘You shall not commit injustice’, the ground of that obligation is God. If this is true, then God is entitled to treat all violation of this command not simply as an evil act worthy of disapproval but also a violation of human obligations towards him. One might cast this in an Anselmian way: humans – by virtue of being God’s creatures – are obliged to give him honour by obeying his commands; when we disobey him, we deny him the honour that he is due. This is a point which *de re* theorists would be sympathetic to. However, my argument has a unique emphasis: I do not appeal here to mental states humans might have about God as *de re* theorists do. Instead, I emphasize that when humans culpably violate their moral obligations towards other humans and commit injustice, they deny God the obedience that belongs to him. The emphasis here is on the human action, not the mental states.

The discussion allows me to formulate the following theses:

1. God is entitled to be angered at human beings who have engaged in injustice.
2. God is entitled to punish human beings who have engaged in injustice.

These theses have important implications for the hiddenness argument, as we shall see in section 2.6.

At this point, an objector might ask: what if Oswald is the kind of person who, had he known God exists and is supremely good, would have *not* engaged in injustice against Veronica? I respond that even if this is true, this fact does not seem to make Oswald look particularly good. It makes him look like a high school bully who would not have punched the middle schooler if he knew the teacher was watching him through the camera. In fact, if anything, it makes him look worse – for now, not only is he a bully but also a coward. Someone who would have done the same wrong action even if he knew there was a God, however depraved such a person might be, is perhaps better than someone like Oswald – for at least such a person has some form of courage. Thus, I hold that God is still entitled to be angered at and to punish Oswald in some way, even if the proposition ‘If Oswald knew that God exists, he would not have been unjust towards Veronica’ is true.

2.5.2. Argument B – Divine Love and Solidarity

In the previous argument, I built on the first three assumptions outlined in sections 2.1-3 – focusing on divine goodness. I come now to the fourth assumption: divine love as laid out in section 2.4. Based on the discussion there, I argue for the following theses:

1. God is personally affected by human injustice.
2. God is a victim of human injustice.

Let’s start with the first. How is a transcendent God affected by human injustice? Note that I argued in section 2.4 that love entails a kind of identification. I even suggested that if God loves *X*, if *X* prospers, it will bring God joy whereas if *X* suffers it will bring God grief. If this is true and if God loves Veronica, then any injustice against Veronica will personally affect God in some way.

This is a controversial idea. There are many who affirm the doctrines of divine simplicity and impassibility and who would balk at the idea that God is personally affected by things like human wrongdoing. It seems to compromise the transcendence of God and runs the risk of making him seem weak and emotionally sensitive. To this, I make three replies. *Firstly*, as noted earlier, many advocates of divine simplicity and impassibility belong to religious traditions that have Scriptural texts attributing such language to God. I already noted some examples of such language in section 2.4. *Secondly*, as also briefly noted in section 2.4, even if there are no literal emotions in God, there may be something analogous. *Thirdly*, I refer the reader to Eleonore Stump's chapter on divine simplicity in her *Aquinas* book, particular the section on divine impassibility and responsiveness (see Stump, 2003, pp. 92-130, esp. pp. 115-122). This will help provide more classically minded theists to reconcile the traditional doctrine of divine simplicity with the kind of responsiveness I advocate for here.

This brings me to my second thesis – given that God is perfectly loving, he would regard the attack on Veronica as an attack on Him for the reasons I sketched out in section 2.1.4. Because of the love God has for Veronica, God regards Veronica's interests as His own. He is in supreme solidarity with Veronica. In some ways, this thesis is both stronger and more modest than the first one. It is stronger in that to portray God as a victim of human injustice is a bigger claim to make than to say that God is personally affected by it. But it is also more modest in that it seems to raise fewer quandaries about divine emotion and impassibility than the previous thesis, for victimhood can be understood here in purely legal terms – for example, it could simply mean that God's rights have been denied.

Let's try to sketch the thesis out philosophically. In what follows, let 'intense love' refer to a strong sense of identification with another. A parent's love for his/her child would be an example of intense love. One might frame the principle as follows.

Principle of Extended Injury: If *A* intensely loves *B*, then if *S* injures *B*, *S* also injures *A*.

I use 'injury' here in a broad sense to refer to any kind of offence, including those that can cause harm.

If this above principle is true, this can carry over to divine-human relationships. The principle allows us to construct the following argument.

1. If God exists, he is in perfect solidarity with all victims of injustice.
2. If God is in perfectly solidarity with all victims of injustice, then a person *S* who culpably commits an injustice against another person *S2* has thereby committed an offence against God.
3. Therefore, (from 1&2), if God exists, a person *S* who culpably commits an injustice against another person *S2* has thereby committed an offence against God.

2.6. Implications

These reflections help us see that, even if certain humans are non-resistant in Schellenberg's sense – that is, they have not self-deceived themselves into believing there is no God – they might still be resistant in a broader sense which Schellenberg has not, in my view, adequately considered. Look at it this way. God, being supremely good, desires free agents to only do good and not do evil – in other words, to be perfectly good insofar as it is possible for them. As the ground of all good – that is, the legislator of moral laws – he has the right to command

and impose obligations upon his free creatures. Putting these two assumptions together yields the following result: God justly commands his free creatures to only do good and not do evil.

However, humans regularly default on this command. Sometimes, this is due to excusable weakness. But sometimes – perhaps very often – it is genuinely our fault. This rightly invites divine disapproval and divine disfavour. We are going against the will of God. I suggest that this kind of ‘going against’ can be counted as kind of resistance towards God. To use an analogy: God is like a human judge whose judgment is being flouted. The Bible uses a word sometimes translated in English as ‘resistance’ to describe this kind of flagrant disobedience (for example, Acts 7:51). The humans may not have mental states about God, but the fact is that they are going against God’s will.

An objector might argue: this is not the kind of resistance Schellenberg is talking about. With that, I agree. This sort of resistance does not meet the criteria laid out in section 1.2.4. However, I argue it is still an eminently relevant kind of resistance, for the following reasons.

Firstly, it problematizes several of Schellenberg’s analogies. In a 2020 publication, Schellenberg offers three stories, one of which I will cite here because it is the most important.

You are [...] a small child, and an amnesiac, but this time you are in the middle of a vast rainforest, dripping with dangers of various kinds. You have been stuck here for days, trying to figure out who you are and where you came from. You do not remember having a mother who accompanied you into this jungle, but in your moments of deepest pain and misery you call for her anyway:

“MOOOOOMMMMM!” Over and over again [...] but with no response. What should you think in this situation? In your dying moments, what should cross your mind?

Would the thought that you have a mother who cares about you and hears your cry and could come to you but chooses not to even make it onto the list? (Schellenberg, Moser, 2020, p. 166)

Schellenberg goes on to argue that a truly loving mother would (1) quickly respond to her child's serious requests, (2) spare it needless trauma and foster its wellbeing, (3) avoid giving misleading impressions about their relationship or her nature, (4) would seek personal interaction with the child whenever possible and (5) miss the child if separated from it (ibid., p. 167). The mother in this story is analogous to God; hence, the argument is that God too – being the perfect parent *par excellence* – would do these things. Moreover, since God is all-powerful, he could do such a thing. However, the absence of a response from God in circumstances like these is evidence that he does not exist.

The part of the analogy I want to draw attention to is the image used to describe humans: that of a child. A child is innocent, taken to be blameless of wrongdoing. Using a symbol like a child, with all its connotations of moral status, is precisely what makes the analogy so compelling. But suppose we replace the image with another one: that of an adult criminal, someone who has culpably carried out injustice against other persons. In that case, the analogy does not work. While it may well be true that a beneficent, powerful mother would rescue an innocent child from danger, it is less clear if she would do so if the person in question is an adult criminal or a moral wrongdoer.

Schellenberg anticipates the sin objection and writes the following in response:

“Turning now to the general reference to sin: this seems completely unsubstantiated – many who seek God seem in fact to be quite blameless in the relevant respects. It is important to notice here that beyond looking thoroughly and carefully for reason to believe in the existence of God and removing all observed impediments to success in

the search, there is nothing the seeker can do to bring about belief. Belief as such is involuntary; it is something that happens to you when evidence adds up to a certain point, not something you can do directly.” (ibid., p. 170).

Schellenberg’s point is well taken. Nonetheless, his riposte to what he terms ‘the sin objection’ does not target the kind of sin objection I am raising in this chapter. My claim is not that every non-believer has in fact self-deceived themselves into disbelieving in God out of a deep-rooted desire to avoid God. This might be termed epistemic sin. Rather, I am drawing attention to the possibility that epistemically non-resistant non-believers might be morally blameworthy and resistant to God’s will in some other aspect of their life, viz. their dealings with their fellow humans. Contra Schellenberg, I insist that such moral blameworthiness *is* relevant when it comes to talking about divine hiddenness, for the reasons outlined in this chapter – (1) injustice is deeply offensive to God, (2) sinners have violated God’s justly imposed commands, (3) God is personally affected by injustice in a negative manner, and (4) by virtue of the Principle of Extended Injury, perpetrators of wrong towards other humans have carried out an offence against God himself. Hence, the analogy of children is mistaken. It may be that, in the eyes of a supremely good God, a great deal of persons are less like little children and more like criminals.

Secondly, the theses laid out in section 2.5.1 are quite relevant here. Suppose that God is justly displeased with a particular human person and desires to punish him/her in a certain way. Why can’t divine hiddenness itself be a form of punishment? Returning to the Oswald-Veronica case. Suppose Oswald is non-resistant in Schellenberg’s sense of the word – he has not deceived himself into non-belief out of a desire to avoid relationship with God. One might even suggest that he has some desire for relationship with God. However, it remains the case that he is guilty of injustice against Veronica. Now let’s assume that Oswald has

libertarian free will, and that God foresees that Oswald is the kind of person who will freely engage in this sort of injustice if he thinks he can get away with it. If so, I argue that God is fully entitled to not reveal himself to Oswald and to deprive him of the possibility of relationship at least for a time.

It should be noted that my claim is not that God might withdraw his love from such hardened sinners. Rather, I argue that divine love for sinners is compatible with God taking a step back. This is so even if love is defined in a Schellenbergian sense of God desiring intimacy and personal relationship with sinners. The reason is that a situation may emerge in which, although God desires to have a personal relationship with someone, there might be good reason for him to not act on this desire and actualize such a relationship. To see how this is, consider the following story. Suppose that I have a son, whom I dearly love and wish to lavish gifts on. However, he turns out to be a person of bad moral character and goes on to sexually abuse multiple women. In this case, it seems intuitively true to say that I am entitled to cut off relations with my son, at least for a while. I might refuse to speak to him and avoid him.

Why might I do such a thing? Have I stopped loving him and wanting to be close to him? Not necessarily. There are at least two reasons I might take such an action. Firstly, there is an *instrumental reason*: I might see this punishment as being corrective in nature rather than purely retributive. Perhaps my deepest desire is that my son learn from his mistakes and that this act of boycott on my part be a learning opportunity for him and help to facilitate his repentance. In other words, a temporary period of distance might be the means necessary to facilitate a deeper and greater union.

There could also be a second reason that is independent from the first – a *non-instrumental reason*. Perhaps a boycott is intrinsically desirable at this stage as an end-in-

itself. For example, respect for the victims and recognition of the injustice might demand that I, at least temporarily, withdraw. By doing so, I demonstrate my displeasure at the actions of my son. Although I love my son and desire intimacy with him, I also have moral obligations to the wider community. Furthermore, my conscience may convict me that it is necessary for me to take a stand for the truth and justice.

Let's sketch these reasons out a bit more philosophically. Christopher Bennett and Kimberley Brownlee note that there are forward-looking and backward-looking justifications of punishment, as well as hybrid theories (Bennett, Brownlee, 2020). Forward-looking theories justify punishment "by claiming that some future good is best realised (or made more likely) by punishment" whereas backward-looking accounts "claim that there is something about the criminal or wrongful action itself [...] that requires punishment as an appropriate response, regardless of whether punishment is the best available means to realise some future good" (ibid., pp. 255-256). To put it in these terms, God might have both forward-looking and backward-looking reasons to punish someone at least temporarily by means of withdrawal. On the one hand, God might foresee that such punishment might aid in a person's moral growth and lead to repentance. On the other hand, there might be something about the person's actions itself that render punishment appropriate, irrespective of whether punishment leads to moral growth.

This helps me to defend the second claim articulated in section 1.3. The above discussion helps us to see that – even if God desires to have a personal relationship with a person *X* – there could be good reasons for God to not act on this desire, both instrumental and non-instrumental.

Thirdly, although – as noted earlier – my case does not require a commitment to divine passibility, nonetheless if one believes in divine passibility, it problematizes

Schellenberg's case even further – for then it follows that God is literally harmed by human injustice. I am not aware of Schellenberg's position on divine passibility, but if he is committed to it, then it strengthens my case as an *ad hominem* argument against him.

2.7. Answering an Important Objection: Blameless Ignorance?

At this point, a critic might raise an objection. Responsibility for moral wrongdoing requires some sort of awareness. In the example given, Oswald knows that his action is wrong and still chooses to engage in it anyway. Now suppose that Oswald is a non-believer in God and his non-belief is not due to any act of self-deception on his part. An objector might distinguish between 1) moral responsibility for injuring Veronica, and 2) moral responsibility for injuring God. If what I have said in the prior sections is correct, Oswald has certainly injured God by injuring Veronica. But he is clearly not aware of this and does not intend this. He is only aware of and intends to injure Veronica. Given this fact, could it not be that Oswald is only morally responsible for injuring Veronica and not for injuring God?

My intuition suggests the answer to these questions is no, but a little bit of philosophical work is needed to justify this answer. I offer the following examples to defend my intuition:

- 1) Playing off an example briefly discussed in section 2.4: a racist attack on a single Black American is taken by many Blacks to be an assault on the whole community. This is so even if the attacker had no intention of attacking the community. Individual Blacks rightly feel profoundly offended and injured at the attack and seek to punish the attacker, even if they are not the immediate victims. This is because of the solidarity that exists among them.
- 2) A similar example can be seen in the case of school shootings in the U.S.A. The parents of the immediate victims typically see themselves also as victims: the loss of

their child's life is a loss to them. They are angry at the victim and seek to inflict some harm on him, and this reaction by them is seen by most as justified. This remains the case even when the shooter had no intention to harm the parents. He may not even have known if the children he shot had living parents who could be hurt by his actions.

- 3) Suppose that a person James is driving a car. With murderous intent, he runs over Thomas and succeeds in killing him. However, unknown to him, he also ends up killing Rachel. Many people would say he is to blame for killing Rachel, even though he lacked full awareness in this case.

These examples suggest that, for a person to be culpable for harming someone, it is not necessary to be aware of the full extent of the damage one is doing. Why so? Perhaps we can explicate the intuition in this way: when one chooses to indulge in act of injustice against another person, one takes on oneself all the responsibility for the damage one is doing. Even if some of the damage is unforeseen and unintended, it still stands that the act one carried out was intrinsically destructive: one could have known even prior to committing the act that such an action *could* have caused such (unintended) damage and (unplanned) consequences. Carrying out an immoral act is an intrinsically risky task, and – in doing so – one must be willing to take on the risk.

This bears on a question called the Epistemic Condition for Moral Responsibility – to be morally responsible for a particular act, is it necessary to have some kind of knowledge or awareness concerning the act, and if so, what kind of knowledge? According to Daniel Miller, most theorists accept the Blameless Ignorance Principle or BIP, which states: “[i]f an agent is blameless for their ignorance then they are blameless for acting wrongly from that ignorance” (Miller, 2023, p. 274). For example, if Jonathan did not know that pressing a button would

cause an avalanche killing hundreds of people, and if he is blameless for his ignorance, then this ignorance excuses him from blame. As Miller notes, the BIP raises the question: when is someone blameless for their ignorance? There are two major theories formulated in response to this – the Reasonable Expectation or RE thesis and the Quality of Will or QW thesis (ibid., p. 275). It is worth exploring these views in some detail and then applying them to the Oswald and Veronica scenario outlined above.

The RE thesis states that “[a]n agent is blameworthy for something only if it was reasonable to expect the agent to avoid it” and this is so “only if they have the capacities to recognize and respond to moral reasons as well as the opportunity to exercise these capacities to avoid the thing in question” (ibid.). Gideon Rosen gives an example that can help illustrate this thesis (Rosen, 2003, pp. 66-69). Smith is a middle-class father living in 1952 with sexist beliefs and attitudes – he provides for a college education for his sons, but not his daughters. His differential treatment is wrong, but not malicious. It is grounded in principles and beliefs which Smith finds obvious. The reason he finds it obvious is because he was raised to find it obvious and the people he takes seriously find it obvious – “[t]he idea that gender matters in this way thus functions for him as an undefended axiom of moral common sense” (ibid., p. 67). He is aware that there are persons who object to this kind of differential treatment, but their objections reflect a sensibility that strikes him as wrong-headed. Given his situation, Rosen argues that Smith is not to blame for his moral principles, even though these principles are wrong and lead to wrong behaviour. The reason Smith holds to these mistaken moral principles is not due to culpable negligence or recklessness on his part – rather, it might be a sign of ordinariness in that cultural context. Moreover, “it would have taken an extraordinary feat – extraordinary moral insight [...] – for the agent [in this case, Smith] to have done the right thing” (ibid., p. 69). It is, in other words, not reasonable for us to have expected Smith to avoid doing what he did, and therefore – under the RE principle – he is not blameworthy.

Furthermore, many RE theorists argue that, to attribute blame to an agent for an action with negative consequences, the agent must have been able to reasonable foresee the negative consequences (Miller, 2023, p. 278).

The QW thesis states that “[a]n agent is blameworthy for something if and only if it manifests a negative quality of will” (ibid., p. 275). ‘Quality of will’ is a term coined by P.F. Strawson. According to Michael McKenna, will does not refer to “anything like a faculty or any other sort of action-theoretic entity, such as decision, choice, intention, motive or reason for action” (McKenna, 2012, p. 59) – it does not refer to the ‘will’ we speak of when we talk of ‘free will’. Rather, will refers to “the regard or concern one has toward others (or oneself), and toward the relevance of moral considerations, as manifested in one’s conduct” (ibid.). Quality refers to value or worth, not property (ibid.). Thus, if an action manifests a bad attitude towards oneself or another person, that agent is blameworthy for that action.

Regardless of which theory of moral responsibility one is inclined towards, one must – I suggest – avoid arguments that have the result of exculpating large numbers of wrongdoers that we would otherwise take to be responsible for their actions. Certain RE theorists go down this route. For example, Rosen argues that “we are hardly ever culpable for the wrong we do” (Rosen, 2003, p. 62). A Moorean-style argument can be made here: my intuition that a particular wrongdoer is responsible for his/her action is stronger than any intuition that could justify an argument exculpating them from all responsibility. Even defenders of such exculpating theses sometimes acknowledge that it runs counters to our ordinary intuitions.

This is important for our present discussion. If the BIP is true, it has the following result: suppose that my fourth thesis is correct, that God is a victim of human injustice. Nonetheless, if Oswald is blameless for his ignorance that God is victimized by his action, he

is free of blame in this regard. He might be liable for punishment for knowingly harming other humans, but he is not liable for punishment for victimizing God¹⁶. Thus, for the second aspect of my argument B (that God is a victim of human injustice, and that humans are blameworthy for this) to succeed, I will have to argue that Oswald is indeed blameworthy for his ignorance of the damage done to God. This is what I will presently seek to do. I contend that my theses – namely that humans who commit injustice against fellow humans (i) commit injustice against God and (ii) are liable for punishment for this even if they are non-believers in God and their non-belief in God is epistemically inculpable – can be defended under both an RE and a QW paradigm of ignorance. To demonstrate this, in what follows I will formulate ways in which an RE theorist and a QW theorist might accommodate my intuition about culpability.

Let's start with the RE theory. Some RE theorists are capacitarrians about moral responsibility. According to this view, "ignorant wrongdoers often could have and should have been aware of some pertinent fact" (Miller, 2023, p. 280). Thus, even if they did not actually know about the fact, they should have known about it and (since ought implies can) had the capacity to do so. George Sher gives the example of a distracted person named Alessandra who forgets her dog Sheba in a hot car. Sher argues that what is relevant is that Alessandra could have and should have remembered Sheba (Sher, 2009). In a similar line, I could frame the situation as follows. Suppose that Oswald has a conscience which serves as a generally reliable source of moral intuitions. Suppose that the possession of this conscience means that Oswald can, upon reflection, realize that (i) the action he plans to commit against Veronica is gravely wrong, and (ii) his action would be injurious not just to Veronica but also

¹⁶ It should be noted that the BIP only affects my thesis that God is a victim of human injustice and that too in a tangential way – it does not deny that God is a victim, but it does threaten to exculpate Oswald of blame in this regard if Oscar's ignorance is found to be blameless. The other theses – that God is rightly offended by human injustice, that God is entitled to punish human injustice and that God is negatively affected by it – remain intact.

to those who ardently love her. Note that I make no reference to God being hurt, but rather ‘those who love Veronica’ being hurt. If we go by a capacitarian view of moral responsibility, Oswald is culpable for injuring God, because, even if he lacks conscious awareness of all the results of his sin, he could have and should have known that this action would hurt all those close to Veronica. He might be ignorant of the fact that his actions hurt this group of people, but his ignorance is not blameless. (My argument here would apply also to the examples given earlier – such as the school shooter.)

Let’s turn now to the QW theory. Under this theory, ignorance is blameworthy and does not exculpate if it is the result of negative qualities of will. Note that in my Oswald-Veronica story, Oswald is clearly animated by malice. He has a disregard for Veronica’s rights and dignity and prefers to exploit her for his own benefit. To put it in Kantian terms, he treats Veronica as a means-to-an-end rather than an end-in-herself. Suppose that Oswald is ignorant of the fact that such an action injures those who love Veronica. Nonetheless, given that his will has many negative qualities, it is not a stretch to suggest that his ignorance of such facts is due to his malice. If he is willing to exploit another person for his own benefit, it is not a stretch to imagine that, even if he was aware of these moral facts, he would suppress that knowledge.

A further Christological argument can be made at this stage. Christians who affirm the Nicene Creed believe that God became incarnate in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. Christ was truly divine and truly human. Nonetheless, it is striking that people did not treat him differently on this account. Jesus himself points this out in the parable of the tenants (see Matthew 21:33-46). In this parable, there is a landowner who rents his vineyard to some farmers. When he sends his servants to collect fruit as rent, they mistreat and even kill them. This happens twice. He decides to send his son, thinking they will treat him differently

because of his relationship to him. In fact, they don't do such a thing: on the contrary, they kill him and treat him worse than the others. In the narrative of the Gospel of Matthew, the parable comes true: Jesus is killed in a very cruel and barbaric way.

A Christian could draw on this parable and argue that when a human will becomes malignant towards its neighbour, it becomes malignant towards God because if God became a human and was placed in a similar situation, he would be treated no differently. Thus, ill-will towards fellow humans is ill-will towards God. Although one can conceptually distinguish between 'ill-will and injustice towards humans' and 'ill-will and injustice towards God' – in that those phrases pick out different concepts – it could be argued that in reality the two cannot be separated – they are always co-instantiated. If this is so, then ignorance of the existence of God – even if such ignorance is epistemically inculpable – does not excuse one of injustice towards him, because it remains the case that, had God been in that position of weakness and vulnerability, he would have been treated no differently.

This harkens back to a concept I introduce in section 2.4: that of the public wrong. I noted that according to some theorists, certain wrongs are public rather than private, and I laid out two reasons that are cited in the literature for considering some wrongs to be public. I would like to introduce a third reason here that will strengthen my case. Suppose that a robber enters a town and surveys the houses on a street. He is not sure which house to rob – they all look the same to him – so he rolls a dice and picks one randomly. Say that the house he picks is House Number 6. An experienced burglar, he sneaks in late at night and makes off with most of the family's wealth, reducing them to a mere fraction of what they were. Now imagine I am in House Number 7. Thankfully, I have not been affected by the action in a direct way. Nonetheless, I do think I am entitled to be enraged and indignant at the robber, and I am entitled to seek justice against him and even punish him if I can. One of the reasons

I am entitled to do so is because, although the robber didn't injure me in a direct way, it remains a fact that I could easily have been the victim. The fact that I was not robbed is not due to any good will on the part of the robber, but rather due to a piece of sheer luck. Thus, even though his malignancy was not directed at me, it is intrinsically dangerous and could have hurt me badly.

The kind of reasoning I have sketched out is not, I think, particularly unreasonable or even uncommon. In fact, there are real-world examples in which such reasoning is utilized by people, suggesting that it has broad intuitive appeal. For example, there was a horrific case of rape in September 2023 in Ujjain, India. Famously, the father of the accused tearfully sought the death penalty for his own son. One of the reasons he gave is very similar to the reason sketched out above: he stated that although it was not his own daughter who was affected, it could easily have been his own daughter and if it was, he would have felt deep grief and sorrow and would have sought revenge (India Today, 2023)¹⁷.

If this kind of moral reasoning is sound, then God is entitled to be angered at human injustice in a very personal way, for God could foresee that if he became incarnate (assuming such a thing is possible) and if he were placed in that person's life, he would have been treated no differently and would have been the target of the wrongdoer's malicious will. If the Christian story is true, this is not a hypothetical, for God did become incarnate and was treated with the utmost cruelty. The Cross of Jesus, under this reading, becomes far more than a proof of divine love – it also becomes an icon of the most hideous human sin.

¹⁷ This case is illustrative. If one watches the video cited here, it becomes clear from the interview that the father has not stopped loving his son. He is clearly in grief that it is his beloved son who has committed this crime. Nonetheless, his love for his son does not stop him from seeking the death penalty. I don't think this is a confused emotion. Rather, I think it can be read thus: the father by default loves his son and desires closeness with him, wishes him well and so on, but, given the circumstances and the gravity of the crime, has realized it is not fitting or right for him to simply gloss over the injustice. Thus, the case vindicates my earlier comments that divine punishment need not be incompatible with divine love even if it entails at least a temporary withdrawal of the possibility of personal relationship.

So, these are some ways in which an RE or a QW theorist might accommodate my intuition.

At this point, an objection might be made. I have argued that humans who victimize God via injustice towards fellow humans are culpable for this, even if they are ignorant of the damage they are doing to God because such ignorance does not exculpate. How different is this, an objector might ask, from saying that human nonbelief in God is due to self-deceptive resistance? Remember that my main argument in this thesis is that, even if humans are non-resistant in the Schellenbergian sense, they might be resistant in a broader, relevant sense. But my argument in this section seems to imply that I am, in fact, questioning Schellenberg's claim that such persons are non-resistant nonbelievers in his sense of the word.

To this, I respond as follows. I would contend that my arguments in this section are compatible with the wrongdoers being nonresistant in Schellenberg's sense of the word. To see this, consider the following two propositions:

- A. Oswald does not believe in God, and his non-belief is not due to self-deception on his part out of a desire to avoid relationship with God.
- B. Oswald is responsible for injuring those who love Veronica because he ought to have known that, by harming Veronica, he would be harming those who love her.

It does not strike me that these two propositions are contradictory or mutually exclusive. Although Oswald might not be accused of resisting belief in God through self-deception, he can be accused of neglecting to reflect on the fact that when he injured Veronica, he also injures who love Veronica. And this is compatible with him being non-resistant in Schellenberg's sense. It of course happens to be the case – to Oswald's misfortune – that one of those who victimizes includes God. The key to understanding this distinction is to see that 'those who love Veronica' is a referentially opaque category. Oswald does not

know who *specifically* belongs to this group and he cannot be blamed for this – this knowledge may be beyond him and is not necessarily due to self-deceptive Schellenbergian resistance on his part. Nonetheless, he is responsible for injuring them if we go by a Sher-style capacitarian approach to responsibility, because even if he does not know who specifically belongs to the group, he ought to have known that there is a group whose members would be affected by his actions.

Similarly, consider the following two propositions.

- C. Oswald does not believe in God, and his non-belief is not due to self-deception on his part out of a desire to avoid relationship with God.
- D. Oswald is responsible for injuring God, because his ignorance that he is injuring God is due to negative qualities in his will that prevent him from seeing that his ill-will towards Veronica is also ill-will towards all those placed in a similar position (which might be an incarnate God).

Like the previous example, ‘all those placed in a similar position’ is referentially opaque. Oswald might not know who specifically belongs to this group and this knowledge might be beyond him even if he has not deceived himself. Nonetheless, he ought to have known that such a group exists whose members would be entitled to be grieved at his actions, and he failed to attain awareness of this group due to negative features of his will.

These distinctions are certainly subtle, but if correct, they vindicate my intuition that it is possible to be non-resistant to relationship with someone in Schellenberg’s sense (and to even want to be in relationship with someone) and yet indulge in actions that harm them for which one is responsible, even though one did not consciously intend to. This reveals a broader kind of resistance.

2.8. *Pressing the Objection Further: Murder vs Manslaughter*

A persistent objector, however, might press on with the line of reasoning noted in section 2.7 in a slightly different way from. One might point to example 3 laid out at the start of the previous section involving James, Rachel and Thomas. An appeal could be made to the difference between murder and manslaughter. James might be guilty of murdering Thomas, but with Rachel, perhaps he can only be accused of manslaughter. Thus, by analogy, Oswald might be responsible for injuring Veronica, but not so for God.

To this, I make the following reply. Firstly, the murder-manslaughter analogy does not help the objector because people are typically responsible for manslaughter. True, it is not the same crime as murder and may be of a considerably less gravity – but it still carries some weight. At best, the objection shows that Oswald is less culpable for injuring God than he is for injuring Veronica, not that he is absolved of culpability entirely. And nothing in my case requires that the injury to God be of the same degree as the injury to Veronica. All I am trying to show is that it could be argued that God is, in some sense, a victim of human injustice and therefore even humans who are non-resistant in Schellenberg's sense might be resistant to God in a broader sense. And this point still stands.

Secondly, the literature on manslaughter is quite illuminating and relevant, especially when it comes to the question of the *mens rea*. For example, consider the category of constructive manslaughter. According to Graham Virgo, “for constructive manslaughter, if the defendant commits a crime which is dangerous and death results then the defendant can be convicted of manslaughter” (Virgo, 1994, p. 45). If this category is accepted, this supports my intuition elucidated at the start of section 2.7 – that committing injustice is an intrinsically risky act, and one must take on responsibility for all the consequences of that injustice. This kind of thinking was reflected in a case titled *DPP v. Newbury*, in which two teenage boys

pushed a paving stone off a railway bridge onto a train as it approached, resulting in the death of a guard. When the boys appealed on the grounds that they did not foresee the act would cause harm, the Court of Appeal dismissed this appeal. This reflects what is sometimes called the objective Caldwell test, according to which “the defendant *either* sees the risk and proceeds regardless, *or* does an act which creates an obvious risk, but gives no thought to the possibility of such risk and proceeds to act in a dangerous manner” (Tebbit, 2017, p. 197). It should be noted, however, that constructive manslaughter is a controversial category, as is the Caldwell test and in recent rulings, the Caldwell objective test has been reversed in favour of a more lenient, subjective test called the Cunningham reckless test which requires that the defendant must actually foresee the risk in order to be guilty of a reckless act (see *ibid.*, p. 198). However, the discussion is still instructive for philosophical purposes. Even if the decision to reverse the Caldwell test was correct, it still helps us to see that the intuitions underlying the arguments of preceding section are by no means eccentric or unique to this present author.

Applying the Caldwell test to the case of Oswald and Veronica has the following result. Oswald might have had no intention to injure God when he injured Veronica. Nonetheless, his act was such that there was a real risk of injuring those who love Veronica (which includes God). Since his action resulted in damage, he is responsible for this damage. This is so even if the injury to God is not the same kind as the injury to Veronica.

2.9. Universal Injustice and Pre-doubt

One might be tempted to think that my argument, if successful, only implies that those who commit injustice against fellow humans are guilty of injuring and resisting God. This is true – but a phenomenon worth noting here – which I shall explore in greater depth in chapter 3 – is the problem of universal wrongdoing. Virtually all of us are guilty – at some point in our lives

– of committing a grave wrong against our neighbour. This is why guilt is such a universal phenomenon. Hence, my argument does not merely convict a subsection of humanity – rather, if my intuitions are correct, all of us are in the dock.

This also helps to develop a unique approach to the case of pre-doubt humans. Schellenberg may be right in emphasizing that the religious beliefs of such humans were so different from monotheism that they cannot be said to have had a God-concept (Schellenberg, 2015, pp. 78-80). However, if what I have been saying is correct, this fact is irrelevant to the question of whether they were resisting God. If what I have argued is correct, such humans were indeed resisting God by wronging each other. In fact, many ancient cultures have practices modern humans consider abhorrent. For example, there is archaeological evidence of human – and possibly, child – sacrifice in ancient Peru (Bourget, 2001). Such actions can be plausibly regarded as deeply offensive and injurious to God, especially if God is regarded as having love for and being in solidarity with those being sacrificed. And if God loves everyone, this must be so.

It could be argued that some ancient humans are not just pre-doubt but also pre-moral in the sense of lacking a sense of right and wrong. So, they cannot be culpable for wrongdoing. I suggest, however, that if this is so, they also fail to meet the criteria for finite person, since it is unclear how a being devoid of moral compass can be a participant in a mature, fully mutual personal relationship of the sort Schellenberg seems to be interested in.

2.10. *De Re Approaches*

The approach of this chapter is distinct from *de re* approaches. Notice that I do not stress that the wrongdoer has a mental state that is *de re* about God (although I do not deny this either). Rather, the fact I emphasize is God's solidarity with the oppressed, which results in God being wronged because of his beloved one being wronged. This is a kind of *indirect* harm

towards God, whereas *de re* theorists lay stress on mental states that are (directly) about God. By contrast, my arguments are compatible with the person not having any mental states about God at all. I do blame the wrongdoer for not knowing that his actions would victimize a wider group of people, but I do not argue that he has mental states about God specifically. (I do, of course, accept that the wrongdoer has some awareness of the moral law, but this is the closest I get to *de re* approaches.)

2.11. Summary

In this chapter, I introduced and elucidated four theological assumptions, which I then utilized to defend four theses: (i) God is entitled to be angered and offended by human injustice, (ii) God is entitled to punish human injustice, (iii) God is negatively affected by human injustice, and (iv) under a certain reading, God can be understood to be a victim of human injustice. This allowed me to argue that (a) certain humans might be non-resistant in a Schellenbergian sense but resistant to God in a broader, relevant sense, and (b) God is entitled to respond to such resistance via at least a temporary withdrawal of the chance of relationship. (a) allows me to problematize Schellenberg's premise that there are non-resistant non-believers, because it shows that humans might be non-resistant in one sense but resistant in a broader sense that is relevant to the discussion. I have argued that a withdrawal on the part of God in response to human moral corruption does not imply a withdrawal of divine love. Furthermore, I have used (a) to problematize some of the metaphors Schellenberg uses.

Chapter Three: Problematizing the hiddenness argument: part 2 (human character and relationships)

In this chapter, I will introduce another phenomenon that I believe problematizes the hiddenness argument. I suggest that it can be plausibly argued that, given human moral corruption, humans are prone to infidelity in any potential divine-human relationship.

I would like to start my argument by looking closely at the concept of personal relationship. I will (i) look at how Schellenberg understands this concept, (ii) offer an interpretive framework for understanding personal relationship, and (iii) look at what this kind of relationship demands from involved parties to be successful.

3.1. Schellenberg on Personal Relationship

As noted, in section 1.2.2, Schellenberg understands personal relationship as a “conscious, interactive, and positively meaningful relationship” (Schellenberg, 2015, p. 38). Such a relationship includes things such as “a capacity to feel the presence of God, recognizing it as such; a capacity to exhibit attitudes of trust, gratitude, and obedience to God, and so on” (ibid., p. 40). Based on this, we might say: if *A* and *B* are in a relationship, *A* and *B* are (i) aware of each other’s existence and presence, (ii) aware of the fact that they are in a relationship, and (iii) able to interact with each other and exhibit attitudes of trust, gratitude and obedience. Another criterion one could add to this is that *A* and *B* (iv) have both chosen to be in a relationship with each other. Although Schellenberg does not always explicitly state this criterion, I take it to be implicit in his argument¹⁸.

¹⁸ Schellenberg at various points in his work implies that a choice is needed. For example, as noted in section 1.2, Schellenberg argues that God will make it possible for every relationally non-resistant person to enter relationship with him simply by trying. The reference to ‘trying’ implies that one must make a choice and strive to enter a personal relationship. See Schellenberg’s response to Azadegan in Schellenberg, 2017, p. 4.

But the above criteria are surely insufficient. For example, my relationship with my employer satisfies the above criteria: I am aware that he exists, have chosen to be in a relationship with him, interact with him, and – if I know him well enough – trust him (for example, when it comes to things such as paying my salary) and am grateful to him for all the times he has gone above and beyond his contractual obligations. But surely my relationship with God cannot be like this. After all, my relationship with my employer is contractual and can involve physical and emotional distance. For example, I might be grateful to him, but my gratitude might involve nothing more than subconscious resolve to return the favour when I am able and thereby pay my debt to him. I might obey him, but only because he is my superior in my job environment and because obeying him is my way to rise in the ranks. I do not necessarily want to be intimate with my employer and I may not care much for the things he does in the rest of his life – in fact, I might view him mostly as a means-to-an-end, such a salary and a promotion.

No major monotheistic religious tradition will want to portray a relationship with God in this way. Some Christian Scriptures explicitly disavow this kind of relationship (for example, Romans 4:1-8). Thankfully, Schellenberg makes it clear that the divine-human relationship he has in mind is one that involves *love*. After all, it is universal divine love that entails that God seek out relationship with every finite person. Moreover, as discussed in section 1.2, love, according to Schellenberg, involves more than benevolence – it implies seeking out of closeness with the other as an end-in-itself. Thus, even he accepts that a personal relationship with God is not like a relationship with a landlord or employer.

In fact, love plays an important role. Schellenberg's understanding of personal relationship is largely influenced by how intimate human relationships work in the real world. He writes: "only the best human love could serve as an analogy of Divine love, and human

love at its best clearly involves reciprocity and mutuality” (Schellenberg, 2006, p. 18). This clearly shows that the relationship Schellenberg has in mind is one that involves mutual love.

Schellenberg’s comments allow us to formulate the following principle:

If God and a person *S* are in a personal relationship with each other, God and *S* are (i) aware of each other, (ii) aware of the fact that they are in a relationship, (iii) able to interact with each other and exhibit attitudes of trust, gratitude and obedience, (iv) have chosen to be in a relationship with each other and (v) love each other and, therefore, seek out closeness with each other as an end-in-itself^{19, 20}

Call the fifth requirement the *intimacy* requirement. With this definition in mind, we are now in a better position to answer the question posed earlier: of all the relationships found in the human world, which one is best analogous to this kind of relationship?

3.2. The Ideal Divine-Human Relationship as Friendship: An Interpretive Lens

We have seen that Schellenberg’s understanding of a divine-human relationship is based partly on an analogy with the best kind of interhuman relationship. This raises the following question: what kind of relationship found among humans is best analogous of the kind of divine-human relationship Schellenberg has in mind? Some of his writings give us clues in this regard. For example, in a 2020 work, Schellenberg relies upon a parent-child relationship (Schellenberg, Moser, 2020). But this is not the only analogy that could be used. One could

¹⁹ It should be noted that the above principle is not framed as a comprehensive exposition of what a divine-human relationship looks like: it merely lays out five features of such a relationship which can be read also as requirements. This principle is meant as an exposition and interpretation of Schellenberg’s views.

²⁰ It might be objected: Schellenberg only says that God, if he is loving, must seek personal relationship with humans as an end-in-itself and does not explicitly state that humans, when they enter relationship with God, also reciprocate in this regard. However, I take this to be implicit in Schellenberg’s argument: as noted in this chapter, Schellenberg writes: “only the best human love could serve as an analogy of Divine love, and human love at its best clearly involves reciprocity and mutuality” (Schellenberg, 2006, p. 18). This statement suggests that Schellenberg thinks that, in a divine-human relationship, humans must reciprocate the divine love shown to them.

also use the analogy of spouses, which is one of the ways the Hebrew Bible and the Christian New Testament describe God's relationship with his chosen people (for e.g., Isaiah 54:5-8, 2 Corinthians 11:2).

I would like to argue in this section that of the many possible interhuman relationships, friendship is the one that is most like the kind of divine-human relationship Schellenberg has in mind.

Although, as noted earlier, Schellenberg utilizes a parent-child analogy, it strikes me that this analogy is not the best one he could use to describe the divine-human relationship for the following reasons. Firstly, the kind of relationship he has in mind is one involving mutuality and reciprocity, but a parent-child relationship does not necessarily require such mutuality and reciprocity. For example, in the early stages of life, a new-born might not be able to have full awareness of his parents and might lack the cognitive apparatus needed for a deep mutually interactive relationship. Nonetheless, the relationship does not seem to be deficient on this account, although there is an expectation that, in later stages, the child will grow up and be able to have these abilities. Similarly, a daughter caring for her father with Alzheimer's or a parent caring for an adult child with a mental disability might not have a fully mutual relationship²¹, but it would still be a quite beautiful relationship: one party assumes the role of a caregiver and the other the role of one who is dependant. Thus, parent-child relationships don't – strictly speaking – require full mutual awareness, although such awareness is obviously desirable and ideal.

Secondly, even when full mutual awareness is present, parent-child relationships don't necessarily require continued closeness. In modern Western societies, for example, it is often expected that the children will leave their parents' homes when they mature and become

²¹ It could still be partly mutual, of course.

independent. There is a degree of separation in their lives at this point. The separation can involve geographical as well as emotional distance. Nonetheless, this doesn't seem to mean that the relationship has soured at this stage. Rather, the distance is expected and, at least in this type of culture, is considered rather normal²².

It should be noted that the above two arguments could also be made about other relationships, such as those between siblings and relatives. I would argue that even a spousal relationship could subsist without mutuality, reciprocity and continued closeness. For example, if one spouse undergoes intense trauma (for example, a soldier returning from a war with PTSD), she might become cold and distant and unable to be intimate with her spouse. Of course, this is far from an ideal situation, but it is at least conceivable that the spousal relationship could continue to subsist even when intimacy and mutuality is largely gone.

What makes a friendship distinct from the previously discussed kinds of relationship is that it seems to require *continued* mutuality, reciprocity and closeness to even exist. If two friends get separated from each other for extended periods of time, their friendship is understood to have waned in strength, at least temporarily. If the separation and distance become strong enough, some might even say they are no longer friends although they once were. Similarly, if one friend gets Alzheimer's and forgets all about the other, it is hard to say that they are still friends, although the friend who is mentally well might show great love to the other by caring for him.

The literature on friendship seems to support this intuition. Diane Jeske writes: "Reciprocity and mutuality are paradigm features of friendship" (Jeske, 2023, p. 4). Laurence

²² Of course, there are other societies (for example, in certain parts of India) where joint families are the norm and greater closeness is expected. Nonetheless, my point still stands: it is not *necessary*, strictly speaking, for there to always be such closeness for the relationship to endure, since there are societies in which distance of this kind is expected.

Thomas writes that friendships have three salient features – firstly, they are the result of a choice on the part of the parties involved; secondly, neither party is under the authority of the other (aside from job situations); and thirdly, there is an enormous bond of mutual trust between such friends, cemented by mutual equal self-disclosure (Thomas, 1987, p. 217). If true, this vindicates the distinction between friendships and parent-child relationships: children don't always disclose intimate details of their lives to their parents, and neither vice-versa. Moreover, features such as equality move some to argue that parents and children can only become friends after children turn adults and become self-sufficient; others take an even more conservative view arguing that parents and children can never become friends (see Kupfer, 1990).

It should be noted that I am not taking a stand on whether parents and children or relatives can or cannot be friends. What I am saying is this: if a parent and their child do have a friendship relationship, their friendship relationship is nonetheless distinct from their parent-child relationship, and the latter can subsist without the former. The same could be said about spousal relationships. It is ideal for spouses to be friends, but it is conceivable for the spousal relationship to remain even when the friendship relationship has gone.

Given that Schellenberg frames an ideal divine-human relationship in terms of reciprocity and mutuality, the above discussion shows that a friendship is the best analogy for such a relationship, although – like analogies in general – it too may fall short in certain ways. The Bible sometimes uses this analogy (see Isaiah 41:8, James 2:21-23).

At this point, an objection might be raised. How might one accommodate Laurence Thomas's intuition (shared by others) that a friend cannot be under the authority of another, except in limited settings? If this intuition is sound, does it not prove that God and humans cannot be friends, since God will always be the master and the human the servant? To this, I

would say that it may well be that when God and a human person become friends, their relationship as master and servant becomes somewhat diluted. The Bible itself seems to say this. For example, in the Gospel of John, Jesus says to his disciples:

“You are my friends if you do what I command you. I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing, but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father.” (John 15:14-15, NRSV)

This text is interesting for several reasons. On the one hand, Jesus is clearly giving *commands* to the disciples. But he also says that he no longer calls them servants, but rather friends. One Biblical commentator, commenting on this passage, writes: “The disciples [...] have been drawn into a new relationship [...] They are not servants (*douloi*) in a relationship of dependence on a master [...] depending on the whim of a master, but *philoï*, intimate and equal associates of Jesus who loves them without limits” (Moloney, 1998, p. 425). The reference to a servant not knowing what the Master is doing implies that the disciples now have intimate knowledge of Jesus’s activity – thus, Jesus satisfies Laurence Thomas’s self-disclosure requirement. Perhaps one might say that, although it is possible to approach God as a servant, it is better to approach him as a friend. The latter is a deeper, more profound kind of relationship, and is more in line with what Schellenberg has in mind.

In the following section, I will argue that seeing the divine-human relationship as a friendship has important implications. A relationship involving intimacy, such as a friendship, makes demands upon the related persons and often requires a prospective partner to fulfil certain prerequisites for such a relationship to be possible. This will help me develop my second argument.

3.3. Friendship Relationships and Genuine Openness

Friendship relationships make several demands upon the persons related. These demands are not arbitrary but rather relate to the concept of friendship – meaning that if these demands are not met, the relationship in question fails to satisfy the definition of friendship.

One such requirement – discussed earlier – is reciprocity. Reciprocity applies to many aspects of life. But most eminently, friendships require that the persons reciprocate each other's *love*. If a person *A* is loving towards another person *B*, but *B* does not have any such attitude towards *A*, *A* and *B* cannot be said to be friends. Moreover, such reciprocity of love does not exist merely in the abstract. A Viking poem goes thus:

“Friends should provide their friends
with weapons and clothing;
this kind of generosity shows.
Generous mutual giving
is the key
to lifelong friendship” (quoted from Kristjánsson, 2022, p. 182).

This brings me to a second requirement. The above extract reflects a universal human intuition: love is demonstrated through action. It is incoherent to say that one loves another and yet refuses to help the other even if one is able. Such an intuition is found in the Christian New Testament (see, for example, James 2:1-26). It should be noted that action can often involve suffering: if I am truly a friend to someone, I must – at least to some extent – be willing to suffer for their sake. The extent to which I am willing to suffer is often related to how close we are as friends – the better friends we are, the more willing we are to suffer and sacrifice.

Thirdly, friendships often affect one's social standing. The Viking poem quoted earlier goes on to say that to be a true friend to someone, one must be a friend to his friends and not be a friend to his enemies (*ibid.*). Although this statement is undoubtedly reflective of the ethos of a medieval, tribalistic society, I suggest that it is still true in some sense today and, in some sense, is a universal truth, for the simple reason that, even if we don't want to make enemies, becoming a friend to someone might invite hatred and hostility from that person's enemies. For example, a person seeking to protect Jews during the Second World War cannot be said to be a friend to the Nazis – on the contrary, he might become subject to Nazi persecution. Even the New Testament does not seem to contradict this idea: it says that we ought to love and forgive one's enemies (Matthew 5:43-48), but it does not do away with the concept of an enemy. If friendship is understood as a relationship involving mutuality and reciprocity, it is a contradiction in terms to say that one is friends with one's enemies: I might be benevolent and merciful to the ones who hate me and might even seek intimacy and friendship with them, but since they do not reciprocate by seeking intimacy and friendship with me in return, we cannot be said to be friends.

Finally, friendships seem to require some kind of commonality of values and compatibility of character. Let's start with the first. If two persons have sufficiently disparate value systems, friendship may become impossible. An obvious example would be a pacifist and a neo-Fascist. The value systems they adhere to are, in some ways, diametrically opposed to one another. Not only are they different, the values of one system are vigorously denounced by the other. For two persons from these opposite camps to truly become friends, one or both would have to significantly compromise on their values. But it is impossible or at least very difficult in practice for two persons who uncompromisingly adhere to these opposed ethical systems to become genuine friends. The reason is simple: because their values are so opposed to each other, if they are both firmly committed to their respective

systems, this means they are likely to clash very intensely with one another in a way that would make friendship virtually impossible.

This brings me to compatibility of character. Compatibility means that their characters are not predisposed to clashes with each other of the sort mentioned in the last example. Compatibility of such sort often features strongly in the context of prospective romantic relationships – one remembers the old question “Are they a suitable match?” – but is no less operative in the case of friendships as well. For example, if James finds something truly detestable about Harry (say, Harry’s racist attitudes), it might be hard for James and Harry to become friends. One might say that the difficulty of forming a friendship relationship with a given person is directly proportional to the number of features one finds detestable about the other person and inversely proportional to the number of features one finds attractive about the other. If one is sufficiently disgusted by another, benevolence of some sort might be possible, but intimacy is often ruled out.

To sum up, one might say that friendship relationships require, at least, the following: (1) reciprocity of love which entails (2) a willingness to act and undergo suffering for the sake of one’s friend and (3) a willingness to ally with and support one’s friend, (4) commonality of values and (5) compatibility of character.

This discussion reveals an important fact about the nature of relationships. I argue that genuine non-resistance to personal relationship is much more than not deceiving oneself out of a desire to avoid such a relationship. The reason for this is that there might be aspects of one’s character or nature that render one resistant to a relationship with the other, simply because such aspects make it extremely difficult or even impossible for a successful relationship to be actualized. This allows us to see that there is a broader way in which resistance to relationship might be understood. If this broader interpretation of resistance is

correct, it could be said that if one lacks what it takes for a friendship relationship with another person to be successful through a defect of character, one is resistant to a personal relationship with that person. For example, suppose that James is considering a romantic relationship with Becky, a devout Christian girl who strongly believes in monogamy and expects her partner to be hardworking, honest and faithful. James has not *consciously* resolved to reject such a relationship; in fact, he may even have some desire for it. However, James is prone to unfaithfulness. He often gets intoxicated and has sex with random people he meets at clubs. He is unwilling to change this habit because he prefers the fun, the excitement and the enjoyment he gets from this lifestyle. His reputation as a Playboy is also a source of pride for him, because it makes him feel more manly and powerful. Suppose also that James is responsible (and therefore blameable) for acquiring this habit – no one forced it on him.

In this scenario, can we say that James is non-resistant to relationship with Becky simply because he doesn't consciously reject the prospect of such a relationship or because he has not deceived himself to avoid such a relationship? I think the answer is clearly no. In fact, I would suggest that even if he has some desire for a relationship with Becky, he is still resistant to a relationship with her, because there is something about his character – which, it must be noted, he is responsible for – that means that any potential relationship will end in failure. Moreover, even if we suppose that he wants a relationship with Becky, his desire for such a relationship clearly isn't stronger than his desire to lead a Playboy lifestyle. Thus, even if he desires such a relationship, he doesn't desire it *enough*. Because he lacks the basic prerequisites for a romantic relationship with Becky, he can be said to be resistant to a personal relationship with Becky. For example, James clearly doesn't reciprocate Becky's love, since Becky wants to give romantic love exclusively to James, whereas James wants to share – these two loves can be said to be qualitatively distinct. Similarly, James's and Becky's

values and character are clearly out of sync with each other. Thus, a successful personal relationship is practically impossible.

The above example reveals something important about the desire that is needed for a person to be truly open to a personal relationship. To be genuinely open to a personal relationship, one must *sufficiently* desire the relationship or, at the very least, be willing to be detached from things that could interfere with that relationship. Some generic desire is not enough – one must desire the relationship (or be willing to desire the relationship) enough to be willing to give up the things that might get in the way of it being actualized. With this we have a sixth requirement for what it takes for a friendship relationship to be successful.

3.4. Implications for Divine-Human Relationships

If we apply the six criteria of relational openness to a personal relationship with God, we get the following result: to be genuinely open to a personal relationship with God, one must be able to (1) reciprocate God's love, (2) be willing to act and suffer for God's sake, (3) be willing to ally with God and oppose his enemies, (4) share the same values as God, (5) have a character compatible with God's and (6) be willing to give up the things that might get in the way of a relationship with God²³.

It is here that some unique difficulties begin to emerge. As noted in sections 2.1-4, God is (1) perfectly good, (2) supremely good, (3) the ground of the moral law and (4) perfectly loving. I argue that this has important implications for what it takes to be genuinely open to relationship with God.

²³ These criteria are not necessarily entirely discrete, and one might slightly overlap with another. Nonetheless, I lay it out in this way for the sake of clarity.

Firstly, as noted in section 3.3, genuine openness to relationships implies an ability to reciprocate the other person's love. This means that, ideally, there must be parity in the kind of love being given. To rehash a familiar example: if one partner wants to love monogamously, exclusively and passionately, the other partner's inconstancy, unfaithfulness and lack of passion can be an impediment to a successful relationship. Parity need not imply absolute equality on both sides – indeed, as noted in section 2.2., God's emotions might be far more intense than any creature is capable of and thus it may be impossible even in principle for a finite person to *fully* reciprocate the divine love. Nonetheless, there should be at least *adequate* reciprocity, in proportion to what humans are capable of. Moreover, the dignity of the divine nature seems to demand a special kind of love on the part of humans if one wishes to be in a relationship with God. If God is the greatest possible person, it seems to follow that he deserves much more respect, admiration, obedience, love and attention than any finite person. The Hebrew Bible speaks of loving God with all one's heart, soul, and strength (Deuteronomy 6:4-5) and the New Testament speaks of loving God with all one's mind (see Mark 12:30).

As the second criterion notes, one must be willing to act, suffer and sacrifice for the sake of God. In a friendship relationship between finite persons, it is ideal that this be equal on both sides. This places an enormous burden on any human person who wants to be a friend of God. One must be willing to act, suffer and sacrifice for God's sake to an extent somewhat commensurate with God's willingness to act, suffer and sacrifice for us (and, of course, in proportion to what finite persons are capable of). From a Christian perspective, this takes on a Christological bent. Christians believe that God became incarnate in the person of Jesus (John 1:14), emptying himself of his divine glory (Philippians 2:7) and dying a humiliating death on the Cross to atone for sin (Galatians 2:16). If this story is true, it could

well be argued that we must be willing to lay aside our own glory and die for God's sake to be genuinely reciprocal in our love and thereby be open to friendship with God.

Thirdly, as noted in section 3.2.3, friendships can affect one's social standing: becoming friends with one person might mean gaining enemies. If God has enemies, friendship with God can mean that God's enemies view us with hatred and try to harm and injure us. For example, the New Testament implies that following Jesus often results in persecution (Matthew 10:16-42). We must be willing to reckon with this possibility if we truly wish to become friends with God.

Fourthly, commonality of values implies that one must love what God loves and detest what he detests. Thus, if God disapproves or intensely dislikes an action *X*, we must be ready to disapprove of or intensely dislike *X* as well. This certainly entails not doing it or enjoying it, because such a thing can render us displeasing to God. This is closely tied to compatibility of character, the fifth criterion alluded to earlier: our personality and God's personality must be sufficiently aligned for a successful relationship to even be possible. If our personality is too much out of sync with God's, this can render us resistant to a personal relationship with him.

The idea that humans need to exhibit some sort of moral character to be truly open to relationship with God is found in the historic Christian tradition. The Church father Gregory of Nyssa, for example, emphasized the importance of what he called purity of heart. Gregory seems to be amenable to Schellenberg's idea that a relationship with God is the best possible thing for human beings – although he does not speak of relationship with God but rather refers to the vision of God. He writes: “the one who sees God possesses by seeing all that is classed as good: unending life, eternal imperishability, [...] everlasting joy, everything good” (Gregory, 2000, p. 67). He also writes: “we are warned that the way we come by this vision is

to become pure in heart” (ibid.)²⁴. It must be stressed that Gregory’s emphasis on purity of heart is drawn from the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:8) – so it is not just a Patristic but also a Biblical concept²⁵.

This raises the question: what is meant by purity of heart? Without going into depth in Gregory’s theology, it is helpful to look at some aspects of it. Gregory says that the pure in heart see God within oneself, because they come to possess God within themselves. He writes: “the person who has purged his own heart of every tendency to passion perceives in his own beauty the reflexion of the divine nature” (ibid., p. 70). This strongly suggests that purity of heart means being free of sinful passion. Hans Boersma, commenting on Gregory’s theology, writes the following: “Godhead is purity, absence of passion, and separation from every evil. If these are in you, God is certainly in you” (Boersma, 2018, p. 80). The converse is also true: one of the obstacles to union with God is “the lack of purity on the part of human beings [...] [and] the passions that stand in the way of the purity required to see God” (ibid., p. 78). Thus, it could be said that purity of heart refers to separation from evil and the passions. The idea seems to be that if one is not separated from evil and what Gregory calls the passions, this makes it more difficult for one to attain to the beatific vision. Impurity hinders and interferes with a potential relationship with God.

The Nyssen idea of purity is closely tied to the sixth criterion I noted earlier. It could be that certain vices interfere with a personal relationship with God, simply because God (justly) finds them detestable and repugnant. Just a woman who believes in monogamy is

²⁴ It could, of course, be argued that Gregory’s notion of the vision of God is not the same as Schellenberg’s idea of relationship with God, for Gregory could be referring to the beatific vision in Paradise, whereas personal relationship – in Schellenbergian terms – can be had even on earth. However, I still think appealing to Gregory is useful here. Firstly, a relationship with God on earth ideally culminates in the beatific vision in Christian theology, so the two are not entirely disparate. Secondly, if impurity on earth prevents us from enjoying the beatific vision, presumably it will interfere also with relationship with God on earth, since the latter – as just noted – is a precursor to the former.

²⁵ I am not claiming that Gregory’s interpretation of purity of heart is exegetically faithful to the New Testament, only that the basic idea of purity being necessary for the divine vision is taken from it.

morally entitled to demand a potential suitor to abandon promiscuity, God is entitled to demand that those who want to be related to him give up the things he intensely dislikes.

Purity need not refer exclusively to detachment from things that are objectively evil or immoral. Even when a particular thing is objectively good, it may still be possible for a person to become overly attached to it. A disordered attachment comes into existence when a thing is loved or desired too much. For example, a sex addict has a disordered attachment to sex, even though there is nothing intrinsically wrong about sex *per se*. The purity needed for relationship with God could refer not merely to a renunciation of anything that is evil, but also imply a freedom from disordered attachments. The reason is that if we love something too much, it may interfere with our ability to give God the love that he deserves. And since God – *ex hypothesi* – is an unsurpassably great being, he is worthy of the highest love we can offer him, a love that becomes tainted if we offer too much affection to created things.

Such inordinate attachments to created things can be seen as a kind of infidelity. In romantic relationships, it is typically expected for partners to give a special kind of love (let us call it *L*) to each other and to withhold giving *L* to other persons. In human contexts, *L* typically includes sexual/erotic love, but also extends to non-sexual things. For example, partners are expected to divulge intimate secrets to each other and not share these things with other people. They are expected to prioritize each other over other persons. Certain amount of time and attention needs to be given to the other, and there must be efforts made to keep the other person happy. The partners are free to love other people, but this must be a different kind of love.

Similarly, one might argue that, since God is the unsurpassably great being, he is entitled to a special kind of love (let us call it *L-W*). Hence, to be truly pure, one must offer *L-W* to God alone. This can mean several things. One way to construe this is to say that God is

to be loved for his own sake, and every other thing is to be loved only for the sake of God. Augustine in his *De Doctrina Christiana* makes a famous *uti/frui* distinction that is worth noting. Augustine distinguishes between honourable or intrinsic goods and useful goods – the former is sought for its own sake (*propter se*), whereas the latter is good because it is referred to something else. Vice, for Augustine, “consists in enjoying what one should use, and using what one should enjoy”, whereas virtue is the opposite. He argues that “it is God alone, the Trinity, that one may legitimately enjoy [...] while everything else ought to be used in order to obtain the enjoyment of what one ought to enjoy [i.e., God]” (Georgedes, Block, 2013). Another way to understand *L-W* is in terms of action – if God commands us to abandon something, we must be ready to do so, no matter how dear that thing is to us. If we are not, this shows that we are giving *L-W* not just to God, but also to a created thing. If this is the standard we are called to, even the most devout worshippers of God would surely concede they often fall short in a culpable way.

At this point, an objection might be raised. A careful reader may note that, in this section, I put the onus for relational compatibility purely on the human and not on God. This is, of course, not always the case with interhuman relationships in which, often, both partners are expected to adjust, although if one partner is significantly more morally deficient than the other, there might be more onus on the one than on the other.

A critic might ask: why is only the human to take responsibility for relational incompatibility, and not God? Why can we not also expect God to adjust to our tastes and preferences? The answer is that, in traditional theism, God is viewed as perfect, as noted in sections 2.1. Thus, if there is something in us that renders us displeasing to God, that is always a failing on our part, and not on God's. God, by definition, cannot be arbitrary or

flawed in his moral perception or judgments. In this way, there is a disanalogy between interhuman relationships and divine-human relationships.

3.5. The Universal Sin Hypothesis

Christianity endorses the doctrine of universal sin. This is the idea that all human beings – except Jesus and (in some traditions) Mary – have sinned (Romans 3:23). A sin here refers to an act that is objectively immoral. In addition to having committed evil actions, humans are seen as having a vitiated moral character. In Roman Catholic theology, this is sometimes called concupiscence – it refers to an inclination towards evil that exists in humans (see *Catechism of the Catholic Church* paragraph 405). We tend to take delight in doing things that are wrong. In other words, our personalities are objectively flawed.

The Christian tradition also emphasizes that humans are often disordered in the way they love. Very often, things that ought to be loved are not loved enough or at all, and things that are loved do not merit that love or the degree of love we offer it. This disordered love often manifests itself in disordered attachments, which I alluded to earlier.

Let us call this the Universal Sin Hypothesis.

Universal Sin Hypothesis: Most human beings (i) have committed immoral acts, (ii) have often found enjoyment in committing immoral acts, (iii) are morally deficient in their character and (iv) are disordered in their love and attachments²⁶.

The hypothesis, framed thus, is accepted by all the major branches of Christianity.

²⁶ These four are not necessarily entirely discrete: there may be some overlap but framing it this way is helpful for the sake of clarity.

It should be noted that, although this is a hypothesis found in a major world religion, it need not be restricted to the confines of that worldview. It is possible for a non-Christian to accept this hypothesis. If one is unhappy with the word ‘sin’ – a term with many religious and theological connotations – one is free to substitute it with ‘moral failing’. All that is needed to affirm the above hypothesis is (1) a commitment to some kind of moral standard which humans are beholden to and (2) a recognition that most humans fall short of this standard. One can come to affirm (1) through intuition and/or argument independent of Scripture and (2) through introspection, memory and experience.

3.6. The Argument(s) from Universal Sin

The preceding discussion allows us to frame arguments against the premise that there are non-resistant non-believers. My argument hinges on the claim that if a finite person has some qualities or traits that make it difficult for one to enter a fully harmonious relationship with God, that person is to some extent resistant to such a relationship. As in the previous chapter, this is not quite what Schellenberg has in mind when he speaks of resistance, but it is – I argue – a kind of resistance that is relevant to the discussion.

There are many possible ways one could frame my argument. Here is one way:

1. For a person *S* to be non-resistant to relationship with God, *S* must be able to enter and sustain a fully harmonious relationship with God.
2. For a person *S* to be able to enter and sustain a fully harmonious relationship with God, *S* must be able to adequately reciprocate God’s love.
3. For *S* to be able to adequately reciprocate God’s love, *S* must be free of disordered love and attachments.
4. Most humans are not free of disordered love and attachments.
5. (From 3&4) Most humans are not able to adequately reciprocate God’s love.

6. (From 2&5) Most humans are not able to enter and sustain a fully harmonious relationship with God.
7. Therefore, most humans are not non-resistant to relationship with God.

Call the above the Argument from Disordered Love and Attachments (ADLA).

Disordered loves and attachments are exactly what we see in the James and Becky story in section 3.3: even if we assume that alcohol consumption and casual sex are not wrong, it would still be the case that James is attached to them and this inordinate attachment prevents him from loving Becky as she wants to be loved. Moreover, Becky is surely entitled to demand that a potential partner be faithful to her and adhere her values of monogamy and honesty.

The ADLA applies the above analogy to divine-human relationships. Since God is unsurpassably great, he is worthy of love much more than a human romantic partner. We owe God *L-W*. However, most humans are typically attached to created things in an excessive way and there are things we desire to have which – if God were to command us to renounce them – many of us would not give up. (It must be remembered that, given God’s perfection, any command he issues would be just and reasonable.) We often obey God only insofar as it is convenient for us, and there is frequently a line of inconvenience most of us would not cross, even for the sake of God. This could be compared to a kind of infidelity – we are giving *L-W* to created things as well as to God. In the Christian spiritual tradition, this is sometimes called idolatry. If humans do have disordered loves and attachments, this results in them having idolatrous tendencies, which means a tendency to be unfaithful to God. Since God is perfect, his love is also perfect; thus, if our love is disordered, it is imperfect and therefore renders us unable to adequately reciprocate his love.

Another argument along these lines might be formulated as follows.

1. For a person *S* to be non-resistant to relationship with God, *S* must be able to enter and sustain a fully harmonious relationship with God.
2. For *S* to be able to enter and sustain a fully harmonious relationship with God, *S* must have a character compatible with God's.
3. For a person *S* to have a character compatible with God's, *S* must be perfectly good.
4. Most humans are not perfectly good.
5. (From 3&4) Most humans do not have a character compatible with God's.
6. (From 2&5) Most humans are not able to enter and sustain a fully harmonious relationship with God.
7. Therefore, most humans are not non-resistant to relationship with God.

Call the above argument the Argument from Universal Moral Imperfection (AUMI).

Although AUMI and ADLA are similar, they appeal to different considerations: ADLA emphasizes the human capacity to reciprocate God's love, which is a reference to the first criterion for relational openness laid out at the start of section 3.4, whereas AUMI emphasizes compatibility of character, which is the fifth criterion.

Premise 3 here requires some explication. I already argued in section 3.3 that compatibility of character is essential for a successful relationship: if two persons are too out of sync with each other, this will lead to a lot of conflict and may make it impossible for them to have a happy relationship. The key point to note here is that God is perfectly good, as noted in section 2.1. This means that he approves of every good action and disapproves of every bad action. Humans, on the other hand, are not perfectly good – meaning, we often approve of things God disapproves of, and disapprove of things God approves of. This means

that our personality is, to at least some extent, incompatible with God and this is a failing on our part. To put it colloquially, we are not good enough for God²⁷.

The idea that friendship requires some kind of equality is found in the literature (for example, consider Laurence Thomas's emphasis on friends not being under each other's authority²⁸). The AUMI taps into an intuition that friendship requires a kind of *moral* equality. It is easy to see why this intuition is compelling. Assuming that moral and immoral are objective categories, a moral person is predisposed to clash with an immoral person. Many mythological stories in ancient cultures often speak of the war between the good hero and the evil antagonist. Of course, in actual life, most humans are a mix of good and evil, but it does seem true to say that *if* there was a perfectly good person, that person would be predisposed to clash with someone who was partly evil, and more so with someone who was completely evil²⁹. The fact that humans are not perfectly good implies that we are partly evil. And if we are partly evil, there is a sense in which we could be called enemies of God, because we often do things that God intensely dislikes and even condemns.

It should be noted that being perfectly good is not, in principle, an unattainable ideal for humans. Remember that in sections 2.1-2, I distinguished between perfect goodness and supreme goodness. Whereas supreme goodness can only be predicated of God, perfect goodness could possibly be exemplified by creatures. For example, in Christian theology, angels who never sinned are perfectly good, even though they are not supremely good. Thus, by demanding that humans be perfectly good to be relationally compatible with God, I am not demanding something that is intrinsically or logically impossible for humans, although it may be practically impossible in the actual world. A Christian might say that, although humans

²⁷ Mark Murphy similarly emphasizes a difference in status between God and humans (see Murphy, 2021), but his treatment is different from mine – for more on this, see section 4.1.

²⁸ See Thomas, 1987.

²⁹ Even in the actual world, humans who are partly good often clash with humans who are less good.

could be perfectly good, most of the humans in our world are not perfectly good, and this is our fault. This means that most of us are not non-resistant to relationship with God, and we are culpable for this.

Suppose, however, that an objector quibbles with this. It could be argued that, although there may be a possible world in which there are humans who are perfectly good, in our actual world, humans are unable to be perfectly good because of the weakness of character that we are born with. We suffer from temptations, addictions and other kinds of struggles that mean that doing evil is sometimes inevitable or unavoidable. This is a strong objection. However, I can easily accommodate it: I simply need to amend the AUMI and replace “perfectly good” with “as good as it is possible for a particular human being to be in the actual world”. It is clear, however, that this more lenient standard is also one which is not in fact satisfied by humans, since we can all recount points in our lives when we carried out immoral acts or developed immoral habits in a blameworthy manner. At that point in time, we knew what the right thing was to do and could have done it, and yet we chose to do what was wrong³⁰. If this is correct, then we are indeed not compatible with God’s character, for we can surmise that if God became incarnate and inherited our vitiated nature with its inherent weaknesses (thereby making some moral evil inevitable), he would have at least avoided evil when he could³¹. Thus, my claim that virtually all humans do not have a character compatible with God’s stands even if this objection is raised.

³⁰ One could, of course, deny libertarian free will and/or seek to absolve humans in general of any culpability. I will respond to this briefly in section 3.8.

³¹ Of course, most traditional Christians would insist that the human nature assumed by God in the incarnation was not fallen like ours, and thus, this story is purely hypothetical. Moreover, some theists may wish to deny this is a real possibility, since they might insist that God cannot ever do moral evil or be in a situation in which committing evil becomes inevitable for him. I personally deny that God incarnate could have done evil. However, I still include it for the sake of argument, to illustrate my general point.

3.7. Answering an Objection: Do Relationships have to be Fully Harmonious?

At this stage, an objector might raise the following objection: why is it necessary for humans to be able to enter a fully harmonious relationship with God to be truly non-resistant? After all, it is not necessary for a relationship to be fully harmonious to be successful. In the human world, relationships – particularly romantic relationships and friendships – are never fully harmonious. There is always conflict, to some degree or the other. However, this does not prevent many relationships from being successful and resulting in a deep, intimate bond between the parties.

In response to this, I make three points.

Firstly, as noted earlier, I emphasize that, since God is an unsurpassably great being who is morally perfect, if there is any conflict between God and a finite person, the fault will always be on the side of the finite person. God does not make mistakes and so cannot be blamed. Every request he makes of or commands he issues to a person are reasonable, and therefore the other party ought to follow it. This is unlike human relationships, in which both parties are flawed to some extent and conflict becomes necessary to help each other grow in virtue.

Secondly, even if it is the case that interhuman relationships do not have to be fully harmonious to be successful, it could be that what God is interested in is not some generic kind of conscious and mutually interactive relationship, but the deepest grade of relationship possible. To understand this, consider the fact that standards of what counts as a worthwhile relationship vary from culture to culture. In an intensely patriarchal culture, domestic violence might be considered normal and therefore a relationship involving a degree of such violence might be considered acceptable. By contrast, a modern secular egalitarian society would consider such a relationship unacceptable and persons from such a society might

consider it better to avoid relationship altogether rather than enter such a kind of relationship – in my opinion, rightly so! Now, just as members of more progressive societies justifiably have higher standards for relationships than highly patriarchal societies, it may be that God – being a transcendent Being – justifiably has higher standards for the kind of relationship worth pursuing. If so, the *telos* of any act of divine disclosure would be the actualization of a fully harmonious relationship.

Furthermore, it could be that a given person might be open to a generic kind of conscious and mutually interactive relationship with God, but not open to this deepest grade of relationship because of the costs it brings with it. (The costs I have in mind are the ones discussed earlier in this chapter, such as the willingness to give up things that might come into way of a relationship with God.) Such a person might be reckoned as non-resistant to the weaker kind of relationship but not to the kind of relationship God is interested in. Thus, if it is accepted that the *telos* of divine disclosure is the deepest grade of relationship, God might be entitled to not disclose himself to a particular person if he foresees that this person is not non-resistant to this deepest kind of relationship which he is interested in.

This brings me to an important observation: it could be that a person might desire some kind of relationship with God and still be resistant to the deepest kind of relationship with God, because it could be that this person does not understand the costs which such a relationship brings with it and – once cognizant of such costs – is disposed to reject it. Such a person might even pray fervently for God to reveal himself, and yet – deep down – is not non-resistant to the kind of relationship God wants. One might say that such a person is like a young man deeply in love with a woman and who thinks he wants to marry her, but if he knew the difficulties and sacrifices which such a marriage demands would not actually want it. In any case, we couldn't tell, because we cannot see the deepest state of a person's heart.

All we would perceive is that this person has at least some form of desire for God, but that wouldn't warrant the inference that he has a desire for the deepest kind of relationship with God³².

Thirdly, suppose for the sake of argument I grant the objection and concede that a divine-human relationship does not have to be fully harmonious to be successful. I could still preserve my institution by substituting “fully harmonious” with “sufficiently harmonious to be successful”. Moreover, as noted at the end of the previous section, I might also substitute “free from disordered loves and attachments” with “sufficiently free from disordered loves and attachments”, and “perfectly good” with “sufficiently good”. However, even if these changes are made, it could still be argued – as also noted earlier – that most humans fall short of this standard. This is so especially if humans are culpable for their vitiated moral character, because if this is the case then it implies that humans might have had a better moral character had it not been for a fault that they are fully responsible for. The Universal Sin Hypothesis does not explicitly refer to such culpability but can be interpreted as implying it. This reading of the hypothesis has interesting implications - if humans are culpable for their moral defects, this implies that the moral standard humans are being held accountable for is not an unreasonable or unreachable one. It has not been satisfied due to an avoidable human fault, but it could have been satisfied. This can be seen as evidence that humans are not sufficiently open to a relationship with God, since they have – through a fault of their own – become more resistant to such a relationship.

³² This is a skeptical point, similar to the point made by skeptical theists vis-à-vis God's reasons for permitting evil in the world.

3.8. Answering a Second Objection: Denying Human Culpability

An objector might go a step further: he might claim that humans are not culpable for their immoral actions. For example, one might think that, for a person *S* to be truly culpable for committing an immoral act *ia*, (i) *S* must possess libertarian free will vis-à-vis the commission or non-commission of *ia* and (ii) *S* must know that *ia* is wrong. However, one might be a determinist, holding that humans do not have libertarian free will and therefore are not truly culpable for any of the wrongs they do. Punishment or incarceration might be practically necessary to maintain law and order in a human society but are not imposed because of objective culpability on the part of those punished or incarcerated. Thus, if human beings are resistant to God in the broader sense I have delineated, they are not responsible for this, and therefore God ought not to punish them for it.

Before I respond to this, I would like to point out that neither the ADLA nor the AUMI make explicit reference to culpability. I have deliberately avoided this to make these arguments as broad as possible. However, for the sake of argument, I am willing – in this section – to take a culpability interpretation of it, according to which humans are culpable for their deficient moral character and their disordered loves and attachments.

I agree that this objection undermines the arguments interpreted thusly. However, I think there is good reason to deny the premise that humans are never or rarely culpable for their moral wrongdoings. This claim contradicts our common-sense intuitions on the matter – when we punish a person for, say, hate speech towards a minority, we often take it for granted that the person is to blame. Even in cases where a particular individual is absolved of blame, this is often taken to be a special case – very rarely do people take the view that humans are, in principle, never to blame for their immoral actions. Given that common-sense indicates otherwise, I would say that the burden of proof is therefore on the objector to demonstrate

that humans are generally not culpable. Barring good evidence for this claim, my arguments in this chapter stand even when a culpability interpretation is taken.

Since discussing this matter of human culpability and libertarian free will in depth is beyond the scope of this thesis, I leave it at that. I point out that there are many defences of libertarian free will in the literature and the reader may consult those. (For an overview of the subject, see Palmer, 2014.)

3.9. Implications

If these arguments are sound, this has important implications for the hiddenness argument. For suppose that God is, in principle, open to relationship with human persons. It could nonetheless be the case that, through his omniscience, he knows that most humans are not fit for a relationship with him. God foresees that they will – to varying degrees – engage in relational infidelity even if such a relationship is actualized. I suggest that this fact problematizes Schellenberg's argument.

To see this, let us revisit the James and Becky analogy introduced in section 3.3. Suppose that Becky has a special supernatural gift and foresees that if she enters a relationship with James, James will prove unfaithful. He will let her down in unacceptable and blameworthy ways. This may imply sexual and/or emotional infidelity, as well as other things, such as disrespect. If this is so, then surely Becky is entitled to not enter relationship with James because of these facts. I imagine Schellenberg would agree with this, but perhaps he would wish to argue that the reason this is the case is because Becky does not love James, and – although she may be justified in withholding her love – God would never withhold his love from any creature, however depraved. I would like to suggest this interpretation is false. It may be that Becky does love James. For example, it could be that James's culpably acquired character defects are not essential to who he is and, had he not acquired these flaws,

Becky would have gladly and immediately entered relationship with him. If so, Becky's default attitude towards James is one of love – all else being equal, she longs to be close to him. However, his culpably acquired moral defects complicates the situation.

Becky therefore has two choices – either she enters relationship with James, his culpably acquired flaws notwithstanding, or she chooses to not enter this relationship. If she chooses the former, this is clearly an act of grace: James is not worthy of her and yet, despite this, she is condescending to bless him with her presence and affection. There are clearly benefits to this action. Firstly, by being gracious, she is acting in a way that is praiseworthy and commendable. Her good character is being outwardly manifested in a way that is surely beautiful. Secondly, it may be that this act of grace is precisely what helps James to embark on a journey of moral progress. If so, it aids in the moral reformation of a bad human character. However, this decision also has costs. Becky is exposing herself to humiliation and heartbreak in a way that she does not deserve. This (i) can bring her emotional pain and (ii) means that she will not always get the respect and the rights that she deserves.

Suppose, however, that Becky chooses not to enter relationship with James. One way she might do so is by avoiding James – by hiding herself. There could be wisdom in doing this. Firstly, she might foresee that no amount of intimacy or affection will ever help reform James – he is too far gone, so to speak. Secondly, even if Becky foresees that James might be reformed through her affection and love, she might be unwilling to put with the emotional abuse, infidelity and lack of respect that such a relationship would bring upon her. She might value her dignity and rights over the reformation of James.

This allows us to see how God might act such a situation. God being omniscient knows that most humans will be culpably unfaithful to him at some point in any potential divine-human relationship. Humans are therefore unworthy of a relationship with God.

Hence, as with Becky, when God considers whether to reveal himself to a particular sinful human h and give h the opportunity to enjoy a relationship with him, God must weigh the pros and the cons. On the one hand, it may be that h can be reformed through such a relationship and, therefore, God condescends to bless h with such a relationship. On the other hand, even if it is the case that h can be reformed through such a relationship, God might be unwilling to subject himself to the humiliation and disrespect which he knows h , at some point, will culpably inflict on him. However, as with Becky, it is up to God what choice to make.

Any divine act of hiding or withdrawal does not indicate a lack of divine love towards human beings for the simple reason that – as with Becky – the default position God takes towards humans is love. It is humans who culpably acquire moral defects and are thereby prone to relational infidelity. If humans weren't culpably depraved in this manner, one might hold the view that God would have revealed himself to every human and given everyone a chance to enjoy a relationship with him. If this story is true, it shows us that the reason for divine hiding is not so much on the side of God as it is on the side of finite human persons. As with the case of human injustice, God desires personal relationship with humans, but he has good reasons to not act on this desire, because humans are morally vitiated and will at some point be unfaithful to him, thereby subjecting him to humiliation.

At this point, an objector might query thus: a lot of my argument relies on making an analogy between divine-human relationships and romantic relationships. But in section 3.2 I used friendship as an analogy and even implied its superiority to spousal relationships as an appropriate analogy. How might this apparent inconsistency be reconciled? To this, I reply as follows: I see romantic relationships as a kind of friendship relationship, indeed perhaps the highest and deepest kind of friendship relationship, and I think that there is a meaningful

distinction between a romantic relationship and a spousal relationship. A spousal relationship might exist even when there is no strong romantic sentiment on either side: the two partners might see their union as more contractual than emotional. Moreover, a romantic relationship might exist even when there is no spousal relationship, as in the case of a husband who is having a passionate affair with another woman while having a very cold and emotionally distant relationship with his actual spouse. Hence, there is no contradiction.

3.10. Application: Post-doubt and doubt

The arguments of this section allow us to formulate a new perspective on the category of post-doubt introduced in section 1.2.4.3. As noted earlier, this category refers to people who were raised in secular, post-religious cultures in which non-belief was natural and who see no good reason or need to believe in God. Moreover, such people don't seem to have deceived themselves into non-belief in support of a desire to avoid relationship with God – rather, non-belief is kind of a default they are born into. However, in this chapter, I have argued that genuine openness to personal relationship with God has six requirements - one must be able to (1) reciprocate God's love, (2) be willing to act and suffer for God's sake, (3) be willing to ally with God and oppose his enemies, (4) share the same values as God, (5) have a character compatible with God's and (6) be willing to give up the things that might get in the way of a relationship with God.

Now, let us take a closer look at some of these secular societies Schellenberg has in mind. Many of these societies underwent or are undergoing a sexual revolution, which brings with it a radically new set of values concerning interpersonal relationships, sex, dating, marriage and reproduction. For example, sex before and outside of marriage is common. Casual sex is no longer taboo. Sexualized images and scenes are increasingly common in advertising, books and movies. Contraception is widely practiced. Divorce is common.

Abortion is legal. Now suppose that the Roman Catholic Church is accurate in its claim that God disapproves of much (if not all) of these aspects of secular societies I just mentioned. If this is the case, then it seems that the people who live in these societies fail to satisfy criterion 4 mentioned earlier. The reason is that the people who live in these societies and indulge in such practices have a radically different set of values from God. One may hypothesize that if God and such humans were to come into contact with each other, there would be potential for conflict, since the two have very different perspectives on moral issues. Hence, it could be argued that even though such persons are not resistant to God in the narrow, Schellenbergian sense, they are indeed resistant to God in a broader sense.

Furthermore, suppose that many such persons are perfectly happy with the kind of life they lead and have no wish to give it up. If this is the case, then it is very possible they also fail criterion 6. Since such practices are disliked by God, to have a relationship with him, one must be willing to give up these things. But such persons might be unwilling to abandon these practices for the sake of God. In fact, they may find God's expectations overly restrictive, unfair and non-conducive to human happiness and flourishing³³. Hence, they may be said to resistant to God in the broader sense.

For these above reasons, God might justifiably hide himself from such persons. But there is yet another way to look at the matter. Take the example of casual sex. God might take the view that, when casual sex takes place, each party treats the other merely as a means to enhance their own pleasure. It may also be the case that this is not what God had in mind when he designed humans as sexual beings – he may have intended sex to be the means of expressing love and long-term commitment and making babies. If this is the case, God might take the view that persons who engage in casual sex are abusing the sexual act and abusing

³³ Whether they are correct in this assessment is, of course, a different matter.

each other. If so, God might take the view that such persons have a very shallow moral character.

Now, God is surely entitled to his opinion. This can hardly be denied, since we often accept that humans are entitled to hold their opinions, even when we disagree. But if God takes this view, he also has the freedom to act on it by withdrawing from such people. Once more, it doesn't seem we can justifiably deny God this right since we often accord this right to finite human persons. Take the example of vegans. Suppose that a person Joseph is a vegan – in other words, he disapproves of the practice of eating meat and views it as cruel and exploitative. Most people typically do not agree with Joseph's point of view on the matter. Nonetheless, people like Joseph are typically accorded the right to hold their views and even express them under certain conditions. Not only that, but they are also even allowed to (i) not buy products from companies that support or invest in factory farming of animals, (ii) abstain from eating animal products and (iii) if they wish, avoid having friendly relations with meat-eaters. Although many would see such actions as being extreme, they would agree that it is part of their freedom. If a human person has such rights, surely God has such rights as well. If we deny this, it leads to the preposterous conclusion that there are certain freedoms which finite persons enjoy which the infinite person – God – doesn't. And such a view does not seem plausible. Hence, if God dislikes certain practices of persons in post-religious cultures, he is entitled to avoid them and not enter intimate relations with them. This is part of his liberty as an autonomous being.

Once more, none of this implies that God does not love such persons. On the contrary, God's default disposition towards them is one of love and seeking intimacy. However, in his infinite knowledge, God knows that – given his opinion about their moral character, the disparity of values between him and them, the overall lack of compatibility of character and

their attachment to their way of life – any attempted intimate relationship would end in failure. It is simply not possible at this stage to have a sufficiently harmonious personal relationship, given the state of moral progress those persons are in. Hence, nothing in my argument implies that God is less than fully loving.

Similar comments could be made about those in the doubt category (although my comments will have to be brief for the sake of space). One might wish to believe in God and have a relationship with him, but one might still lack a sufficiently deep desire for union with God. One might have attachments to things God dislikes, and one might be prone to relational infidelity against God. Given these facts, God might choose to hide himself and not actualize a relationship.

3.11. De Re Approaches Again

I distinguish my approach here from *de re* approaches. Nothing in my argument requires one to take the view that morally imperfect or disordered humans have mental states that are *de re* about God. Even if they do have such mental states, such facts are irrelevant to my argument. Rather, the core thrust of my case is that – given certain facts about human nature – humans are prone to relational infidelity against God, and therefore God is entitled to not actualize a relationship with humans if he doesn't want to. To put it another way, the emphasis of this chapter has been on human *capacities* for successful divine-human relationships, or the lack thereof: I have argued that humans don't have what it takes to enter a fully harmonious relationship with God and it can be plausibly argued that such lack of capacity is their fault. Mental states about God do not enter the picture here.

3.12. *Is this argument different from the Argument(s) from Injustice?*

It might be asked: how are the arguments of this chapter different from the arguments formulated in chapter 2?

They are different from each other in important ways. Although both chapters appeal to the same feature (human moral corruption), they appeal to different considerations and tell different stories about (i) how human moral corruption manifests itself and (ii) how human moral corruption affects the world and God. They also give different reasons or justifications for God to hide – in chapter 2, it is the fact that God’s beloved has been wronged, and in chapter 3, it is the fact that humans would prove unfaithful in a potential divine-human relationship. Even if the two are always co-instantiated in the actual world (that is, even if human moral corruptions always manifests itself in both these ways), they are nonetheless distinct from each other.

A couple of other points are worth making here. There could be a world – distinct from the actual world – in which only one finite person exists. If so, there would not be injustice strictly speaking, but the finite person could still suffer from disordered attachments and imperfect moral character. Furthermore, nothing in the arguments of chapter 3 implies that God is victimized by human imperfect character or disordered attachments – although it is true that, given the human tendency to infidelity, God *would be* victimized if such a relationship were actualized.

Finally, the focus of chapter 2 is on human action whereas the focus of chapter 3 is on human character. The latter is a weightier notion than the former – it could be argued that flawed human character leads to unjust social actions. Thus, in some sense, chapter 3 taps into problems about humanity that are more fundamental than those discussed in chapter 2.

Chapter 4: Some important points

4.1. Interacting with Mark Murphy

Before proceeding, it is worth interacting briefly with the work of Mark Murphy whose account of divine holiness is noteworthy (see Murphy, 2021). I have briefly alluded to his work already. Interacting with his work is important because some of Murphy's claims are similar to the ones I have made in this thesis.

According to Murphy, a holy being is “one that objectively merits a dual response from another: to desire to be united to that (holy) individual while also being unfit for such a union” (Wessling, 2022, p. 289). He also argues that God should be conceived of as being absolutely holy and this entails being absolutely perfect – possessing “infinite and unqualified” perfection (Murphy, 2021, p. 46). Murphy then constructs a Holiness framework for divine action, arguing that it is superior to other frameworks, such as Morality or Love-based frameworks. This Holiness framework “claims that there are reasons for God to keep distance from creatures, and the more distance the more limited the creature is” (ibid., p. 120). He distinguishes between requiring and justifying reasons. A requiring reason is a reason to ϕ that an agent A rationally must act on in the absence of adequate considerations to the contrary, whereas a justifying reason to ϕ is one that A rationally may act on in the absence of sufficient considerations to the contrary (ibid., p. 110). This distinction allows Murphy to make the following claim – to quote reviewer Jordan Wessling's summary of his work, Murphy holds that: “Since God is absolutely holy, God has requiring reasons [...] to keep his distance and only justifying reasons to enter into various kinds of intimate union with us [...] God has requiring reasons not to create, to act within our world to shield us from suffering, and not to make himself known. That God does all these things is gracious acts of love that go against his default setting” (Wessling, 2022, pp. 290-291).

There are some similarities between Murphy's account and some of the arguments I have made in this thesis. Firstly, although I have not utilized the motif of divine holiness, I have argued for that God must exemplify various degrees of Goodness. I also agree with Murphy that God must be maximally perfect. Secondly, I too argue that it is unreasonable for us to expect God to always disclose himself. I even claim that there are good reasons for God to hide himself. However, with this, the similarities end and there are important differences in how Murphy would respond to Schellenberg and how I do.

Firstly, I would like to point out that there is a subtle but weighty distinction between saying "God is *not obliged* to disclose himself" and "God is *obliged to not* disclose himself". The latter is a much stronger claim than the former. Neither of my arguments require commitment to this claim. Rather, I merely make the more moderate former claim³⁴. However, Murphy – without saying that God must never disclose himself to lowly humans – does seem to lean in a stronger direction than I do. He taps into the fact that God and humans have a vast difference in status and, therefore, it is in some sense beneath God's dignity to enter intimate relations with humans *unless* he has justifying reasons to do so. This is not a claim I endorse in this thesis. Nor do I argue that the default setting (as Wessling puts it) of God is to be aloof from humans. On the contrary, I can be read as saying the opposite: my arguments imply that the default setting of God towards humans is that of seeking personal relationships, but God has justifying reasons to be aloof given human sin. Thus, my account of God is closer to Schellenberg's than Murphy's in this regard.

³⁴ I anticipate Schellenberg responding by saying that his claim is not that God is under some sort of divine obligation to disclose himself but rather that – if God is unsurpassably loving – he would disclose himself. But I can modify my hypothesis accordingly to accommodate this. I could say, for example, that my argument is 'Give human sin, God might or might not disclose himself'. This is a less deontological rendering of my central claim.

Furthermore, my arguments do not at all rely on the fact that humans and God have different status. Rather, my arguments focus on the phenomenon of human sin. Whereas Murphy argues that the reason God is not obliged to disclose himself is because of the difference in status between God and humans, my argument is that the reason God is not so obliged is because of human sin. In other words, Murphy's reason for any divine hiding is ontological, whereas I do not appeal to human creatureliness but rather human sinfulness. My arguments imply that – if humans were truly non-resistant in the relevant sense – God would certainly disclose himself. Murphy, however, would dispute even this.

My differences with Murphy also help to highlight just how much of Schellenberg's case and framework I am willing to accept. I do not question much of his claims about the divine nature, unlike Murphy who introduces an entirely new framework. My approach, it must be remembered, is a sin-based approach, not a divine-holiness-based approach.

4.2. Why would God reveal himself at all?

An objector might ask: if my arguments are sound, all humans resist God in some way. Do my arguments imply that God would never disclose himself? And if so, why to some and not others?

Nothing in my arguments imply that God would not reveal himself – I only quibble with Schellenberg's claim that there are some who are non-resistant non-believers. If God were to reveal himself, this would be *despite* their resistance not because of their non-resistance.

Secondly, I suggest that if there is a person *P* who is resisting God, God has good reasons to not reveal himself but also good reasons to reveal himself. A good reason to not reveal himself is obvious: this person is resisting him. But a good reason to reveal himself

would be that, in doing so, God manifests extravagant grace and love³⁵. I further suggest that these reasons might be fifty-fifty, in that neither reason outweighs the other in terms of weight. In this situation, God has no choice but to exercise his libertarian freedom, since neither alternative is obviously better than the other and there is no third alternative³⁶. This is a plausible way of interpreting the doctrine of election, but I don't have space to develop this point further.

³⁵ I allude to this briefly in the Becky analogy in section 3.9.

³⁶ To reveal or to not-reveal is a logically exhaustive disjunction.

Conclusion

In this thesis, I have introduced two strands of argument against Schellenberg's premise that there are non-resistant non-believers. In this final section, I want to tie the threads together, propose an improved definition of non-resistance to relationship with God and note avenues of potential future research and investigation.

I would like to suggest a new definition of non-resistant non-believer:

Non-resistant non-believer: A person *S* is a non-resistant non-believer iff (1) *S* is properly disposed to relationship with God and (2) *S* fails to believe in God.

A properly disposed person is a person (1) who would not commit injustice against fellow humans if he could help it and (2) is disposed to value relationship with God above everything else³⁷ which implies (i) he is free of disordered loves attachments and (ii) has a moral character that renders him relationally compatible with God. Understood this way, it could easily be argued that no human person – falling into the pre-doubt, doubt or post-doubt categories – is truly non-resistant to relationship with God.

This allows me to deliver a powerful rebuttal to Schellenberg's premise that there are non-resistant non-believers. As noted in chapter 1, Schellenberg gives various examples of people he considers to be non-resistant. But if this is the correct way to understand non-resistance, hardly anyone can be found who is truly non-resistant to God in this deeper, more robust sense. And if this is the kind of non-resistance God is interested in, he can hardly be faulted for hiding himself from some persons if he so chooses.

³⁷ To say that *S* is disposed to value relationship with God above everything else means that, if *S* was familiar with the God-concept and believed that such a being existed, he would value relationship with such a being over everything else.

Thirdly, I note some important avenues of further research and investigation. For space-related reasons, I have been unable to touch upon many of these topics, but a future project could pursue these further.

- 1) The second point in section 4.2 is worth developing in future work. It is generally accepted that in romantic relationships and friendships, humans to a certain extent have the right to discriminate – we pick the friends we like and form our cliques, and sometimes the reason we like someone as opposed to another is rooted in non-rational factors. To what extent can God be said to have a similar right to discriminate? These themes can be used to develop the doctrine of election.
- 2) In section 3.7, I raised a point that - in footnote 32 – I titled a skeptical point. Suppose we go by Schellenberg's definition of non-resistant non-believer as laid out in chapter 1. The problem can be laid out as follows: if someone is self-deceiving himself/herself, to what extent would an outside observer be able to tell? Schellenberg claims that there are large groups of people who haven't deceived themselves into non-belief, but it is not clear how such a judgment can be made. It is plausible to suppose that persons who are self-deceived aren't aware of this fact. If the self-deceived cannot themselves tell that they are self-deceived, to what extent can an outside observer make this judgment? Furthermore, Timothy Williamson has argued that we don't necessarily have privileged access to our own mental states – if so, this strengthens my point. Could a skeptical style argument be made using Stephen Wykstra's CORNEA principle, arguing that even if people were self-deceived, we wouldn't be able to tell and therefore our supposition that they are not self-deceived is unwarranted?

This thesis, as the title suggests, has been about divine hiddenness and non-resistant non-belief. I have explored J.L. Schellenberg's divine hiddenness argument against the existence of God, particularly his premise that there are non-resistant non-believers. I have critiqued this premise over the course of this thesis, and I hope I have shown that – although it is often taken for granted in the literature – it is far from unassailable. Most – perhaps all – humans resist God in some way, and it can be argued that perhaps no one is a non-resistant non-believer. A loving God may hide from such sinful humans. Although Schellenberg's argument is interesting and innovative, I suggest it fails for these reasons.

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