

**THE “GREATER GOODS” RESPONSE TO THE
ARGUMENT FROM DIVINE HIDDENNESS**

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Declaration of Authorship

I hereby certify that the thesis I am submitting is my own original work, except where otherwise indicated. No proper part of this thesis has been submitted, or is currently being submitted, for any degree, diploma, certificate, or other qualification in this University or elsewhere.

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Abstract

Arguments from divine hiddenness attempt to demonstrate that the apparent hiddenness of God is a reason for thinking God does not exist. One of the most prominent arguments from divine hiddenness maintains that if God existed He would do what He could to ensure that all persons have access to conscious personal relationship with Him. But since such relationship is impossible for those who do not believe God exists, God would ensure that everyone has evidence sufficient to believe that He exists. That there are people who do not believe God exists due only to a lack of evidence is therefore a reason for thinking that God does not exist. One of the most prominent ways to respond to this kind of argument from divine hiddenness is to maintain that God withholds evidence of Himself in order to bring about some greater good or another.

But there are a few challenges facing these “greater goods” responses. First, some proposed greater goods benefit only someone other than the nonbeliever; one might argue that God would not withhold evidence sufficient for belief from one person entirely for the benefit of another person. Second, some proposed greater goods presuppose libertarian free will; but it has been argued that God would not allow such free will due to the great evil it brings about. Third, if a conscious personal relationship with God is greater than *all other goods* we might wonder how there could be goods for the sake of which God would be willing to withhold such relationship from some people. Finally, if God is infinitely resourceful and if all goods come from God, it is somewhat puzzling how there could be goods which preclude conscious personal relationship with God. In this thesis I aim to address these challenges to greater goods responses to the hiddenness argument.

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Introduction

It's *prima facie* plausible that, if God exists, His existence is not obvious to everyone. But, if God *wants* everyone to believe that He exists, as we might suppose, it should *surprise* us that some people do not find His existence obvious. Recently, the challenge of explaining this apparent tension (and other similar problems) has come to be called the "Problem of Divine Hiddenness". But this term is somewhat ambiguous; there are at least three different *families* of problems one might refer to with that term.

First, there is a family of *experiential* or *existential* problems which might be called problems of divine hiddenness. Some who believe in God desire to experience His *presence*, but feel as though God has withdrawn Himself from them. This problem may be intensified when believers are in the middle of terrible *suffering* and yet feel as though God remains absent throughout that suffering.¹ There might also be an existential problem for nonbelievers who *want* to believe and yet find that God does not reveal His existence to them. These existential problems plausibly remain even if we can find some plausible explanation of *why* God might withdraw His presence or withhold knowledge of His existence.

Second, there is a family of *theological* problems which might also be called problems of divine hiddenness. Even if it will not provide much comfort to the one who suffers the existential problem, we might want to understand *why* God would withdraw His presence from believers – and, in particular, from believers who are suffering. And we might want to understand *why* God withholds knowledge of Himself from nonbelievers who want to believe.² There is also quite a different sort of theological problem which

¹ See Yujin Nagasawa, "Silence, Evil, and Shusaku Endo," in Eleonore Stump and Adam Green (eds.), *Hidden Divinity and Religious Beliefs: New Perspectives* (Cambridge University Press, 2016) 246-259.

² Plausibly, in setting aside the possibility that God does not exist as an explanation, we can assume that it is a *theological* problem Robert McKim considers in his "The Hiddenness of God," *Religious Studies* 26(1) (1990) 143.

might be referred to as a problem of divine hiddenness; if God is completely transcendent, how is it that we are supposed to relate to Him at all?³

But the “problems of divine hiddenness” I am concerned with belong to a “family of *arguments for atheism*.”⁴ The term “problem of divine hiddenness” is somewhat deceptive when referring to arguments for atheism. “Divine hiddenness” seems to imply that God exists and hides, but obviously those offering an argument from atheism will deny that God exists.⁵ Roughly, what these arguments really try to demonstrate is that some phenomenon of *nonbelief* in God’s existence gives us a reason for thinking that God does not exist. There is an important distinction between the theological problems of divine hiddenness discussed above and these arguments for atheism. Both families of problems attempt to explain (some phenomena associated with) the apparent hiddenness of God, but the arguments for atheism take the nonexistence of God to be the solution to the problem, while those concerned with the theological problem take God’s existence as assumed.

Throughout the following chapters I aim to address a particular *subset* of the arguments for atheism from divine hiddenness. While I will state more precisely which arguments I am concerned with in chapter I, my primary interlocutor throughout will be J.L. Schellenberg.⁶ Very roughly, Schellenberg’s “hiddenness argument” claims that God would ensure that every human *capable* of a conscious personal relationship with Him has *access* to a conscious personal relationship with Him. But since one cannot have a conscious personal relationship with God unless one *believes* that God exists, and since

³ See Jerome Gellman, “The Hidden God of the Jews: Hegel, Reb Nachman, and the *Aqedah*,” in Eleonore Stump and Adam Green (eds.), *Hidden Divinity and Religious Beliefs: New Perspectives* (Cambridge University Press, 2016) 175-191. A similar sort of question is addressed by David B. Burrell, *Knowing the Unknowable God* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1986).

⁴ This phrasing comes from Klaas J. Kraay’s “The Problem of Divine Hiddenness,” *Oxford Bibliographies*, 2013.

⁵ Kraay also makes this point.

⁶ I discuss his arguments in much more depth in chapter I.

God would have the power to *ensure* that everyone has access to evidence sufficient to believe that He exists, the fact that there are people who *do not* believe that God exists due only to a lack of evidence (“nonresistant nonbelievers”) constitutes a reason for thinking that an all-loving God does not exist. I will discuss Schellenberg’s argument in much greater depth in chapter I.

I endorse a particular kind of reply to these arguments which I call “greater goods responses” (though I do not offer a full defense). Speaking generally, these sorts of responses argue that God might allow some hiddenness phenomena (such as nonresistant nonbelief) for the sake of bringing about some *good* or set of goods. A brief overview of the literature suggests that this is one of the most common kinds of responses to make.⁷ But there are a number of objections to and challenges for the strategy of offering a greater goods response to these arguments. My aim in this thesis is to address and respond to what I take to be the most pressing of these challenges and objections. Thus far, the challenges and objections I discuss have gone mostly unaddressed in the literature.

One of the most pressing objections I address I call the problem of “no greater goods”. Defenders of hiddenness arguments may reject greater goods responses in principle, arguing that, since a conscious personal relationship with God would be *unsurpassably great*, not even a set of many goods could justify God in withholding the possibility of such a relationship from someone. No less of a challenge than the problem of no greater goods is what I call the “general” *accommodation strategy*. While “particular” accommodation strategies are utilized by critics of greater goods responses to demonstrate that the *particular* goods proposed in the literature do not require God to allow nonresistant nonbelief, there are also *general* accommodation strategies. These are

⁷ For an extensive, though now out of date, annotated bibliography of the literature see Kraay (2013). For a slightly more up to date overview see Daniel Howard-Snyder and Adam Green, “Hiddenness of God” in Edward N. Zalta (ed.), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2016) URL = <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2016/entries/divine-hiddenness/>>.

attempts by defenders of hiddenness arguments to argue that if God exists then we should expect *every* good to be accessible *within* the context of a conscious personal relationship with God, and so for this reason there should be *no goods* for the sake of which God would be willing to sacrifice such a relationship – and thus no reason for God to allow nonresistant nonbelief. One might argue, for example, that since all goods would be *in God* if God existed, a conscious personal relationship with God would not preclude any goods.

The problems of accommodation and no greater goods are objections which aim to demonstrate that greater goods responses *in general* must fail. But I also address a couple of challenges which would restrict which sorts of goods could count as part of the reason for God to allow nonresistant nonbelief. The first of these “restricting” challenges maintains that God could be justified in allowing some person P to be a nonresistant nonbeliever for the sake of some good G *only if* G in some way benefits P *in particular*, not just someone else. The second “restricting” challenge to greater goods responses I address is whether greater goods responses which involve *incompatibilist* free will must fail in principle *because* they involve such free will. Schellenberg for example argues that, because of the evil that is brought about by incompatibilist free will, God would not allow such free will in the first place. And so if God is not justified in creating humans with incompatibilist free will, then God would not be justified in allowing nonresistant nonbelief for the sake of goods involving such free will.

Ultimately my aim in this thesis is to address each of these objections against and challenges to greater goods responses to hiddenness arguments. I argue that the accommodation strategy and the problem of no greater goods *do not* demonstrate that greater goods responses to hiddenness arguments must fail in principle. I argue that goods which benefit only someone *other than* the nonresistant nonbeliever must not be considered irrelevant to greater goods responses *just by virtue* of only benefitting someone

other than the nonresistant nonbeliever. And I argue that greater goods responses which somehow rely on incompatibilist free will are not unacceptable as part of a defense against hiddenness arguments *just by virtue* of relying on incompatibilist free will.

I want to be very clear that my goal is *not* to provide a defense against hiddenness (much less a theodicy). That is, what I say *is not* intended to demonstrate that the arguments for atheism I address are unsound. Instead, what I offer might be considered a defense of the *strategy* of offering a greater goods defense against a particular set of arguments for atheism from divine hiddenness. Given that these objections to and challenges for greater goods responses have gone unaddressed in the literature, it is at best *uncertain* whether the *actual* greater goods responses offered in the literature can (even theoretically) give us good reason for thinking that any hiddenness arguments are unsound. It is for this reason that I aim to address these objections and problems. But what I conclude will fall short of a defense, and thus fall short of demonstrating that any hiddenness argument is unsound.

Before proceeding, there are a few notes and clarifications to make. First, the subset of arguments for atheism I address may very well have corresponding *theological* problems. It seems theoretically possible that one could demonstrate that some argument for atheism from hiddenness is unsound, and yet there may still be a related *theological* problem which remains unsolved. For example, suppose one, in arguing for atheism, suggests that since we can think of no good reason for God to allow anyone to be a nonbeliever, the existence of nonbelievers gives us a reason to conclude that God does not exist. In response one might argue that we cannot conclude that God has no good reason to allow nonbelief *just on the basis* that such reasons are not apparent to us humans.⁸ Setting

⁸ This is an example of a kind of “skeptical theist” response. For some discussion of skeptical theism in the context of arguments from divine hiddenness, see Michael Bergmann’s “Skeptical Theism and the Problem of Evil” in Thomas P. Flint & Michael C. Rea (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophical Theology* (Oxford

aside nuance and further complexities for sake of argument, suppose that this objection successfully demonstrates that *this particular* argument for atheism from nonbelief is unsound. In such a case the theologian may *nevertheless* want to know *why* God allows nonbelief. And so it seems at least theoretically possible that a solution to an atheistic argument from hiddenness will not necessarily provide a satisfying answer to any corresponding theological problems. Given that I am concerned with the arguments for atheism *themselves* I will not directly address any corresponding theological problems. My silence about such problems *does not* indicate that I think they are not legitimately difficult problems which may remain even if the corresponding arguments for atheism are deemed unsound. But since my project falls short of offering even a *defense*, it is well outside the bounds of this thesis to offer anything which illuminates related theological problems.

Second I want to make a note about normative theories. Much of what I say is relevant in ethics and value theory more generally. I do not assume any particular position within consequentialism, deontology, *or* virtue ethics. As often as possible I try to work with intuitions which can be *shared* between differing normative positions. Occasionally I will take seriously objections to my arguments which would dissolve if a particular normative theory turned out to be right. For example, if utilitarianism turned out to be right, then plausibly (assuming there were sufficiently valuable goods) it would be *easy* to see that God could be justified in allowing nonresistant nonbelief for the sake of goods which benefited only people *other than* the nonresistant nonbeliever. But ultimately the account I offer in this thesis to address the various objections and challenges will, as much as feasible, remain *neutral* with regards to normative theories.

University Press, 2008) 374-399. See also Justin P. McBrayer and Philip Swenson, "Scepticism about the Argument from Divine Hiddenness," *Religious Studies* 48(2) (2012) 129-150.

Third, it will become apparent that my strategy for addressing these objections and challenges *may plausibly* commit one to holding to certain views about eschatology. I address eschatology in chapter V, where I try to argue that my strategy is compatible with a relatively diverse range of eschatological views. But now with these clarifications discussed, I proceed in chapter I to discuss arguments from divine hiddenness and the various replies.

Chapter I The Hiddenness Argument

1 Introduction

As discussed, “the problem of divine hiddenness” refers to a variety of related issues. I will focus only on a subset of the *arguments for atheism* one might name with that term. In the first half of this chapter, I intend to outline which arguments will be relevant to the rest of my discussion. While most of what I say directly responds to work by J.L. Schellenberg and his version of the “hiddenness argument”, I suspect that much of it will also be relevant to other arguments from hiddenness.⁹ In the second half of this chapter I discuss the various replies available to critics of the hiddenness argument. Some of these have received wide attention in the literature, while others have received little to no attention. I will highlight the importance of one particular class of responses, members of which I call “greater goods responses”. I argue that most *other* responses are either *implausible* without support from greater goods considerations or are made *more* plausible with support from greater goods considerations.

2 Arguments from Divine Hiddenness

I begin by discussing the basic structure shared by all deductive arguments from divine hiddenness, and then explain how that structure differs in inductive arguments from hiddenness. After that I will discuss many of the possible variations hiddenness arguments can have, primarily focusing on the actual arguments from hiddenness that have been proposed in the literature. Once all this is laid out, I will specify roughly which set of arguments I take to be the primary focus of the rest of my project.

⁹ I use the terms “argument from divine hiddenness” and “hiddenness argument” interchangeably.

The simplest version of a deductive argument from divine hiddenness might be formulated in the following way:

IP: If God exists, then nonbelief does not occur.

EP: Nonbelief occurs.

Therefore,

C: God does not exist.

Call this the “simple argument”. This argument is probably much too simple to be sound, and no one has proposed such a simple version of the hiddenness argument. But it demonstrates the basic structure that all deductive arguments from hiddenness have at their core. IP is the simple argument’s “incompatibility premise”. Incompatibility premises identify two states of affairs which are supposed to be incompatible. In all deductive arguments from hiddenness, the two supposed states of affairs must be, first, the existence of God (on some conception¹⁰) and, second, what I will call a “nonbelief phenomenon”. Nonbelief phenomena include patterns of nonbelief¹¹ as well as different *kinds* of nonbelief which might be had by individual persons.¹² EP is the simple argument’s “existential premise”. Existential premises state that the nonbelief phenomenon specified in the incompatibility premise occurs. From this, all deductive arguments from hiddenness conclude that God (according to the conception of God indicated by the incompatibility premise) does not exist.

Inductive arguments from hiddenness follow a similar pattern, but differ from the deductive pattern above in at least one of the following ways.¹³ Some inductive arguments from hiddenness, in place of an incompatibility premise, have an “improbability premise”. Improbability premises state that the existence of some nonbelief phenomenon makes

¹⁰ Sometimes the conception is very broad (eg. “anything which might fittingly be called ‘God’”). Sometimes the conception is narrower (eg. “the God of Christianity”).

¹¹ Such as the geographic or temporal distribution of nonbelief.

¹² Such as nonresistant nonbelief or reasonable nonbelief.

¹³ Schellenberg originally suggested that his argument from hiddenness could be reformatted as an inductive argument in *Divine Hiddenness and Human Reason* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993) 9.

some variety of theism *less likely*. Improbability premises may make even bolder claims than this, but they are *at least* this bold. Some inductive arguments from hiddenness, in place of an existential premise, may have a “probability premise”, which states that the nonbelief phenomenon in question *probably* exists. And so there are at least three basic models for inductive arguments from hiddenness, since it is surely possible to have an inductive argument from hiddenness with *both* an improbability premise *and* a probability premise. Depending on which adjustments are made the conclusion will have to be adjusted accordingly.

So, taking into account deductive and inductive arguments, we can see that there are already a few different arguments from divine hiddenness one could make. The number of potential arguments from divine hiddenness increases when we take into account the two variables in the basic structure of hiddenness arguments. Arguments from divine hiddenness can vary with regards to which conception of God is under consideration, and which nonbelief phenomenon is under consideration.

Proponents of arguments from hiddenness have taken as their target at least a couple of different conceptions of God.¹⁴ J.L. Schellenberg initially defined God as “unsurpassably great” – which he takes to mean (at least) ultimate¹⁵, personal¹⁶, omnipotent, omniscient, perfectly good, and (most importantly) *perfectly-loving*.¹⁷ Theodore Drange argues specifically against the *Christian God*, basing his conception of God on descriptions of God and His purposes found in both the Old and New Testaments

¹⁴ Though some of these differing conceptions of God may be compatible with each other.

¹⁵ On Schellenberg’s understanding, God is ultimate only if He is “the source or ground of all existence other than his own, to whom nothing stands as a ground of existence.”

¹⁶ On Schellenberg’s understanding, God is personal only if “agential, intellectual, and affective qualities may appropriately be predicated” of Him.

¹⁷ Schellenberg (1993) 10.

of the Bible.¹⁸ Others have considered¹⁹ arguments from hiddenness regarding God as understood by Islam,²⁰ Judaism,²¹ and various eastern religions.²²

Proponents of arguments from hiddenness have also identified several *nonbelief phenomena* as problematic sorts. Drange takes nonbelief *simpliciter* as the sort of thing the Christian God would eliminate as far as He could. Schellenberg initially identified *reasonable* or *inculpable* nonbelief as incompatible with the existence of a perfectly-loving God, but later clarified this as *nonresistant* nonbelief.²³ Jason Marsh points to *natural* nonbelief – the sort of nonbelief had by humans prior to the advent of monotheistic religion²⁴ – and Stephen Maitzen argues that the uneven geographic *distribution* of nonbelief is evidence for atheism.²⁵

Given these variables, as well as the various deductive and inductive forms discussed above, quite a number of potential arguments from divine hiddenness can be generated. And there are no doubt others which have not yet been proposed in the literature. The number of potential arguments further increases when we consider that *most* arguments can be altered to take the *amount* of a particular kind of nonbelief to be the problematic phenomenon, rather than the mere occurrence of that kind of nonbelief. Not all of these potential arguments from hiddenness will enjoy even *prima facie* plausibility,

¹⁸ Theodore Drange, "The Argument from Non-Belief," *Religious Studies* 29 (1993) 417. See also his *Nonbelief and Evil*, Prometheus Books, 1998.

¹⁹ In all of the following cases, the authors consider hiddenness arguments which had not been previously defended, but they do not *endorse* those arguments

²⁰ See Jon McGinnis, "The Hiddenness of "Divine Hiddenness": Divine Love in Medieval Islamic Lands," in Eleonore Stump and Adam Green (eds.), *Hidden Divinity and Religious Beliefs: New Perspectives* (Cambridge University Press, 2016) 157-174.

²¹ See Jerome Gellman, "The Hidden God of the Jews: Hegel, Reb Nachman, and the *Aqedah*," in Eleonore Stump and Adam Green (eds.), *Hidden Divinity and Religious Beliefs: New Perspectives* (Cambridge University Press, 2016) 175-191.

²² See N.N. Trakakis, "The Hidden Divinity and What It Reveals," in Eleonore Stump and Adam Green (eds.), *Hidden Divinity and Religious Beliefs: New Perspectives* (Cambridge University Press, 2016) 192-209.

²³ J.L. Schellenberg, *The Wisdom to Doubt: A Justification of Religious Skepticism* (Cornell University Press, 2007) 205.

²⁴ Jason Marsh, "Darwin and the Problem of Natural Nonbelief," *The Monist* 96 (2013) 349-376.

²⁵ Stephen Maitzen, "Divine Hiddenness and the Demographics of Theism," *Religious Studies* 42 (2006) 177-191.

but many of them may. And plausibly, a compelling response to one argument from hiddenness will not always constitute a compelling response to other arguments from hiddenness. So it will be important to try to outline roughly which set of arguments from divine hiddenness I will take as the focus of my project.

My expectations about the relevance of this project for the various kinds of arguments from divine hiddenness fall into three categories. Category 1 arguments are deductive arguments involving the Christian God or God conceived as “unsurpassably great” (ultimate, personal, all-powerful, all-knowing, perfectly good, and perfectly loving), and which address nonresistant nonbelief, or the *amount* of nonresistant nonbelief. I expect my project to have direct relevance to category 1 arguments, and I directly address these arguments. For simplicity, hereafter I will use the terms “arguments from divine hiddenness” and “hiddenness arguments” to refer to category 1 arguments. Whenever I make reference to arguments in other categories, I will make it clear that I am doing so.²⁶

Category 2 arguments are inductive versions of otherwise category 1 arguments. I expect my project to be at least indirectly – and perhaps directly – relevant to category 2 arguments, but I do not directly *address* these arguments. Category 3 arguments include (but not exhaustively) arguments from natural nonbelief, arguments from the uneven distribution of belief, etc., as well as arguments against any conceptions of God incompatible with the Christian God. I address these arguments only when insights from discussion of these arguments in the literature prove illuminating to my discussion of category 1 arguments. Otherwise, I will leave to the side the task of applying what I have to say to these arguments.

²⁶ I will say, for example, “the argument from natural nonbelief” to refer to the argument defended by Jason Marsh.

3 The Argument from Nonresistant Nonbelief

The version of the argument from divine hiddenness I want to primarily consider was proposed by J.L. Schellenberg, who continues to be its primary defender. Here is the core argument:²⁷

1. If God exists, then there are no nonresistant nonbelievers.
2. There are nonresistant nonbelievers.²⁸

Therefore,

3. God does not exist.

Premise 1 is this argument's incompatibility premise, while premise 2 is its existential premise. The first thing to note is that Schellenberg does not specify which conception of God concerns him – he states that his argument should apply to *anything* which would be deserving of the name “God”.²⁹ As I noted above, the conception of God I will concern myself with is that of the Christian God, or of God conceived as unsurpassably great.³⁰ So if it turns out that the argument is unsound, but due to a consideration which does not apply to the conception of God in which I'm interested, then I will not appeal to such a consideration.³¹

The second thing to note is that it is *nonresistant* nonbelief which Schellenberg takes as the problematic sort. Initially Schellenberg used the terms *reasonable* nonbelief³² and *inculpable* nonbelief.³³ Later, he clarified reasonable/inculpable nonbelief as *one*

²⁷ Schellenberg never actually presents an argument precisely like this one. I take it as my base argument since something roughly like it is at the core of each of Schellenberg's formulations of the argument. As will be seen, what I take to be the definition of “nonresistant nonbeliever” makes each premise and the conclusion of this argument logically equivalent to the premises and the conclusion of the core argument as presented in *The Wisdom to Doubt*. For ease of reference, I prefer the simpler form presented here.

²⁸ I will treat the phrase “God is hidden” as synonymous with the phrase “there are nonresistant nonbelievers.”

²⁹ His arguments almost certainly do not apply to lesser gods of polytheistic religions, such as Zeus or Thor, who are more like super humans than they are like God as conceived by the major monotheistic religions.

³⁰ I take these two conceptions of God to be compatible.

³¹ For example, it might turn out that the argument is unsound if it turns out that there is a coherent conception of God as entirely unloving. The reason I would ignore such a consideration is that, plausibly, one could simply revise the argument to *specifically* target God conceived as loving.

³² Schellenberg (1993) 83.

³³ Ibid 59.

species of a broader kind of nonbelief he calls “nonresistant”.³⁴ Taking cues from Schellenberg’s argument as presented in *The Wisdom to Doubt*, I stipulate a “nonresistant nonbeliever” as a person who is (i) not resisting God and (ii) capable of meaningful conscious relationship with God, and yet who does not (iii) believe that God exists.³⁵ A few of the terms in this stipulated definition should be further analyzed.

Consider first the phrase “capable of meaningful conscious relationship with God”. Schellenberg intends “meaningful conscious relationship” to be understood as we do in ordinary contexts. He states that a personal relationship with God is a “conscious, interactive, and positively meaningful relationship”.³⁶ One is “incapable” of this if, for example, one lacks the cognitive capacities for engaging in such a relationship. It is possible that there are other ways one might be incapable of engaging in such a relationship, but it seems the primary reason Schellenberg adds this qualifier is to grant that babies – for example – do not count as nonresistant nonbelievers, and so their sort of nonbelief is not incompatible with the existence of God.

Consider next what it means to *resist* God. Schellenberg explains this in a bit more detail in *The Hiddenness Argument*. He clarifies that the sort of resistance he is talking about has at least two qualities. First, it includes a desire component; I count as resistant only if I have some desire incompatible with being in relationship with God. I need not explicitly desire not to be in relationship with God; it is enough that I desire to be in some state which is *incompatible* with being in relationship with God.³⁷ The second quality Schellenberg’s notion of resistance must have is that it must be causally connected with that person’s nonbelief. Schellenberg writes that one only counts as a “resistant” nonbeliever in the relevant sense if one is a nonbeliever *because* of one’s resistance. So,

³⁴ This is clarified by a note in Schellenberg (2007) 205.

³⁵ Ibid 206.

³⁶ J.L. Schellenberg, *The Hiddenness Argument* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015) 38.

³⁷ Ibid 55.

for example, one might be a resistant nonbeliever if, due to a desire incompatible with a relationship with God, one suppresses positive evidence about God's existence, or seeks out evidence against God's existence, or visits a hypnotist to suppress belief, etc. And so a nonresistant nonbeliever is one who does not believe that God exists, but due to none of these (or similar) factors. A nonresistant nonbeliever, it is important to point out, *may* have some resistant desires or even tendencies. But so long as these desires and tendencies do not *cause* one's nonbelief, one can still be considered a nonresistant nonbeliever.

With all this in mind, the argument we're working with from above could be redrafted in the following way:³⁸

- 1'. If God exists, anyone who is (i) not resisting God and (ii) capable of meaningful conscious relationship with God also (iii) believes that God exists.
 - 2'. There are people who are (i) not resisting God and (ii) capable of meaningful conscious relationship with God *without* also (iii) believing that God exists.
- Therefore,
- 3'. God does not exist.

Because of how we are defining "nonresistant nonbeliever", the premises (and conclusion) in this argument are equivalent to the premises (and conclusion) in the argument I offered above. Premise 1' says essentially the same thing as premise 1, and the same is true for 2' and 2, as well as the conclusions in 3' and 3. For simplicity, from here on, I will primarily reference the simpler argument above, referencing further details where appropriate. But it is important to see that what that argument *means* is more explicitly expressed by this more complex argument.

I will refer to the argument from 1 and 2 to 3 as Schellenberg's *strict* deductive argument from divine hiddenness. This argument states in the incompatibility premise that God's existence is incompatible with *any* nonresistant nonbelief. On the strict argument, if one person is a nonresistant believer for even one second, then God does not exist. But

³⁸ This argument is now very similar to the core argument presented by Schellenberg (2007) 204-206.

even if one can demonstrate that God might allow a single person to be a nonresistant nonbeliever for just one second, we might still think that there is *some* amount or duration of nonresistant nonbelief that God would not allow. And one might defend something like the following argument:

1*. If God exists, then there is not *too much* nonresistant nonbelief.

2*. There is too much nonresistant nonbelief.

Therefore,

3*. God does not exist.

One offering such an argument might attempt to fill in more precisely how much is “too much” nonresistant nonbelief, but for my purposes this will do. Call any deductive argument which allows that nonresistant nonbelief is not *strictly* incompatible with God’s existence, but which identifies some *amount* of nonresistant nonbelief as incompatible with God’s existence, a *quantitative* deductive argument from hiddenness.³⁹ Some of what I say will have relevance to arguments such as these.

3.1 Support for the First Premise

As will be seen shortly, premise 1 is more contentious than premise 2. Schellenberg’s argument in support of 1 has undergone slight changes since his original defense of the hiddenness argument. Here is one version of his argument in support of 1.⁴⁰

4. If God exists, then everyone who is (i) capable of a conscious personal relationship with God, and (ii) is not resisting God, is in a position to enter into such a relationship (able to do so just by trying).
5. Anyone who is in a position to enter into a conscious personal relationship with God believes that God exists.⁴¹
6. If God exists, then anyone who is (i) not resisting God and (ii) capable of a conscious personal relationship with God also (iii) believes that God exists.

And 6, based on definitions from above, is equivalent to:

³⁹ Notably, this will *not* include arguments which appeal to certain *patterns* of nonbelief, such as those which appeal to the uneven geographical or temporal *distribution* of nonbelief.

⁴⁰ Adapted from the argument presented by Schellenberg (2007) 204.

⁴¹ As some critics have pointed out, this premise is ambiguous. One might (for example) have a *de re* belief that God exists, but not a *de dicto* belief that God exists. I discuss this in more depth below.

1. If God exists, then there are no nonresistant nonbelievers.

While some of the details have changed since his original defence, in essence Schellenberg's defence of 1 is, and always has been, that God would do whatever He could to ensure that His creatures have access to a positive and meaningful personal relationship with Him, but such a personal relationship requires that one believes that God exists.

Let's consider premise 5. Schellenberg stipulates that "a conscious [personal] relationship is one you recognize yourself to be in."⁴² This still leaves it vague whether (in order to have a conscious personal relationship) one must recognize *who* one is in a relationship with, or whether one must merely recognize that one is in a relationship with *someone*. If one might have a conscious personal relationship with *God* and yet not recognize that it is *God* one has a relationship with, then it is not obvious why one must believe that God exists in order to have a conscious personal relationship with Him.⁴³ That is, if one might have a conscious personal relationship with God and yet not recognize that it is God one has a relationship with, then it is not obvious why we should think premise 5 is true.

But it seems plausible that Schellenberg intends premise 5 to simply follow from a stipulated definition of "conscious personal relationship". In response to an attempt to deny premise 5, Schellenberg writes, "One can't solve the hiddenness problem just by noting that the terms it employs and to which it gives certain senses can be used in different senses."⁴⁴ The term he claims has been taken in the wrong *sense* is "conscious personal relationship". So plausibly Schellenberg intends to *stipulate* that premise 5 simply follows from what he means by "conscious personal relationship". If premise 5 *does*

⁴² J.L. Schellenberg (2015) 59.

⁴³ Some might find the possibility of having a relationship like this unintuitive. I discuss arguments that such relationships are possible later this chapter.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

simply follow from a stipulated definition, then, to deny premise 1 of the core argument, one must deny premise 4.

Schellenberg's support for 4 has changed since his original defense of the argument. Originally, his argument for 4 was essentially that an all-loving God would ensure the optimal well-being of His creatures, as far as He could. Since the optimal well-being of all capable creatures would include a personal relationship with God, God would ensure that all capable creatures can enter into a personal relationship with Him just by trying. This argument establishes something very similar to premise 4, differing only in that it does not specify that God would ensure a *conscious* personal relationship. Schellenberg added this element to his argument only later. But one might adjust Schellenberg's original argument to account for this. In order to defend *this* sort of argument one must maintain that the optimal well-being of all capable creatures would include a *conscious* personal relationship with God. Hereafter I refer to this argument as the "optimal well-being" argument.

Although Schellenberg no longer appeals to the optimal well-being argument in his most recent defences of the hiddenness argument, it is still important to consider. As an independent argument for 4, any response to the hiddenness argument which relies on objecting to premise 4 must include a response to the optimal well-being argument.

Schellenberg later attempted to derive 4 more directly from the concept of a perfectly-loving being. He argues that it just follows from our understanding of love that a *perfectly* loving God would, at all times, be open to a personal relationship with any finite person capable of personal relationship. Schellenberg writes that openness, at some given time, 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.”⁴⁵ And so if God is open to personal relationship with every capable creature, then we should expect that everyone who is (i) capable of a conscious personal relationship with God, and (ii) not resisting God, is also (iii) in a position to enter into such a relationship just by trying. So if God’s being perfectly loving entails that He would be open to all capable creatures, then if an all-loving God exists everyone who is (i) and (ii) is also (iii). This is almost, but not quite, premise 4. We get premise 4 on the assumption that if God exists, then God is all-loving. We can formulate his argument in the following way:

7. If God exists, He is perfectly loving.
8. A perfectly-loving God would, at all times, be open to a personal relationship with any finite person capable of personal relationship.
9. God is open to a personal relationship with a finite person only if such a relationship is not made impossible through *God’s* actions or omissions.
10. If a finite, nonresistant creature capable of conscious personal relationship with God is not in a position to enter into such a relationship (not able to do so just by trying), then it must have been made impossible through *God’s* actions or omissions.

Therefore,

4. If God exists, then everyone who is (i) capable of a conscious personal relationship with God and (ii) is not resisting God is (iii) in a position to enter into such a relationship just by trying.

Call this argument for 4 the “perfect love argument”.

In support of premise 7 Schellenberg argues that God must be perfectly loving because no ultimate being could be less than perfectly loving.⁴⁶ Regarding premise 8, Schellenberg thinks that we can “just see” that perfect love necessarily brings openness to relationship with it.⁴⁷ He writes that “love is deeply relational.”⁴⁸ Beyond this, he provides us with an intuition pump, asking us to imagine a friend telling us about how loving his parents are, while at the same time pointing out that they never spend any time with him, they never come to him when he calls them, and they are not open to having a relationship

⁴⁵ Schellenberg (2015) 41.

⁴⁶ And he has stipulated that “God” refers to the ultimate person.

⁴⁷ In the sense of openness he stipulates, as discussed above.

⁴⁸ Schellenberg (2015) 41.

with him.⁴⁹ Schellenberg expects that we will agree with him that this friend's parents are not as loving towards him as they could be. As for premise 9, Schellenberg offers it as a stipulative definition. This is just what he means when he uses the term "open".

Schellenberg offers no explicit defense of premise 10. Instead he takes it as intuitive that if some person S is nonresistant, and capable of conscious personal relationship, then it is *God's* fault if S is not in a position to enter into such a relationship.

4 Responses to the Argument from Divine Hiddenness

Now that I have laid out Schellenberg's argument, and his support for the key premises, I turn to discuss the various ways one might attempt to respond.⁵⁰ Many of these responses can be found in the literature, while some have not been defended in any published work. Since the argument is deductively valid, any response must involve denying at least one premise. Responses which deny premise 1 must also deny one of the premises in the argument for premise 1 discussed above. That is, they must deny either premise 4 or 5. And those which deny 4 must then deny one premise in *both* the optimal well-being argument *as well as* the perfect love argument.

In addition to summarizing the range of options one has in replying to Schellenberg's hiddenness argument, I also aim to demonstrate the importance of one particular reply – which I will call the "greater goods response". I will argue that some of the responses cannot plausibly demonstrate that the hiddenness argument is unsound or unsupported *unless* they are supplemented by greater goods considerations.⁵¹ I also argue

⁴⁹ Ibid 42.

⁵⁰ I focus primarily on responses to the strict argument, but I note where certain responses may help against quantitative arguments.

⁵¹ The category of all "greater goods considerations" *includes* "greater goods replies", but there are possible greater goods considerations which would not constitute a greater goods reply. A greater goods reply is intended to be a full and independent response to the hiddenness argument. A greater goods consideration may not always be sufficient on its own, but might still supplement another reply in order to respond to the hiddenness argument.

that nearly *all* of the responses are made *more plausible* if supported by greater goods considerations.⁵²

The first response to Schellenberg's argument I discuss will be the greater goods response, since it is that response which will concern me throughout the rest of this project. Moreover it will be important for the argument in this chapter as well. After discussing greater goods arguments I will proceed more or less systematically; first I will discuss the replies to the hiddenness argument which deny premise 1, and then those which deny premise 2.

4.1 The Greater Goods Response to the Argument from Divine Hiddenness

Greater goods responses deny premise 1 of the hiddenness argument. They maintain that God's existence is compatible with nonresistant nonbelief. In order to deny 1 they deny premise 4, maintaining that God might withhold the possibility of conscious personal relationship (at least for a time) from some people, even though those people may be capable of such a relationship and not resisting God. In order to deny 4, they deny premise 8 of the love and openness argument.⁵³ And so greater goods responders argue that a perfectly loving God would *not necessarily*, at all times, be open to a personal relationship with any finite person capable of personal relationship. While each greater goods response proposes a different good, the structure of each response is essentially the same. Few authors explicitly outline this structure. Below, I offer what I take to be the argument being made against premise 8.

⁵² There are perhaps two kinds of responses which are plausibly not made more plausible from greater goods considerations. The first assumes that God is not loving, and so it appeals to a conception of God other than the one I am concerned with. Regarding the second kind of response, though it is not necessarily made more plausible by greater goods considerations, I suggest later in this chapter that it may nevertheless benefit from a response to objections to greater goods responses. As I will discuss, this is because responses of this kind are open to some of these same objections as greater goods responses.

⁵³ Regarding the optimal well-being argument, they deny that optimal well-being always includes a conscious personal relationship with God.

Premise 8 is true only if it is always more loving to remain open to relationship than not.⁵⁴ Greater goods arguments deny that this is always the case. Proponents of greater goods responses argue that sometimes it may be more loving for God to *refrain* from remaining open to relationship. Specifically, greater goods responses attempt to show that there is some good (or perhaps a set of goods) for the sake of which God would be willing to remain hidden from some of His creatures. They may do so by appealing to specific goods – several of which I will discuss in more detail next chapter – or by arguing that there may be *unknown* goods for the sake of which God would hide.⁵⁵ I will go into more detail next chapter about what conditions must be met for a greater goods response to be successful, but roughly the greater goods proposed must outweigh the value lost because of God’s hiddenness and they must be optimally brought about by God’s hiddenness.

This seems simple enough to me. If such goods exist, then sometimes the most loving thing God could do will involve refraining from openness to relationship with some creatures, at least temporarily, which would entail that 8 is false. And so one must only demonstrate that such goods exist to demonstrate that 8 is false. But Schellenberg seems to think that whether such goods exist is irrelevant. Recall Schellenberg’s intuition pump, and the friend who describes his parents as loving, and yet it is clear that they are not open to conscious personal relationship with him. Schellenberg thinks that *clearly* these parents have (at best) a deficient love for their son. He does not mention what the parents’ *reasons*

⁵⁴ And also, only if a perfectly loving being must always do what is most loving. One might suppose that a perfectly loving being might have *other* attributes or character traits that sometimes take precedence over perfect love. I discuss responses like this below.

⁵⁵ Replies of this latter sort are called “skeptical theist” replies. For an example of a skeptical theist response to hiddenness, see Justin P. McBrayer and Philip Swenson, “Scepticism About the Argument from Divine Hiddenness,” *Religious Studies* 48(2) (2012) 129-150. See also Michael Bergman, “Skeptical Theism and the Problem of Evil,” in Thomas P. Flint and Michael C. Rea (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophical Theology*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011) 374-400.

for refraining from openness may be; this seems to imply that he thinks it does not matter. The mere fact that they are not open, for Schellenberg, implies that their love is deficient.

Schellenberg offers some reason to think that even an incredibly benevolent parent would not be perfectly loving if she were not open to relationship with her child. He asks us to imagine a mother who is unopen to relationship with her son, and yet she provides him with all of his needs as well as countervailing goods.⁵⁶ But he does not think she acted in the most loving way. He argues that perfect love must be *more* than mere benevolence. Perfect love is relational-personal love, according to Schellenberg, and thus – following Eleonore Stump – a *key* component of it is the desire for union with the beloved.⁵⁷ A perfect lover desires relationship *for its own sake*. He writes, “Even supreme benevolence may be expressible from a distance. But the one who loves desires to come close to the object of love. The one who loves desires to share *herself* in personal relationship, and is of this disposition so long as love persists.”⁵⁸ And so Schellenberg thinks that *no matter what* countervailing goods a mother might supply, as long as she is not open to personal relationship with her son, she is not as loving as she could be.

Notice that this reasoning from Schellenberg is importantly different from his original optimal well-being argument, which states that a perfectly loving God would ensure the optimal well-being of His creatures. On *this* argument, a perfectly loving being might withhold from a creature its optimal well-being if it were necessary for remaining open to personal relationship with that creature.⁵⁹ It seems to me that Schellenberg must be mistaken if his view entails that a being who is perfectly good *would*⁶⁰ withhold from His

⁵⁶ See J.L. Schellenberg, “Replies to My Colleagues,” *Religious Studies* 49(2) (2013) 267.

⁵⁷ J.L. Schellenberg, “Divine Hiddenness and Human Philosophy,” in Eleonore Stump and Adam Green (eds.), *Hidden Divinity and Religious Beliefs: New Perspectives* (Cambridge University Press, 2016) 17. See also Eleonore Stump, *Wandering in Darkness: Narrative and the Problem of Suffering* (Oxford University Press, 2010) 109.

⁵⁸ Schellenberg (2016) 18.

⁵⁹ Schellenberg will claim this is a counter-possible, but I will respond later to his reasons for thinking so.

⁶⁰ Not merely “might” or “could”, but “would”.

creature their optimal well-being in such a scenario. It seems to me that the perfect form of love must at least *include* omnibenevolence. But then it might turn out that *if* there are greater goods which cannot come about unless God remains closed to relationship, then God *might* withhold the possibility of relationship with some of His creatures (at least temporarily) to allow those goods to come about.

One of the mistakes Schellenberg may have made is the assumption that perfect love's *desiring* to share in relationship must entail that one who is perfectly loving is always *open* – in Schellenberg's sense – to personal relationship. Surely if God is perfectly loving then He *does* desire to share Himself with us in personal relationship. However, it is not contradictory to say that He would nevertheless *refrain* from sharing Himself with us in relationship if doing so would keep us from our optimal well-being. Although He may at all times desire relationship with us, if He were to pursue relationship with us (when it is not part of our optimal well-being) *due* to that desire, that would be self-seeking, and such a self-seeking decision certainly *does not* follow from perfect love. Instead, it would certainly be more loving for God to allow His desire to go unfulfilled, in order to bring about our optimal well-being.

But one might remain stubborn and insist that the story about the mother who provides countervailing goods for her son but is not open to personal relationship with him is *incoherent*; the love the mother has for her son *must* be deficient. In response, I offer another story. In *The Great Divorce* C.S. Lewis describes a journey from purgatory to heaven. There is a woman who makes this trip, and upon arriving in heaven she meets her son. She demands that her son leave heaven with her and return with her to purgatory, since she feels that she cannot remain in heaven – but she does not want to leave her son.⁶¹ It seems clear to me that the love this mother has for her son *must* be deficient, as she is

⁶¹ C.S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce* (Original Copyright 1946, Reprint, HarperCollins Publishers, 2002) 97-104.

willing to deprive her son of a greater good in order to remain in relationship with him. But this entails that it would be a *greater* act of love for the mother to withhold the possibility of relationship with her from her son.

One might object that the analogy breaks down here, since she is only justified in remaining closed to relationship with her son when she does so in order to ensure that he can enjoy personal relationship *with God*. And this could never apply to God, since relationship with *Him* would be the greatest good. I call this objection to greater goods responses the problem of “no greater goods”. It is plausibly the most difficult challenge to greater goods responses to the hiddenness argument. Accordingly, I will dedicate an entire chapter to addressing it. And so for now I will leave it alone.

It is worth noting that, in appealing to the problem of no greater goods, we have switched from the love and openness argument to the optimal well-being argument. The mother’s choice to allow her son the greater good – personal relationship with God – does not follow from Schellenberg’s sense of perfect love as desiring relationship for its own sake. It follows from benevolence, and so if we accept that the mother is more loving in allowing her son to seek relationship with God, then we deny that the perfect form of love desires relationship for its own sake *above* benevolence. Plausibly the perfect sense of love *does* require that the lover desires relationship for its own sake. But it seems that, despite that desire, the perfect lover must not *prioritize* relationship for its own sake above benevolence. The perfect lover would not *selfishly* seek a relationship with the beloved if it would keep the beloved from greater benefit. And so it seems to me that God’s desire for relationship could only be a tie-breaker. If (for example) God deems that some person would be equally well off *with* a relationship with God (at some given time) as she would be *without* a relationship with God (at that same time), due to greater goods, then God might “break the tie” in favour of relationship.

And so greater goods responses to the hiddenness argument deny 8: that God would always remain open to relationship with all capable creatures. They also deny the premise of the optimal well-being argument that states that the optimal well-being of all capable creatures, at all times, includes a personal relationship with God. In denying these premises greater goods responses undercut the support for premise 4: that God would ensure that all capable and nonresistant creatures are in a position to participate in a conscious personal relationship with God at all times. And in undercutting support for 4, they undercut the support for 1: that God's existence entails that there would be no nonresistant nonbelievers. And so, if greater goods arguments succeed, then Schellenberg's conclusion – that God does not exist – is left unsupported.⁶²

4.2 Other Responses to the Hiddenness Argument

Much more can and must be said about greater goods responses to the hiddenness argument. Chapter two outlines the general strategy of greater goods arguments in much greater detail. In that chapter I also outline a few of the greater goods responses from the literature, and I present what I argue is the most promising strategy for proponents of greater goods replies. For the rest of this chapter I very briefly examine the *other* ways one might attempt to reply to Schellenberg's *strict* hiddenness argument. I argue that most of these responses would benefit from a defense of greater goods considerations. Some of these replies *must* be supplemented by greater goods considerations in order to succeed. Others will be made much more plausible if supplemented by such considerations. Finally there is at least one kind of response which is similar enough to greater goods responses

⁶² I will discuss next chapter the distinction between a greater goods *defense* and a greater goods *theodicy*. Greater goods defenses demonstrate merely that Schellenberg's conclusion is left unsupported – since God may have a reason to remain hidden – and so we cannot accept it on the basis of his argument. Theodicies, on the other hand, demonstrate that one of Schellenberg's premises is false – since God, if He exists *does* have a reason to remain hidden – and therefore his argument is unsound.

that much of what I go on to say in later chapters will also be relevant to this other kind of response. And thus my defence of greater goods arguments in general throughout the remaining chapters will be important for most other replies as well.

4.2.1 Responses to Premise 1

I will begin by discussing the other possible responses to premise 1 of the core hiddenness argument as presented above. Again, premise 1 is supported by the argument from 4 and 5 to 6 (which is equivalent to 1). I first outline responses to premise 4 which, once again, is supported by both the optimal well-being argument and the love and openness argument. As with greater goods responses, most of the arguments against premise 4 reject premise 8 of the love and openness argument. But before I discuss these I will briefly discuss the possible ways one might respond by rejecting the *other* premises of the love and openness argument.

There is little use attempting to argue against premise 9, which states that God's openness entails that a personal relationship with His creatures would not be made impossible through *His* actions or omissions. This is because I am taking this simply as a *stipulative definition*. This is just what Schellenberg *means* by "open". If one disagrees with 9 because one does not think this follows from a natural understanding of openness, one might instead be able to reject premise 8. One with this view might maintain that God *would* remain open in some broader sense, but nevertheless maintain that 8 is false because God would not necessarily remain open in *Schellenberg's* sense of "open".

Now recall premise 10, which states that a finite, nonresistant creature capable of conscious personal relationship with God can fail to be in a position to enter into such a relationship *only if* such a relationship has been made impossible through *God's* actions or omissions. There may be a very small amount of wiggle room here. The idea is that if a

creature is capable and nonresistant, and yet a personal relationship with God is not possible, the only available explanation is that something that God did or failed to do resulted in the impossibility. But perhaps creatures may themselves be responsible for making a personal relationship with God impossible, in a way that does not count as “resistance”. For example, if a personal relationship with God requires reflection on divine revelation, repentance, and prayer, then there might be some creatures who do not actively *resist* God, but who – through laziness or apathy or something else – cannot enter into a personal relationship with God whether He offers knowledge of Himself or not. If this is so, then a person’s nonresistance may not be a sufficient condition for God to reveal Himself to that person.⁶³

If this response were correct then it would demonstrate that 10 is false, and so premise 4 would remain unsupported, and in turn premise 1 of the core argument would remain unsupported, and so we could not accept Schellenberg’s conclusion based on his argument.⁶⁴ But this sort of response to the hiddenness argument can be dismissed relatively quickly. For Schellenberg can pack the actions of reflection on divine revelation, repentance, prayer – and whatever else may be necessary – into the act of *trying*. And so Schellenberg would maintain that, if these actions are necessary, then God must put all capable and nonresistant creatures into a position to perform these actions.

I now turn to premise 7: that if God exists He is perfectly loving. While very few theistic traditions would hold that God is not perfectly loving in *some* sense, it is important to remember that *Schellenberg’s* sense of perfectly loving must include relational-personal love. With this in mind, there are a few traditions which would hold that God is not loving

⁶³ An argument like this is pursued by Ebrahim Azadegan in his paper, “Divine Love and the Argument from Divine Hiddenness,” *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 6(2) (2014) 114-116.

⁶⁴ This kind of response does not give us a positive reason for thinking the core hiddenness argument is unsound, however. We cannot suppose that God *would* hide (and thus conclude that premise 1 is false) but only that we are left with no reason for thinking that He wouldn’t hide (and thus we would be *agnostic* about premise 1).

in this sense.⁶⁵ Moreover, any view of God as totally transcendent will argue that God *cannot* love us in this sense, since we cannot know God well enough to engage in the same kinds of personal relationships we have with other people.⁶⁶ Responses which reject premise 7 are perhaps the only sort of reply which do not benefit from greater goods considerations. Plausibly if God is not perfectly loving (in a way which involves relational-personal love), then Schellenberg's argument will fail.⁶⁷ But I do not appeal to these responses because they are considering a *different* conception of God from the one I am concerned with. Schellenberg once dismissed these arguments as simply changing the topic.⁶⁸ While Schellenberg now offers a direct response to these objections, I will still dismiss them as merely irrelevant to my present concern.

And so finally we turn to the arguments which, along with greater goods responses, reject premise 8. There are two *broad* ways to reject premise 8. The first way attempts to show that perfect love, *in and of itself*, does not necessarily entail Schellenberg's sense of openness. Greater goods responses, as I have outlined them, are of this sort.⁶⁹ The second way argues that God's *other* characteristics might explain why a perfectly loving God might not always be open, and thus might explain why perfect love does not entail that God is always open. For example, God's *justice* and His *humility* have both been proposed

⁶⁵ Not all varieties of Islam, for example, believe that God is perfectly loving in a relational-personal sense. For discussion of this see John McGinnis (2016).

⁶⁶ Transcendence is discussed by Michael Rea in "Hiddenness and Transcendence," in Eleonore Stump and Adam Green (eds.), *Hidden Divinity and Religious Beliefs: New Perspectives* (Cambridge University Press, 2016) 210-226. Jerome Gellman (2016) offers a Jewish conception of a transcendent God. For a discussion on God and Transcendence in a variety of other religions, see N.N. Trakakis (2016).

⁶⁷ This being said, Schellenberg maintains that God *must* be perfectly loving in this way. For a discussion of this, see Schellenberg (2015) 89-13. Rea rejects this assertion in Rea (2016) 220.

⁶⁸ J.L. Schellenberg (1993) 44-57.

⁶⁹ As I will explain below, some might want to say that the category of "greater goods replies" includes more than just those replies which argue that perfect love, in and of itself, does not entail that God would always be open to relationship. For some might say that "goodness" is a broader category than "love", and so there might be *greater goods* that are not "loving" goods. If this is right, then there are possibly "greater goods replies" which appeal to *these* sorts of goods. I treat replies relying on "non-loving" goods as different sorts of replies.

as reasons why God might remain hidden. Having discussed greater goods responses already, I turn to discuss the latter kind of response. Call them “other attributes” responses.

The idea behind “other attributes” responses is that we can only conclude that God would always be open to relationship with His creatures – in the way Schellenberg stipulates – if we assume that God’s perfect love is His *only* or *primary* character trait. But plausibly, if God has other character traits that are at least as primary as His perfect love, then God may have reasons *based on those* not to remain open at all times to personal relationship with all His creatures. Travis Dumsday, for example, suggests that God’s *humility* may explain why God does not make Himself more obvious to everyone. He argues that a humble person “does not presume upon another’s regard.”⁷⁰ Instead, such a person will know when to wait to use a direct approach to pursue relationship with a person, or when to use an indirect approach instead. And so, Dumsday argues, God’s *humility* might be the reason God is not always open. Another character trait which might explain why God would not always be open is His *justice*. Dumsday argues that God might remain hidden from His creatures because we do not *deserve* knowledge of God’s existence.⁷¹ Schellenberg has addressed this concern, arguing that it does not matter that we do not deserve knowledge of God – for God’s *perfect love* entails that God just *would* be open to relationship with His creatures.⁷² But Dumsday thinks that this too quickly prioritizes love over justice.

If one can argue that there is no reason to think that love would take priority over one of God’s other character traits – and that character trait gives God a reason to remain hidden, all else being equal – then we cannot conclude that 8 is true. In this case, the support for premise 4 and therefore 1 will be undermined, and so Schellenberg’s

⁷⁰ Travis Dumsday, “Divine Hiddenness and Divine Humility,” *Sophia* 53(1) (2014) 58.

⁷¹ Travis Dumsday, “Divine Hiddenness as Deserved,” *Faith and Philosophy* 31 (2014) 286-302.

⁷² Schellenberg (1993) 46-47.

conclusion will be unsupported. If one can show that God would actually prioritize another of His traits *above* love (and that trait gives God a reason to remain hidden) then one can show that 8 is *false*, and therefore the love and openness argument for premise 4 is *unsound*. Ultimately this would show that the core hiddenness argument is *unsound*, since this would demonstrate that God *would* hide, and therefore we should *expect* there to be nonresistant nonbelievers.

There is much that could be said about other attributes responses to premise 8, but for my purposes I just want to suggest that they are open to some of the same problems as greater good replies.⁷³ As we will see in a later chapter, particular greater goods replies require that God allows some person P to be a nonresistant nonbeliever for the sake of some good that benefits *only someone other than P*. Critics argue that God would not allow P to be a nonresistant nonbeliever for the sake of goods which in no way benefit P. Similarly, some “other attributes” responses require that God allows P to be a nonresistant nonbeliever for the sake of some end which in no way benefits P. As another example, some greater goods responses rely on *incompatibilist* free will; some critics argue that they should not. Some “other attributes” responses *also* seem to rely on *incompatibilist* free will.⁷⁴ And so, since other attributes responses are open to some of the same replies as greater goods responses, other attributes responses may benefit from a defense of greater goods responses against those replies.⁷⁵

⁷³ While these sorts of replies are importantly different from greater goods replies as I have defined them, one might consider a broader understanding of “good” than I have been considering. In discussing this sort of reply, Michael Rea seems to suggest that this *is* a sort of greater goods reply. He writes that it might be a *very good thing* for God to exercise His character. See his “Narrative, Liturgy, and the Hiddenness of God,” in Kevin Timpe and Eleonore Stump (eds.), *Metaphysics and God: Essay in Honor of Eleonore Stump* (New York: Routledge, 2009) 86. But whether these count as “greater goods replies” is ultimately a semantic issue, and as I have been using the term, these are not greater goods replies.

⁷⁴ To take Dumsday’s reply as an example, God may hide from those who have *freely* chosen to sin, because they do not deserve to know God.

⁷⁵ I do not claim that what will work as a defense for greater goods responses against these replies will necessarily *also* work as a defense for other attributes responses against these replies. However, in practice I anticipate that some of what I have to say in defense of greater goods replies to these responses *actually will* help defend other attributes responses against these replies.

The next kind of reply to the hiddenness argument maintains that personal relationship with God does not require belief that God exists. Call them “nonconscious relationship” responses. In order to understand how this kind of reply fits into the picture, it is important to understand how Schellenberg’s support for premise 1 has changed. Originally, Schellenberg argued that God would ensure that all capable and nonresistant creatures could enter into a personal relationship with Him just by trying, and that such a personal relationship with God was not possible unless one believes that God exists. Nonconscious relationship responses denied this, arguing that one might have a personal relationship with God without believing that God exists. But Schellenberg altered his argument to block the nonconscious relationship response. Notice that premise 4 explicitly states that God would ensure all capable and nonresistant creatures have access to a *conscious* personal relationship with God, and premise 5 states that *this conscious* kind of personal relationship with God requires belief that God exists. In order to understand how nonconscious relationship responses worked, we must look at them in their original context: as responses to Schellenberg’s *original* argument for premise 1. After this, I will argue that nonconscious relationship responses might still be saved from Schellenberg’s revision, but plausibly only by appealing to greater goods considerations.

Consider first an argument from Andrew Cullison.⁷⁶ Cullison argues that, in general, one can have a loving personal relationship with a person one does not believe exists. He argues this by way of the following thought experiment:

Bob is lonely and begins a chat-room relationship with Julie. Bob and Julie are both grieving the loss of a loved one. Julie offers words of encouragement that no one has been able to offer Bob. Bob does the same for Julie. Then Bob’s friend Steve provides Bob with an overwhelming amount of evidence that Chat Rooms

⁷⁶ Others have argued that personal relationship with God does not require belief that God exists. See Terence Cuneo, “Another look at Divine Hiddenness,” *Religious Studies* 49 (2013) 151-164, as well as M. Weidler and I Aijaz, “Divine Hiddenness and Discrimination: A Philosophical Dilemma,” *Sophia* 52(1) (2013) 95-114. Daniel Howard-Snyder also briefly discusses this kind of argument in “Divine Openness and Creaturely Nonresistant Nonbelief,” in Eleonore Stump and Adam Green (eds.), *Hidden Divinity and Religious Beliefs: New Perspectives* (Cambridge University Press, 2016) 138.

have very sophisticated Turing Machine programs that can perfectly replicate close, personal conversation with other humans. Bob is nervous. It is highly likely that Julie is a fake. He stops believing that Julie exists. He even tells Julie that he doesn't believe she exists. However, he holds out strong hope that Julie exists. He says, you may not be real, but there is some very slim possibility that you are – that's enough for me to think this is worth continuing. Eventually, they meet. They marry. Someone asks them "When did your personal relationship begin?" Bob says, "Back when I didn't even believe Julie existed."⁷⁷

Cullison's argument is that we can identify features indicative of a loving personal relationship even in cases in which one person does not believe that the other exists, and that this is some reason to think that such a case is a case of a loving personal relationship. Essentially, the fact that one person does not believe the other exists is not an overriding reason for thinking that there is no loving relationship between two people if it appears in other ways to be a loving relationship. In the case of Bob and Julie, they talk with one another and offer each other comfort and encouragement. Cullison further reasons that if this can be true of two humans, then it can also be true for human-divine relationships.⁷⁸

Cullison's argument may plausibly demonstrate that Schellenberg's original argument for premise 1 was unsound. Schellenberg claimed first that God would ensure that all capable creatures have access to a personal relationship with God, and second that creatures only have access to such a relationship if they believe that God exists. Cullison's argument may plausibly demonstrate that the second claim is false. However, on Schellenberg's revision, God would ensure that all capable creatures have access to a *conscious* personal relationship with God (premise 4), and a *conscious* personal relationship with God requires belief (premise 5). Cullison's argument cannot demonstrate

⁷⁷ Andrew Cullison, "Two Solutions to the Problem of Divine Hiddenness," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 47(2) (2010) 120.

⁷⁸ Perhaps *a fortiori*, given that God has access to means of facilitating relationship that are not open to humans. For example, God may be able to make His presence and love felt in the natural world, while He can "count" good and loving actions done by humans for those who are less fortunate as good and loving actions done for God. While this is not the place to offer a robust defense of this account, this line of reasoning is defended by Terence Cuneo (2013), as well as chapter 3 of his book *Ritualized Faith* (Oxford University Press, 2016).

that 5 is false. The sort of personal relationship plausibly had by Bob and Julie is not a *conscious* personal relationship.⁷⁹

But Cullison's argument may plausibly be altered so that it undermines the support for premise 4 instead. We might reason that God will not necessarily ensure that all capable and nonresistant creatures have access to a conscious personal relationship with God if instead they might have a personal relationship with God that is *nonconscious*. But there is a relatively simple response to this altered argument available to Schellenberg. God would ensure that all capable and nonresistant creatures have access to a *conscious* personal relationship, rather than one that is not conscious, because a conscious personal relationship is a more perfect expression of love. God, as perfectly loving, would do what is most loving.

In order to save Cullison's response, one must argue either (a) that a nonconscious personal relationship with God is as perfect an expression of love as (or more perfect an expression of love than) a conscious personal relationship with God, or (b) that the state of affairs including *both* greater goods from hiddenness *as well as* one's having a nonconscious personal relationship with God is as perfect an expression of love as (or more perfect an expression of love than) a conscious personal relationship with God. Assuming that there *are* greater goods from hiddenness, (b) is a more plausible response than (a). And so, the nonconscious relationship response to premise 1 of the hiddenness argument will be more plausible if it can be supplemented by greater goods. Moreover, if one argues that a nonconscious personal relationship with God is *more* perfect an expression of love than a conscious personal relationship with God, one is simply offering a greater goods response. The greater good, in this case, is a nonconscious personal

⁷⁹ Schellenberg's understanding of "conscious relationship" entails that each member of the relationship believes the other exists.

relationship with God. As it turns out, if a nonconscious relationship *is* as perfect or more perfect an expression of love than a conscious personal relationship with God, it might actually avoid many of the problems which face *other* greater goods responses. However, most will find it implausible that a nonconscious relationship with God *would* be as perfect or more perfect an expression of love than a conscious personal relationship with God. Thus, nonconscious relationship responses will be made more plausible if supplemented by other greater goods.

4.2.2 Responses to Premise 2

I now turn to discuss responses to the hiddenness argument which deny premise 2, which simply states that there are nonresistant nonbelievers. It seems intuitive to me that there at least *seem* to be human beings who both fail to believe that God exists and whose nonbelief is not due to any resistance to God. Nevertheless, there are at least two ways one might try to deny premise 2. First one might deny that there are any nonbelievers at all, and second one might deny that there are any nonbelievers *of the problematic sort*. That is, all nonbelievers are *resistant*. With both of these strategies, if one succeeds then one has shown that premise 2 is false, and the hiddenness argument is unsound.

The first way one might deny 2 is by denying that there are any nonbelievers at all, of any kind. So far, this kind of response has not been defended in the literature, and so I will not discuss it at length. *Prima facie*, this has very low plausibility, given that there are a large number of self-described nonbelievers, as well as many people who are geographically isolated and may not even have a concept of a monotheistic God. So if one denies that there are any nonbelievers, one must explain away *apparent* nonbelief. One *might* try to do this, for example, by maintaining that all self-described nonbelievers are lying – in many cases to themselves – and that by going deep enough into their minds, we

would find that they all secretly would admit to believing in God. And one may attempt to build a Biblical case to demonstrate that even geographically isolated people are believers, citing passages such as Jeremiah 31:33 and Romans 2:15, or by citing passages such as Romans 1:20. The former passages state, respectively, that the law of the Lord is written on the hearts of Jews and Gentiles. The latter passage discusses how God's qualities are clearly revealed in creation, and consequently people are "without excuse".⁸⁰ While strategies like these may be coherent, they are ad hoc. They clearly involve a more complicated explanation, and they can be easily dismissed in favour of the simpler explanation that there *are* nonbelievers, given that they have no more explanatory power than that explanation.

The second way one might deny 2 is by denying that any of the nonbelief in the world is nonbelief of the problematic kind. Consider the following example from the literature. As mentioned earlier, Schellenberg was initially concerned with *reasonable* nonbelief, before identifying it as one species of *nonresistant* nonbelief. Douglas Henry argued in a 2001 paper that it is unlikely that there *are any* reasonable nonbelievers. He writes:

[T]he number of persons who, like Descartes, realize that they possess many uncritically examined beliefs is large, but the number of persons who, again like Descartes, search for evidence for these beliefs is small. Many persons pay lip service to Socrates' praise of the examined life, but most of them live largely unexamined lives [...] When it comes to the issue of God's existence, meaningful investigation is the exception rather than the rule.⁸¹

Henry argues that, since relatively few people – even in academia – subject the question of God's existence to rigorous examination, even though many people know the question is

⁸⁰ A lot more would have to be said to show that this biblical data supports the proposition that there are no nonbelievers. The former passages are more naturally read as indicating that all people have a sense of the moral law, while the latter passage may plausibly be interpreted as stating that something like an argument from design is available (and perhaps apparent) to all people – not that everyone in fact believes that God exists. But these have been provided just to indicate one starting point for a hypothetical biblical case.

⁸¹ Douglas Henry, "Does Reasonable Nonbelief Exist?" *Faith and Philosophy* 18(1) (2001) 79-80.

of great importance and thus deserving of examination, this is a reason for thinking that the number of reasonable nonbelievers is very low, perhaps zero.⁸²

Given how Schellenberg's argument has developed to concern itself with *nonresistant* nonbelief – a broader category of people than reasonable nonbelief – Henry's argument clearly has its limits. This is not to say that Henry's argument can contribute nothing to a response to hiddenness arguments more generally. For example, his argument might demonstrate that one intuitively problematic kind of nonbelief is unlikely to occur. Henry's arguments will have to overcome a few additional objections as discussed in the literature.⁸³ But for my purposes here, I need not discuss these.⁸⁴

In addition to these two ways of replying to premise 2, there is a more complicated kind of response to the argument from divine hiddenness which I will now discuss. Call it the “*de re* response”. The *de re* response actually denies premise 1, not premise 2. However, it will become clear why I saved discussion of it until now. According to this strategy, a loving God *would* allow some sorts of nonresistant nonbelief (contra premise 1) but not others.⁸⁵ Proponents of this response then argue that only non-problematic sorts of nonresistant nonbelief occur. Trent Dougherty and Ted Poston, for example, argue that all apparent nonresistant nonbelievers are *de dicto* nonbelievers – they would deny or claim

⁸² There are others who argue that there are no nonbelievers of the problematic sort. See Ebrahim Azadegan “Divine Hiddenness and Human Sin: The Noetic Effects of Sin,” *Journal of Reformed Theology* 7(1) (2013) 69-90. See also V.M. Nemoianu, “Pascal on Divine Hiddenness,” *International Philosophical Quarterly* 55(3) (2015) 325-343.

⁸³ For example see Schellenberg's “On Reasonable Nonbelief and Perfect Love: Replies to Henry and Lehe,” *Faith and Philosophy* 22(3) (2005) 330-342.

⁸⁴ For another example of an argument which denies premise 2, see Tyler Taber and Tyler Dalton McNabb, “Is the Problem of Divine Hiddenness a Problem for the Reformed Epistemologist?” *Heythrop Journal* 57(6) (2016). See also Paul Moser, “The Virtue of Friendship with God,” in L.F. Callahan and Timothy O'Connor (eds.) *Religious Faith and Intellectual Virtue* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014) 140-156. Also Paul Moser, “Divine Hiddenness and Self-Sacrifice,” in Adam Green and Eleonore Stump (eds.) *Hidden Divinity and Religious Belief: New Perspective* (Cambridge University Press, 2016) 78-88. Moser's argument is doing something a bit different from simply denying that there are nonresistant nonbelievers, but he will inevitably have to argue that nonbelievers are *in some way* at fault for their nonbelief.

⁸⁵ This claim, of course, must be argued for. Trent Dougherty and Ted Poston offer such an argument in “Divine Hiddenness and the Nature of Belief,” *Religious Studies* 43 (2007) 183-196.

agnosticism about the *proposition* that God exists – but they are nevertheless *de re* believers.⁸⁶ That is, according to this strategy, apparent nonresistant nonbelievers have beliefs *about* God, which entail that He exists, but they do not *recognize* that their beliefs are about God.⁸⁷ So on this strategy, while apparent nonbelievers are indeed nonbelievers in the *de dicto* sense, they are also *believers* in the *de re* sense. While this argument necessarily involves denying premise 1, it anticipates a revision to the argument. Instead of 1, plausibly 1a is true: if an all-loving God exists, nonresistant *de re* nonbelief does not occur. If this is true, then 3 follows so long as 2a is also true: nonresistant *de re* nonbelief occurs. So this response to the hiddenness argument denies 2a, rather than 2 itself.

Of these 3 ways of replying to Schellenberg's hiddenness argument, intuitively the second and third ways are more promising than the first way. Intuitively it is more plausible that all nonbelievers are somehow resistant, or that they are only *de dicto* nonresistant nonbelievers but not *de re* nonbelievers, than it is that there are no nonbelievers at all. While there might be *some* apparent nonbelievers who are merely lying, it is implausible that *most* let alone *all* apparent nonbelievers are of this sort. But there is a problem shared by all three kinds of replies. Schellenberg's strict argument requires only that there exists *a single* nonresistant nonbeliever. While each of these responses may give us reason to think that the *amount* of people with the problematic sort of nonbelief is some degree lower than we might have otherwise expected, none of them give us a high confidence that *none* of the problematic sort of nonbelief exists. And in principle each of these three general *kinds* of replies, even if they do not take the specific forms I have discussed here, will have a hard time avoiding this problem. It is notoriously

⁸⁶ Poston and Dougherty, 192-194.

⁸⁷ They also argue that *de re* belief is all that is necessary to have a personal relationship with God.

difficult to offer a compelling reason to accept a negative existential claim when the contradictory positive existential claim enjoys *prima facie* plausibility.

One way to try to minimize this problem is by offering a hybrid account. One might argue that the actual world contains some mix of (a) believers who falsely claim to be nonbelievers, (b) *resistant* nonbelievers, and (c) *de re* believers who are not also *de dicto* believers – but the world does *not* contain any nonresistant *de re* nonbelievers. While this sort of reply plausibly covers more ground than any of the individual replies, much more will need to be said to argue that *all* apparent nonresistant nonbelievers can be sorted into (a), (b), or (c). For even this hybrid account will involve the difficult task of demonstrating a negative existential claim. It simply offers three different ways that apparent cases of the problematic sort of nonbelief might be explained away.⁸⁸

But plausibly, this hybrid account can be supplemented by appeal to greater goods considerations. Even if this hybrid account cannot demonstrate that there is *no* nonresistant nonbelief at all, perhaps it can demonstrate that the *amount* of such nonbelief in the world is much less than we would have otherwise thought. If so, while this will not be sufficient to demonstrate that the hiddenness argument is unsound, it may provide a plausible response if supplemented by greater goods considerations. All those who are apparently nonbelievers of the problematic sort who *cannot* be categorized as (a), (b), or (c) will be compatible with God's existence if greater goods outweigh the value lost because of their nonresistant nonbelief.⁸⁹

⁸⁸ Of course, one might do a lot more to show that it is *plausible* that none of the problematic nonbelievers exist, and so this might still end up being a fairly strong response.

⁸⁹ This would entail that Schellenberg's strict logical formulation must be demonstrated unsound *exclusively* by strict denial of premise 1, because premise 2 in this hypothetical scenario would still be true. And so this hybrid response does *nothing* against the strict formulation. But on *quantitative* logical hiddenness arguments, the hybrid account can demonstrate that the *amount* of the problematic sort of nonbelief is much lower than we might have originally thought. If there are some cases of the problematic sort which cannot be explained away by (a), (b), or (c), they may be explained by greater goods.

5 Conclusion

In this chapter I have specified *which* arguments from hiddenness I aim to directly address in the rest of this project: the strict argument offered by Schellenberg as well as quantitative versions of that argument. I have very briefly outlined the greater goods response to the hiddenness argument, as well as many other possible replies. While this is not an exhaustive list of *potential* replies, it is representative of the *kinds* of replies found throughout the literature. I have argued that most of the other replies will benefit from a defense of greater goods replies. Some cannot succeed unless supplemented by greater goods considerations, while others will be made more plausible if supplemented. The aim of the next chapter is to outline in greater detail what would make a successful greater goods response. In the remaining chapters I address some of the most pressing challenges facing greater goods responses.

Chapter II Greater Goods

1 Introduction

Greater goods responses to the hiddenness argument attempt to demonstrate that there is some good, or set of goods, for the sake of which God would be willing to remain hidden from some of His creatures, even though this entails that – while He is hidden – those creatures cannot enter into a conscious personal relationship with Him. But what conditions must be met in order for God to be justified in allowing some humans to be nonresistant nonbelievers? In the first part of this chapter I discuss which conditions must be met for a successful greater goods reply to the hiddenness argument. I establish two necessary conditions which should be relatively uncontroversial. I also discuss two controversial principles which some authors take to be necessary conditions for a successful greater goods response. In the second part of this chapter, I outline my strategy. I suggest that the most promising way to meet these necessary conditions is to offer a response which incorporates *many* goods. I then discuss several goods proposed in the literature and how easily they might be incorporated into such a response. I conclude by proposing a new good to be incorporated into the many goods response.

2 Two Necessary Conditions

It will be useful to begin by outlining the conditions *most* authors agree *must* be met in order for any greater goods reply to succeed in overcoming the argument from divine hiddenness. Schellenberg, in *Divine Hiddenness and Human reason*, proposes that God would allow nonresistant nonbelief “only if there is a state of affairs in the actual world which it would be logically impossible for God to bring about without permitting the occurrence of at least one instance of [nonresistant] nonbelief, for the sake of which God

would be willing to sacrifice the good of belief and all it entails.”⁹⁰ So Schellenberg proposes first that there must be some state of affairs S for the sake of which God would be willing to sacrifice the good of belief, and second that nonresistant nonbelief must be *necessary* for S to obtain. But more needs to be said about these conditions. I will discuss each in turn.

The first condition proposed by Schellenberg I will discuss says that God would only allow nonresistant nonbelief if there is some state of affairs for the sake of which God would be willing to sacrifice the good of belief and all it entails. Greater goods responses take this “state of affairs” to be a *good* of some kind. And so greater goods responses can succeed only if God would be *willing* to allow some case of nonresistant nonbelief NN for the sake of the good, G, that they propose. But what conditions need to be met for God to be *willing* to allow this? Here are two potential candidates. First candidate condition: God would be willing to allow NN for the sake of G only if G’s obtaining is *more valuable* than NN’s not obtaining (G is an “outweighing” good). Second candidate condition: God would be willing to allow NN for the sake of G only if G’s obtaining is greater than *or equal to* the value of NN’s not obtaining (G is at least an “offsetting” good).⁹¹ The first candidate condition states that God would only allow nonresistant nonbelief for the sake of some good if the world is better off with *both* than it is with neither. The second condition states that God might allow both a case of nonresistant nonbelief and some good even if together they only even things out. That is, even if a world with neither is equal to a world with both.

Which of these candidate conditions is right? Would God allow nonresistant nonbelief and some good if they balance each other out, or must they have a positive net

⁹⁰ J.L. Schellenberg, *Divine Hiddenness and Human Reason* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993) 85-86.

⁹¹ *Ibid* 86.

effect on the value of the world?⁹² Schellenberg thinks the second condition might be the right one, writing that, “an outweighing good, while clearly sufficient, is not necessary. For if there *were* a state of affairs which required for its existence that God permit the occurrence of [nonresistant] nonbelief and which constituted an offsetting good, God might very well bring it about, and so might be kept from putting His existence beyond [nonresistant] nonbelief.”⁹³ However, he notes that *if* there were such an offsetting good which could only come from God’s hiddenness, God would not necessarily opt for both rather than neither. His choice might come down to something akin to a coin toss.

Schellenberg’s position that an outweighing good is not necessary, so long as there is an offsetting good, gives the benefit of the doubt to theists. But there may actually be a good reason to think that a merely offsetting good would never be sufficient for God to allow nonresistant nonbelief. This is because, plausibly, God would prefer a world in which everyone had the opportunity to participate in a conscious, personal relationship with Him, if all else is equal. This is the idea: God, being omnibenevolent, would first and foremost look out for the good of *His creatures*. As I argued last chapter, His first priority would be to ensure our optimal well-being. But, supposing that He might ensure for us optimal levels of well-being in several different ways (maybe in *countless* different ways, for all we know) He might take other factors into consideration to narrow down His options. If it *were not* part of our optimal well-being, He might keep us from having a personal relationship with Him, despite His desire for it. But if our optimal well-being includes either a personal relationship with Him, or nonresistant nonbelief and some *other good*, His preference would plausibly break the tie in favour of personal relationship. If

⁹² Almost no one has argued that God would allow them if their net effect is *negative*. However Travis Dumsday has suggested that if God has *duties* which entail that there must be some nonresistant nonbelief, God might allow that nonresistant nonbelief occurs. This might be true even in cases where it has a net negative effect on the world’s value. See his “How Divine Hiddenness Sheds Light on the Problem of Evil,” *International Philosophical Quarterly* 55(3) (2015) 321.

⁹³ Schellenberg (1993) 86-87.

this reasoning is correct, then an offsetting good could never be enough for God to allow someone to remain a nonresistant nonbeliever. Instead, a necessary condition for God to do so would be that there is an *outweighing* good.⁹⁴

But there is a further complication. Plausibly, if there *were* a good or set of goods G which justified God in allowing nonresistant nonbelief, G would have to not just outweigh the value lost due to nonresistant nonbelief, G would have to at least *offset* (if not outweigh) any *other* negative value brought about by G. For even if G outweighs the value lost due to nonresistant nonbelief, God might plausibly not allow nonresistant nonbelief for the sake of G if G also caused incredible evil, or if G were incompatible with *even more* valuable goods. With this and the above in mind, I propose the following necessary condition for any successful greater goods reply to the hiddenness argument:

Outweighing Goods: God would be justified in allowing some person P to be a nonresistant nonbeliever *only if* there is some good (or set of goods) G the value of which outweighs the value lost because of P's nonresistant nonbelief combined with any other value lost because of G.

If the outweighing goods condition is met for some good G, then God might be willing to allow some case of nonresistant nonbelief NN for the sake of G. Of course, there is at least one other necessary condition for God to allow NN for the sake of G. I turn to discuss that now.

Schellenberg suggests that God would not be justified in bringing about NN for the sake of G unless it is *logically impossible* for God to bring about G without also bringing about NN. This is too strong. Daniel Howard-Snyder suggests that “if permitting [nonresistant] nonbelief is no worse than any other means for some significantly greater

⁹⁴ If the “other attributes” responses to the hiddenness argument I discussed last chapter are right, then this move may be too quick. This move assumes that the only significant factor in breaking a tie would be God’s own desire for relationship. But if there are *other attributes* which lean towards remaining hidden, and they take precedence over God’s desire for relationship, then the tie might be broken in another direction (if it needs breaking at all!). If this were the case, then offsetting goods *may* be all that is necessary. But I leave this issue to the side for now and assume the position that is less favourable to my argument: that outweighing goods are necessary for allowing hiddenness.

good to obtain,” then God might reasonably allow nonresistant nonbelief to obtain in order to acquire that greater good.⁹⁵ Howard-Snyder’s point is that it might be logically possible to bring about G without NN, but God might nevertheless be justified in allowing NN for the sake of G if the only other way to bring about G is to allow some evil E which is as bad as or worse than NN (all else being equal). But this too may not be quite right. Recall that I argued above that plausibly God would break ties in favour of making personal relationship possible. Given this, God might only be justified in allowing NN for the sake of G, when NN could also be brought about by E, if E is *worse than* NN. If E is only *equally* as bad as NN (and all else is equal), then this is a kind of tie. And, again, God may plausibly break ties in favour of personal relationship, and thus in favour of not allowing NN.

There is a further consideration. Perhaps G *can* be brought about without NN (and *without* a worse evil) but G turns out to be *more valuable* given NN than without it.⁹⁶ If such a good existed, this might be enough for God to allow NN for the sake of G. So with these considerations in mind, instead of Schellenberg’s suggestion, the following necessary condition seems plausible:

Optimal Means: God would be justified in allowing some person P to be a nonresistant nonbeliever for the sake of some good or set of goods G *only if* (a) G cannot obtain unless God allows P to be a nonresistant nonbeliever, or (b) the only other ways G might obtain require God to allow for something worse than P’s nonresistant nonbelief, or (c) the value of G itself is *greater* given P’s nonresistant nonbelief than without it.

Some good G meets the optimal means condition if it meets one of clauses (a), (b), or (c).

One might object to clause (c) that G needs to be not just *greater* given P’s nonresistant nonbelief than without, but *so much greater* that the extra value outweighs the value lost

⁹⁵ Daniel Howard-Snyder, “The Argument from Divine Hiddenness,” *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 26(3) (1996) 438-439.

⁹⁶ I discuss how this might be possible in chapter VI.

due to nonresistant nonbelief. In order for G to justify God in allowing NN, this is correct. But this does not need to be the case in order for G to meet the optimal means condition. If G meets the optimal means condition by virtue of meeting (c), this does not thereby entail that God is justified in allowing NN for the sake of G. For G *must still* meet the outweighing goods condition in order to justify God in allowing NN for the sake of G.⁹⁷

With this in mind, the outweighing goods and optimal means conditions both look plausible. But there are potentially further complications regarding the former condition, which I turn to now.

2.1 Further Complications of the Outweighing Goods Condition

While the outweighing goods condition seems plausible, some might notice a complication with it. It is simple enough that goods that are *equal* in value to the value lost from nonresistant nonbelief – as well as goods of lesser value – fail to meet this condition, and that this condition is met by goods of greater value. But some might argue that it's possible for there to be two goods such that each good is neither greater than nor equal to the other. If this is the case for two goods, their values are *incommensurable* with each other. The outweighing goods condition does not explicitly note incommensurability, and so the primary question I ask in this section is whether the outweighing goods condition ought to be revised to take incommensurability into account.

In order for the outweighing goods condition to be met, there must be some good (or set of goods) the value of which outweighs the value lost because of nonresistant nonbelief. But suppose some very valuable good or set of goods, G, is proposed and it turns out that G is neither greater than, equal to, nor lesser than the value lost because of

⁹⁷ Examples of this will be discussed in chapter VI. Hopefully the significance of this will be evident later this chapter when I discuss my proposed strategy of greater goods response.

nonresistant nonbelief. If this were the case, then certainly *G cannot* meet the outweighing goods condition, and so – if the outweighing goods condition expresses a real necessary condition for God to be justified in allowing nonresistant nonbelief for the sake of *G* – *G cannot* constitute a sufficient reason for God to allow nonresistant nonbelief. But one might think that a good such as *G might* actually justify God in allowing nonresistant nonbelief, so long as *G* meets the optimal means condition. If this is so, then the outweighing goods condition should be revised to accommodate incommensurability.

For example, consider those who have a strong view of the value of creaturely dignity. Suppose, as Richard Swinburne argues, that God cannot make His existence too obvious to creatures without sacrificing our morally significant free will – but this makes it very likely that there will be some nonresistant nonbelievers.⁹⁸ In this case, God would have to allow for a risk of nonresistant nonbelief in order to allow creatures to have morally significant free will. Suppose further (just for the sake of the example) that morally significant free will bestows *greater dignity* on creatures, so that God must sacrifice a high degree of creaturely dignity in order to prevent nonresistant nonbelief. If one has a strong view of the value of creaturely dignity, one might be hesitant to say that some person *P*'s dignity can rightly be judged to be more valuable than, as valuable as, or less valuable than *P*'s opportunity to have a personal relationship with God. Someone like this might deem these two goods to be incommensurable. In this situation, such a person might argue, God might plausibly do the equivalent of flipping a coin to make His decision. And this might be the reason why we end up with hiddenness. If this were the case, then in order to identify a good for the sake of which God would be willing to allow nonresistant nonbelief, one must *either* identify an outweighing good or an

⁹⁸ See for example Richard Swinburne, *Providence and the Problem of Evil* (Oxford University Press, 1998) 204-210 as well as Richard Swinburne, *The Existence of God* (Oxford University Press, 2004) 268-271.

incommensurable good. But then, one might conclude, the outweighing goods condition ought to be revised to take incommensurability into account.

Contrary to this, it seems to me that the problem of incommensurability might not be a reason to revise the outweighing goods condition. For recall that I argued in the previous chapter that God might break ties in favour of allowing for the possibility of personal relationships with Him due to *His* desire for personal relationship with His creatures for *its own sake*. If this is true, then if a good – such as creaturely dignity perhaps – turns out to be incommensurable with the good of a personal relationship with God, and God has to choose between one or the other, rather than flipping a coin God will opt for personal relationship. But then that would mean that the good of creaturely dignity cannot constitute a sufficient reason for God to remain hidden, and it cannot provide a successful defense against the argument from divine hiddenness.⁹⁹ And so the outweighing goods condition stands.

Ultimately, we will have to deal with any complications which might arise because of incommensurability only once a greater good is proposed the value of which one suspects to be incommensurable with the value of a personal relationship with God. But until such goods are identified, the problem will not come up. Either way, the outweighing goods condition does not have to be altered to take incommensurability into consideration.

2.2 Are These Conditions Jointly Sufficient?

So now we have two plausible candidates for necessary conditions for the success of any greater goods response to the argument from divine hiddenness: the “outweighing goods” condition and the “optimal means” condition. But do they together constitute a sufficient condition? That is, would God be justified in allowing some case of nonresistant nonbelief

⁹⁹ At least, given the assumptions made above.

NN for the sake of some good G *just in case* the value of G outweighs the value lost by NN and G cannot obtain unless God allows NN or something worse? It seems to me that the outweighing goods condition and the optimal means condition *do* jointly constitute a *sufficient* condition for God to allow cases of nonresistant nonbelief. And so if some good (or set of goods) G is identified which meets these conditions, and G plausibly exists, then we will have a successful *defense* against the hiddenness argument.¹⁰⁰

I suspect that not everyone will agree with me that these two conditions constitute a sufficient condition. There are (at least) two more candidates for necessary conditions which need to be addressed. First, some may think that God would be justified in allowing some person S to be a nonresistant nonbeliever for the sake of some good G *only if* G sufficiently benefits S. Call this the “patient-centred” condition. Second, some may think that no good which requires *incompatibilist* (ie. libertarian) *free will* can play a role in a successful defense against the hiddenness argument.¹⁰¹ Call this the “compatibilist” condition. The next two chapters examine each of these proposed necessary conditions in turn, and I argue that neither is a necessary condition for a successful response to the argument from divine hiddenness. For the rest of this chapter, some of what I discuss will be affected by whether or not these two candidate conditions are necessary. Accordingly, I will note the effect they would have.

¹⁰⁰ And if G does exist, then we have a successful theodicy.

¹⁰¹ There are at least two reasons why one might think this. The first comes from Schellenberg, who has argued that a perfectly loving God would not give creatures libertarian free will because of the evil it is liable to cause. If Schellenberg is right, then no good which involves or assumes free will can meet the outweighing goods condition. The second reason some may think that no good involving libertarian free will can be used in a successful defense is that the actual existence of libertarian free will is controversial. And so even if *in principle* God would be justified in allowing NN for some G which involves free will, if there is no free will then G *cannot* exist in the actual world. And if G cannot exist in the actual world, then G cannot be used in a successful defense or theodicy.

2.3 Interim Conclusion

In the first part of this chapter I established that there are at least two necessary conditions for any successful greater goods response to the hiddenness argument: the outweighing goods condition and the optimal means condition. I have argued that the former does not require any revision due to the problem of incommensurability. I have also flagged two other potential necessary conditions – the patient-centred and compatibilist conditions – though I wait to address them until later chapters. This ends the first half of this chapter. In the next half, I outline a strategy for how to best *meet* the outweighing goods condition and the optimal means condition. I also briefly summarize a few of the goods proposed in the literature, and in doing so I will demonstrate how the patient-centred and compatibilist conditions would complicate things for the greater goods responder. This will demonstrate that there is good reason to examine these conditions and determine whether or not we should accept them. Ultimately I will argue that they ought to be rejected. This is the task I devote myself to in the two chapters following this one.

3 The Many Goods Response

There are many different goods proposed in the literature. Some authors may intend their proposed good to be *all* that is necessary to either defend against the hiddenness argument or refute it. Others may simply take it for granted that their proposed good should be viewed as merely *part* of a reply to the argument from divine hiddenness. Very few greater goods responders explicitly state that their proposed good cannot defend against the argument from divine hiddenness on its own.

One exception to this is Travis Dumsday, who writes, “The best approach is probably a cumulative case combining multiple compatible and interrelated strategies of

reply.”¹⁰² Last chapter I hinted at what such a cumulative case might look like, when I argued that greater goods considerations would benefit most other responses to the argument from divine hiddenness. But Dumsday does not explicitly mention the possibility that the *combined value* of some of the proposed goods in the hiddenness literature might play a role in a response.¹⁰³

What I suggest in this section is that the best response to the argument from divine hiddenness will incorporate – to some extent – the “many goods” response (hereafter “MGR”) The MGR admits that no single good may be sufficient as a response to the argument from divine hiddenness. If “greater goods” is just one element of a cumulative case response, the MGR admits that no single good may be sufficient to fill the “greater goods” role in that cumulative case response. Instead, the MGR holds that many goods can be combined to play this “greater goods” role together. And, if greater goods are all that is necessary to overcome the argument from divine hiddenness, the many goods response holds that this sort of response plausibly involves many goods.

This second part of the chapter will consist of two sections. In the first section I will argue that the MGR is the *optimal* strategy for greater goods reasoning in response to the hiddenness argument. In the second section I will discuss several of the goods which have already been proposed in the literature, and how well they meet the conditions for being incorporated into the many goods response. This section should also motivate the need to discuss the patient-centred and compatibilist conditions, which I go on to do in the next two chapters. I conclude this chapter by proposing a new good which I argue can be incorporated into the MGR.

¹⁰² For example, see Travis Dumsday, “Divine Hiddenness and Special Revelation,” *Religious Studies* 51 (2015) 256.

¹⁰³ One philosopher who *does* discuss this possibility is Paul Moser. See his “Cognitive Idolatry and Divine Hiding,” in Daniel Howard-Snyder and Paul Moser (eds.), *Divine Hiddenness: New Essays* (Cambridge University Press, 2001) 135.

3.1 The Benefits of the MGR

When I ask whether or not the MGR is the “optimal strategy”, I mean to ask about the potential benefits and drawbacks of the MGR. Essentially I aim to discuss why we should bother to consider goods in light of the MGR. If it did not have some real advantages, or if its drawbacks were too great, it wouldn’t be worth considering.

The primary benefit to the MGR is that, in order to constitute a successful defense against the hiddenness argument, only the MGR *itself* must possibly meet the outweighing goods condition and the optimal means condition. And in order to constitute a successful *theodicy*, only the MGR itself must plausibly actually meet these conditions.¹⁰⁴ This means that the *individual* goods within the MGR do not necessarily have to meet these conditions on their own. It would be enough to demonstrate there is a *set of goods* G such that G’s *total* value outweighs the value lost because of nonresistant nonbelief, and G (*the set*) requires nonresistant nonbelief or something worse.¹⁰⁵ So long as there is such a set of goods, it will not matter if each *individual* good cannot outweigh the value lost because of nonresistant nonbelief, and it will not matter if each *individual* good does not require nonresistant nonbelief or something worse. Only the *set* of goods matters.

What does this mean practically? First, it means that some proposed good does not necessarily need to be discarded when it is judged to be insufficient on its own to outweigh the value lost from nonresistant nonbelief; it can simply be added to the MGR. So long as it is determined that some proposed good is indeed valuable, then it might add to the total value of the MGR. Second, it means that there may be some goods which do not require nonresistant nonbelief, and yet which might be possible to incorporate into the MGR.

¹⁰⁴ Setting aside for now the patient-centred and compatibilist conditions.

¹⁰⁵ Or which is more valuable given nonresistant nonbelief.

Unlike goods which do not meet the outweighing goods condition on their own, however, it is not so simple to know whether goods which do not meet the optimal means condition can ultimately be incorporated into the MGR. This, instead, is the practical benefit: if a *set* of two or more goods meets the optimal means condition the set itself can be incorporated into the MGR – no matter how many of the individual goods in the set meet the optimal means condition on their own.

Another benefit to the MGR is that it acknowledges that each *case* of nonresistant nonbelief might be explained by *different* goods. While I suspect that most authors who have proposed greater goods in the literature do not suppose that their proposed good is the one and only reason for every case of hiddenness, few have made it explicit that *different* cases of hiddenness might be explained by *different* goods. The MGR simply makes this explicit.¹⁰⁶

There are at least two more minor benefits of the MGR. First, in a sense the MGR can “afford” to lose a good here or there. Suppose some good G is proposed, incorporated into the MGR, but then later someone demonstrates that it either is not of any significant value or that it does not plausibly meet the optimal means condition. All we must do is remove G from the MGR, and consider what is left. It’s also worth noting that, over time, other goods will be *added* to the MGR – as I intend to do at the end of this chapter. Second, as I have already noted, if one accepts the patient-centred condition then God would not be justified in allowing some person P to be a nonresistant nonbeliever *entirely* for the sake of some good G which does not benefit P. While I will reject the patient-centred condition in a later chapter, even if one accepts the patient-centred condition one may acknowledge that “non-patient-centred” goods can constitute *part* of the explanation

¹⁰⁶ And so, if the MGR is to be successful, it plausibly involves numerous overlapping sets of goods which can *together* explain all the cases of nonresistant nonbelief there are.

for why God allows nonresistant nonbelief. The MGR might incorporate goods both for the nonresistant nonbelievers *and* others, and so only those who claim that non-patient-centred goods can play *no role* in a response to the hiddenness argument will require that all non-patient-centred goods be removed from the MGR.

3.2 Incorporating Goods

I've argued that the ideal strategy for offering a greater goods response is by defending what I've called the many goods response. In this section I review just a sampling of the goods which have been proposed in the literature.¹⁰⁷ Once reviewed, I will briefly analyze how they might be incorporated into the MGR. As discussed above, the conditions for being incorporated into the MGR are much looser than the conditions of a successful defense or theodicy. This will be seen plainly.

In reviewing these goods, I also place them into four categories. These categories are defined by whether or not they meet the patient-centred and compatibilist conditions. Call goods which fail to meet each of these conditions “non-patient-centred” (or “NPC”) goods and “incompatibilist” goods respectively. With these two conditions in mind, our four categories arise: incompatibilist goods (which are patient-centred), NPC goods (which are compatibilist), incompatibilist NPC goods, and unconditional goods.¹⁰⁸ All goods proposed as a greater goods response should be able to be sorted into at least one of these categories.¹⁰⁹

The purpose of this section is twofold. First, it will be seen how (relatively) easily goods might be incorporated into the MGR. This is not the place to offer a defense of each

¹⁰⁷ Though I reference several others in the footnotes.

¹⁰⁸ Unconditional goods are simply those goods which benefit the nonresistant nonbeliever and do not require incompatibilist free will.

¹⁰⁹ What I call “complex” goods (those goods which benefit *both* the nonresistant nonbeliever as well as others) fit into at least two categories.

of these goods, as there is only space enough for a brief overview. I will mainly be concerned with demonstrating how the conditions for incorporating goods into the MGR are relatively loose. Second, it will be clear that there are *numerous* goods which are either incompatibilist, non-patient-centred, or both. These goods can only be incorporated into the MGR if we reject the patient-centred condition and the compatibilist condition. And so, it will be clear why it will be useful to spend the next two chapters arguing that that they are *not* – in fact – necessary conditions for a successful response to the hiddenness argument. If what I argue in those chapters is right, then plausibly goods from all four of these categories can be incorporated into the MGR. If what I argue in just one of those chapters is right, then goods from at least two of these categories can be incorporated into the MGR. I now turn to discuss some of these goods.

First I discuss *unconditional goods*. Again, these are goods which benefit the nonresistant nonbeliever that do not require incompatibilist free will. The first example of an unconditional good from the literature, which was proposed by Richard Swinburne, is the “opportunity to find out for ourselves whether or not there is a God.”¹¹⁰ This may actually be a *set* of similar goods. It includes, at the very least, the opportunity for serious academic – including philosophical – inquiry into the question of the existence of God.¹¹¹ It plausibly also includes the opportunity to seek to know whether God exists in other ways: to pray to God directly asking for Him to reveal Himself, and to seek out personal religious experience, healing, and miracles. It might also include the opportunity for pre-historic and ancient humans to develop religious ideas through reasoning about ourselves, the natural world and our place in it, and to refine those ideas over time in order to come

¹¹⁰ Richard Swinburne, *Providence and the Problem of Evil* (Oxford University Press, 1998) 210-211.

¹¹¹ A similar good to this, originally from Thomas Aquinas, was proposed as a response to the problem of divine hiddenness by Travis Dumsday in his “A Thomistic Response to the Problem of Divine Hiddenness,” *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 87(3) (2013) 365-377.

closer and closer to knowing about God.¹¹² For simplicity, I will take just the first good – the good of serious philosophical inquiry.

Let's briefly look at how this good might be incorporated into the MGR. First, any greater goods response must meet the outweighing goods condition and the optimal means condition. But as part of a *many goods* response, it is not yet time to determine whether this good meets the outweighing goods condition. It is enough at this point to determine that it is actually valuable – that it is actually a good. While I will not offer at this point a decisive defense of the value of this good, it does seem that serious inquiry about God's existence is uncontroversially a good thing (all else being equal). Believers and nonbelievers alike enjoy it, and many have (in part) made their livings doing it – we must look no further than professional philosophers of religion (Schellenberg included!). I can also offer my own personal experience that such activity is incredibly meaningful to me and that it is – at the very least – enjoyable. So the opportunity to engage in serious philosophical inquiry into the existence of God is at least intuitively valuable.¹¹³

Serious inquiry into God's existence seems to obviously meet the optimal means condition, since, as Swinburne writes, “to seek, let alone to find, knowledge, we need ignorance to start with.”¹¹⁴ If God's hiddenness is a *necessary* means to bring about some state of affairs, then it must also be the *optimal means* to bring about that state of affairs.¹¹⁵

¹¹² Something like this is suggested by Kevin Vandergriff in “Natural Nonbelief as a Necessary Means to a Life of Choiceworthy Meaning,” *Open Theology* 2(1) (2016) 42.

¹¹³ Note that this is *not* to say that we should prefer this opportunity over having the opportunity for a meaningful personal relationship with God. That would be to say that it meets the *outweighing goods* condition. But, as I have argued already, it does not need to meet the outweighing goods condition on its own. It's enough that it is valuable – and the fact that it is potentially a very meaningful activity is even better.

¹¹⁴ Swinburne (1998) 210.

¹¹⁵ I should note that although *ignorance* may be necessary for serious philosophical investigation, *nonresistant* nonbelief in particular may not be. One might argue that *resistant* nonbelief would be enough. But it is not clear to me that resistant nonbelief *would* be enough. If God's existence were put beyond inculpable doubt, it's unclear that any philosophical investigation which might result could be regarded as “serious”. Nevertheless, even supposing that nonresistant nonbelief is not necessary for serious philosophical investigation, because resistant nonbelief can achieve this, nonresistant nonbelief is still

And so, if the good of coming to know about God's existence on our own requires that at some point God remains hidden from us, then it must also be that God's remaining hidden from us is the *optimal* means for bringing about such a good.¹¹⁶

So there seem to be some good initial reasons for thinking the good can be incorporated into the MGR.¹¹⁷ The next question is whether it can be *unconditionally* incorporated, as I am claiming. Again, all I mean by "unconditional" is that it is neither a non-patient-centred nor an incompatibilist good. This good is probably what I will call a "complex" good, with regards to who it benefits. It benefits nonresistant nonbelievers since they certainly have the opportunity to seriously discuss whether God exists. It also benefits believers, who can engage with nonbelievers in discussion and debate. But we can separate complex goods into their simpler parts; this good brings about both a patient-centred as well as a non-patient centred benefit. But what about free will – is this good an incompatibilist good? Swinburne himself seems to suggest that the good we have from ignorance about God's existence is the *free choice* about whether to engage in a serious investigation. While this choice itself may be an incompatibilist good, it seems to me that even if we take away incompatibilist free will, there is a good here that remains. Even if

probably the *optimal* means since in general it should be preferred over resistant nonbelief. I will say a bit more about why nonresistant nonbelief is generally preferable to resistant nonbelief below.

¹¹⁶ One might object that there would *still* be room for philosophical investigation into the question of God's existence – even if everyone knew that God existed – as long as many or most did not *know* that they knew. As I said above, I cannot offer a complete defense of each of these goods I discuss here. But even if one thinks that this good does not *require* God to hide, one might argue that it is nevertheless *a greater good* if some people are legitimately ignorant about God's existence. It is arguably more valuable, at least in many cases, to gain first-tier knowledge (to know X) than it is to gain second-tier knowledge (to know that you know X). And even if it is not, it is plausibly more valuable to have the opportunity to gain *first and second-tier* knowledge than *just* second-tier knowledge.

¹¹⁷ Schellenberg often employs what he calls the "accommodation strategy" to demonstrate that certain proposed goods do not require God's hiddenness – or that there are other sufficiently similar goods which do not require God's hiddenness. I will address worries about the accommodation strategy in chapter VI.

there is no such free will, it will nevertheless be a good thing to engage in philosophical inquiry about the existence of God.¹¹⁸

Another example of an unconditional good comes from Robert Lehe who suggests that “God may allow a person to wonder whether He exists in order to intensify that person’s longing for God.”¹¹⁹ If one always knows that God exists – and always has access to relationship with God – then (one might argue) it may be easy to take God’s presence for granted.¹²⁰ But if one is distant from God for a period of time, including having a period of nonbelief, then that person will plausibly come to appreciate having a personal relationship with God even more once becoming aware of God. If this is right, then divine hiddenness can actually *enhance* one’s eventual personal relationship with God, since a relationship thrives the more each party appreciates it.¹²¹

Can this good be incorporated into the MGR? One might doubt that we actually *could* take God’s presence for granted, and if so we would not need a period of nonresistant nonbelief to restore our longing or desire for God. I think a better way to understand this good is not that it *restores* our longing or desire for God, but that it *increases* our desire for God. And the good is not that it *restores* one’s appreciation for God, but it *enhances* one’s appreciation of God. I will focus on the enhanced appreciation. When one longs for or desires something, a temporary period of unfulfillment changes the

¹¹⁸ Furthermore, even the *choice* to engage in serious inquiry need not be incompatibilist. Plausibly, there is still something good about having that choice even if it is only a compatibilist choice (though there may nevertheless be *more* good if the choice is incompatibilist). Thanks to Brian Leftow for this point.

¹¹⁹ Robert Lehe, “A Response to the Argument from the Reasonableness of Nonbelief,” *Faith and Philosophy* 26(3) (1996) 163.

¹²⁰ One might object that one could never take God’s presence for granted. I discuss this objection below.

¹²¹ This response is very similar to the so-called “dark night of the soul” reply, according to which a period of hiddenness from God is necessary to obtain greater spiritual maturity. There is some question whether the dark night of the soul reply is an incompatibilist good, or whether it belongs in the unconditional category. Tracing originally from St. John of the Cross, the dark night of the soul as a reason for hiddenness is endorsed by Laura L. Garcia, “St. John of the Cross and the Necessity of Divine Hiddenness” in Daniel Howard-Snyder and Paul K. Moser (eds.), *Divine Hiddenness: New Essays* (Cambridge University Press, 2002) 83-97. For a more recent defense, see Sarah Coakley, “Divine Hiddenness or Dark Intimacy? How John of the Cross Dissolves a Contemporary Philosophical Dilemma,” in Eleonore Stump and Adam Green (eds.), *Hidden Divinity and Religious Beliefs: New Perspectives* (Cambridge University Press, 2016) 229-245.

way one *appreciates* the object of one's desire once it is fulfilled. When one knows what it is like for God to be absent, one appreciates God's presence not just *more*, but in a different way. One *recognizes* in ways that one otherwise wouldn't the *difference* God's presence makes. And this appreciation of God is plausibly enhanced in a unique way by nonresistant nonbelief. Only the nonresistant nonbeliever knows what it feels like to live in a world seemingly utterly absent of God. Nonresistant nonbelievers come closer than any others to knowing what the world would be like without God. And when they finally come to know God, they alone can attest to the difference not just God's *presence* makes, but the difference His *existence* makes. And so a period of nonresistant nonbelief can enhance in a unique way one's appreciation of God. And an enhanced appreciation of God plausibly enhances one's relationship with God.

Understanding things this way, it seems clear to me that this good can be incorporated into the many goods response. An enhanced personal relationship with God is *undoubtedly* valuable – this much should be at least as clear as it is that a personal relationship with God *itself* is valuable. But does this meet the optimal means condition? While there might be many ways of enhancing a personal relationship with God, it seems to me that each *way* of doing so is different. And so the *appreciation* of the relationship one gets from a period of nonresistant nonbelief – it seems to me – cannot quite be gotten in any other way.¹²² It also seems clear that this is an unconditional good. It is unquestionably a benefit to the nonresistant nonbeliever, rather than someone else. And it does not seem to require incompatibilist free will; even if I have free will I cannot will

¹²² This may not convince everyone, but it should suffice for now. I must reiterate that this is *not* the place to offer a decisive defense of each individual good. Moreover, I return to discuss this good in greater depth in chapter VI.

myself to have a newfound appreciation for anything. That is something that *happens* to you.¹²³ And so this is another unconditional good.¹²⁴

I turn now to discuss the category of (*compatibilist*) NPC goods. For my main example, I turn again to Richard Swinburne. The good from this category he proposes is, essentially, the opportunity to evangelize. He writes that nonresistant nonbelief “allows the believer to have the awesome choice of helping or not helping the agnostic to understand who is the source of his existence and of his ultimate well-being.”¹²⁵ Again we turn to how this good might be incorporated into the MGR. Unlike the other goods discussed so far, the value of this good strikes me as a bit less *immediately* obvious. But, it does seem to be a *meaningful* task, and in general it is good for us to have meaningful tasks that we are responsible for carrying out. Travis Dumsday suggests that there might be even more to its value. According to Dumsday, an important part of the most valuable of friendships is pursuing common aims together.¹²⁶ One of the greatest joint aims humans might have with God is helping others to come to know God, and thus doing so is an important part of having a *friendship* with God. This good plausibly meets the optimal means condition, since in order to evangelize there need to be some nonbelievers.¹²⁷ It is plausibly better that they are nonresistant so there is no increase in moral evil.¹²⁸

¹²³ It might be that *something* happens to you, and then upon *reflection* on it you gain a newfound appreciation for something (for example, if I get in a car accident, I may only gain a newfound appreciation for life upon reflection). But the action of reflection can bring about appreciation whether or not there is libertarian free will.

¹²⁴ Other potentially “unconditional goods” are proposed by Ebrahim Azadegan in “Ibn Arabi On the Problem of Divine Hiddenness,” *Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn ‘Arabi Society* 53(1) (2013) 49-67, as well as (perhaps) by Andrew Cullison in “Two Solutions to the Problem of Divine Hiddenness,” *American Philosophical Quarterly* 47(2) (2010) 99-134. For Cullison’s proposed good, see his second solution. Cullison seems to present his good as involving a libertarian free choice, but it plausibly does not require this, and so I’ve put it in this category.

¹²⁵ Richard Swinburne (2004) 271.

¹²⁶ Travis Dumsday, “Divine Hiddenness and the Responsibility Argument: Assessing Schellenberg’s Argument Against Theism.” *Philosophia Christi* 12(2) (2010) 364.

¹²⁷ Schellenberg applies his accommodation strategy to this. I address the accommodation strategy in chapter VI.

¹²⁸ Something similar – but not exactly the same – is suggested by Travis Dumsday in “Divine Hiddenness as Divine Mercy,” *Religious Studies* 48 (2012) 183-198.

As it should be obvious, the good of evangelism is of no *direct* benefit to the nonresistant nonbeliever. One might argue that it is good for the nonresistant nonbeliever to be part of the reason *believers* have access to a good.¹²⁹ But many will find this kind of reasoning unconvincing, and many of those who *do* find it convincing will likely admit that it is not a particularly valuable good. I am content to label this a non-patient-centred good. But it seems equally clear to me that this good does *not* require incompatibilist free will. Many Calvinists – who are most frequently compatibilists – hold that evangelism is important. So this does not seem to be an incompatibilist good, and so it seems that the good of evangelism fits well into the category of (compatibilist) non-patient-centred goods.

The next category is (patient-centred) *incompatibilist* goods. The main good I want to discuss in this category comes from Daniel Howard-Snyder, who suggests that God might allow someone to remain a nonresistant nonbeliever until that person is ready to respond appropriately to His revelation of Himself.¹³⁰ Someone might be disposed to respond inappropriately – and thus partially constitute a reason for God to remain temporarily hidden – in a few different ways. First, one might have the disposition to reject God. Second, one might have the disposition to *accept* God, but not be responsible for that disposition. Third, one might have the disposition to accept God, and be responsible for that disposition, but have bad or unfitting motivations for accepting God.

This might be better described as the *prevention of a negative* state of affairs rather than as a good in itself. And, particularly in the case of rejection, it seems as though

¹²⁹ In other words: one might think it is good for nonresistant nonbelievers to be a benefit to someone else.

¹³⁰ Howard-Snyder originally defended this idea in his “The Argument from Divine Hiddenness,” *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 26(3) (1996) 433-453. He gives a follow-up defense of it in his “Divine Openness and Creaturely Nonresistant Nonbelief,” in Eleonore Stump and Adam Green (eds.), *Hidden Divinity and Religious Beliefs: New Perspectives* (Cambridge University Press, 2016) 126-138. Paul Moser offers what might be considered a variant of Howard-Snyder’s proposed good in Moser’s “God and Evidence: A Cooperative Approach,” *European Journal for the Philosophy of Religion* 5(1) (2013) 46-61.

allowing nonresistant nonbelief *could* prevent a bad state of affairs. Once again I must point out that this is not the place to offer a strong defense that it is indeed good for God to prevent these states of affairs, but instead I just note that Daniel Howard-Snyder does offer a defense of this.¹³¹ As for the optimal means condition, all but preventing *rejection* obviously meet this. The case of preventing rejection, instead, seems at first to require that an individual be a *resistant* nonbeliever, and so this would not help a response to the hiddenness argument since it is only *nonresistant* nonbelief that the hiddenness argument claims is incompatible with God's existence.¹³² But it seems to me that even rejection – while it might not *require* nonresistant nonbelief to prevent – might be most *optimally* prevented by God's allowing nonresistant nonbelief. It seems perfectly plausible to me that someone might *actually* be disposed to reject God, upon learning of His existence, and yet not actively resist belief in God. There may be some person, S, who really desires to know God, and to know that He exists, but upon God's revelation to S, S might realize that God is different from how S imagined He would be – God might expect S to give up some of S's sinful habits for example. So although S was a nonresistant nonbeliever, S might reject God upon God's revelation. And so plausibly even the case of rejection meets the optimal means condition in some cases.

This is a case which is plausibly beneficial to the nonresistant nonbeliever, if anyone. If it is good for these less-than-ideal responses to be prevented, then that is a good for the nonresistant nonbeliever. But this good also seems to require incompatibilist free will – at least in order to meet the optimal means condition. Without incompatibilist free will, it seems possible that God could simply set things up so that everyone always

¹³¹ Howard-Snyder (2016) 136.

¹³² At least with Schellenberg's hiddenness argument.

responds to God's revelation appropriately.¹³³ While God could possibly set things up so that we would not always be disposed to respond appropriately, and then use nonresistant nonbelief to prevent inappropriate response, it seems obvious that the *optimal* means of preventing inappropriate response (given no incompatibilist free will) would not require God to allow any nonresistant nonbelief. And so this is most likely a (patient-centred) incompatibilist good.^{134 135}

The final category of goods is incompatibilist NPC goods. One good which may fit into this category comes from Travis Dumsday.¹³⁶ Again, perhaps better described as the prevention of an evil, Dumsday's good piggy-backs off of Howard-Snyder's. According to Dumsday, it might be that God wants to hide from the *resistant* because they would respond negatively to revelation that God exists. But in order to hide effectively from the *resistant* God might also have to hide from the *nonresistant*.¹³⁷

As with Howard-Snyder's good, whether this can be incorporated into the MGR partially depends on whether it is a good thing for God to prevent people from rejecting God. This in particular seems plausible. And like Howard-Snyder's good, this good seems to depend on libertarian free will in order to meet the optimal means condition. Unlike

¹³³ If Molinism is true, then it *might not* be feasible for God to ensure this, even if it is possible. Given that Molinism might actually be compatibilist, then (if Molinism is true) Howard-Snyder's good might actually be an unconditional good as well.

¹³⁴ For reasons of space, and because I briefly discussed it earlier this chapter, I've omitted possibly one of the most notable goods proposed in the literature: the good of (morally significant) free will itself. Used as a response to the problem of divine hiddenness, this good is endorsed by Swinburne in *Providence and the Problem of Evil* (Oxford University Press, 1998) 204-210, as well as in *The Existence of God* (Oxford University Press, 2004) 268-271. It is also endorsed by Michael J. Murray, "Coercion and the Hiddenness of God," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 30 (1993) 27-38.

¹³⁵ Travis Dumsday proposes several goods which plausibly fit into the category of *incompatibilist* goods. For some examples, see his "Divine Hiddenness, Free-Will, and the Victims of Wrongdoing," *Faith and Philosophy* 27 (2010) 423-438; "Divine Hiddenness and the Opiate of the People," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 76 (2014) 193-207; "Divine Hiddenness and Special Revelation," *Religious Studies* 51 (2015) 241-259; and "Divine Hiddenness as Divine Mercy," *Religious Studies* 48 (2012) 183-198.

¹³⁶ Travis Dumsday, "Divine Hiddenness and the One Sheep," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 79 (2016) 69-86.

¹³⁷ While I can't get into too much detail, the idea is that if God provided the nonresistant with sufficient evidence of His existence, that itself would be evidence for the resistant. And so they might come to believe that God exists, and yet respond by rejecting God.

Howard-Snyder's good, though, this is clearly a non-patient-centred good. God hides Himself from the nonresistant *explicitly* for the benefit of the resistant, on Dumsday's picture. And so this seems to be a prime example of an incompatibilist NPC good.

It was my aim in this section to make two things apparent. First, it is much more obvious that the many goods already proposed in the literature can be incorporated into the MGR than it is that any of them (on their own) meet the outweighing goods condition and the optimal means condition.¹³⁸ Second, I demonstrated that many of the goods proposed in the literature will fail to qualify as part of the MGR if only unconditional goods can be incorporated. And so this motivates me to spend the next two chapters rejecting the patient-centred condition and the compatibilist condition. But before I get to that, I close this chapter by presenting a new good.

3.3 A New Good¹³⁹

I suggest that there is another good which comes from nonresistant nonbelief. Nonresistant nonbelief allows there to be a greater variety of personal testimony about entering into a relationship with God, and I will argue that the testimonies from former nonresistant nonbelievers may be particularly valuable. Personal testimonies are unique to each individual, but they can be divided into at least four main categories. First, there are people who have always believed in God, and whose relationship with God has grown since they were small children. Second, there are people who culpably resist God for a period of time until they finally accept God. Third, there are some who fall away from relationship before

¹³⁸ I have not shown that none of these goods meets the outweighing goods and optimal means conditions on their own. Nevertheless, it should be clear that it is more likely that each can be incorporated into the MGR than it is that any provides a successful defense on its own. After all, if there *were* a good which could provide a successful defense on its own, it could *a fortiori* be incorporated into the MGR.

¹³⁹ Much of this section appeared in my "Divine Hiddenness, Greater Goods, and Accommodation," *Sophia* 56(4) (2017): 589-603. In particular, see pages 600-602.

returning to God.¹⁴⁰ The fourth category includes nonresistant nonbelievers who do not know that God exists at all until something happens which allows them to believe.

It is plausible that an individual's personal testimony can be good for both the individual and for the community with which an individual shares his or her testimony. First, for many individuals, whatever their testimonies may be, they connect with those testimonies in a way that brings them each value. Testimonies are unique to each person, and many believers feel as though they would not be the same person without them. Thus, reflecting on their own testimonies encourages them and gives them the sense that they are part of God's plan. And it may be that each person's story of how he or she entered into a relationship with God is the *best* story for that individual. If God knew this from eternity, then He might do what He could to create a world where each person lives the story of coming to know God that is best for him or her.

Personal testimonies also provide *communal* goods. Many individual members of the community may benefit from one person's testimony, and that person's testimony will also benefit the community as a whole. Individual members who hear a person's testimony are able to empathize and know and understand what it would be like to be that person. This allows individuals to understand the many ways God works, and to perhaps appreciate their own testimonies in a new light. The community itself is then strengthened as people are able to understand each other in deeper ways. These testimonies may also encourage the members of the community. It's plausible that the community will grow stronger and flourish if there are a variety of testimonies and they make a practice out of sharing those testimonies.

¹⁴⁰ This includes both those who started in relationship with God and those who started as resistant, then believed, and then resisted again. It also includes those who fall away and return any number of times.

A testimony which includes a period of nonresistant nonbelief may be particularly valuable. Recall the good I discussed above of the *enhanced appreciation* of relationship with God that comes from a period of nonresistant nonbelief. Plausibly, some individuals may gain more from reflecting on their own personal testimony if that testimony included a period of nonresistant nonbelief which led to an enhanced appreciation of their relationship with God.¹⁴¹ If the best story for a given person *is* one which includes nonresistant nonbelief, then he or she will appreciate this story when he or she reflects on it and shares it with others. That person may see it as a valuable part of God's plan, and may exalt Him because of it. It may also cause this person to reflect on how, even when he or she did not know of His existence, God was watching over and loving him or her.

Further, the story of a nonresistant nonbeliever may be of particular value to the community of which he or she is a part. If nonresistant nonbelievers share their stories, then the members of their communities will understand in a new way what it would be like to not know of God's existence. As I discussed above it may be that, apart from experiencing nonresistant nonbelief oneself, there is a kind of appreciation of God one cannot gain. But, assuming that not everyone will be a nonresistant nonbeliever, the *testimony* of nonresistant nonbelievers gives one *something* of that enhanced appreciation. Through the testimony of a nonresistant nonbeliever, one comes closer to appreciating the difference God's existence makes than one could otherwise come, apart from becoming a nonresistant nonbeliever oneself.

There are a couple of possible objections here. First, one might wonder why God would require there to be *actual* cases of nonresistant nonbelief, rather than fictional stories. If there are fictional stories of nonresistant nonbelievers, then believers might have

¹⁴¹ Whether the *individual* benefit I am discussing here is *distinct* from the good of enhanced appreciation I discussed above may be debated. At any rate, this discussion is important as a set up for the *communal* goods which come from personal testimony.

the communal benefits of those stories; they might be able to understand what it would be like to be a nonresistant nonbeliever, appreciate their own stories in a new light, and come closer to appreciating the difference God's existence makes than they could come without those fictional stories. But it seems to me that fictional stories would *not* bring as much benefit as the stories of actual nonresistant nonbelievers. First, only if there are actual nonresistant nonbelievers could there be the benefits for the individual. Furthermore, it seems to me that a story which is factual has more power than a fictional story, and so the benefits to the community would be greater if there were actual nonresistant nonbelievers. Plausibly there would be something about *knowing the person* who experienced nonresistant nonbelief which could bring one closer to understanding the difference God's existence makes than knowing a fictional story ever could. This understanding would be experiential, not propositional, and so actually *knowing* a person, in a relational way, who was a nonresistant nonbeliever will make a difference.¹⁴²

A second objection is that the stories of *resistant* nonbelievers would be enough to gain these benefits, so nonresistant nonbelief would not be necessary. While it seems plausible to me that there *is* value in the testimony of a person who once resisted God but finally came to accept Him, this only means that God might desire for there to be some people with *this* testimony as well. It does not seem that what a community gains from a former resistant nonbeliever's testimony is the same as what that community gains from a former *nonresistant* nonbeliever's testimony.¹⁴³ But furthermore, nonresistant nonbelief

¹⁴² This might *also* provide a reason for thinking that there would be a benefit to there being more than *one* nonresistant nonbeliever. If there is just one nonresistant nonbeliever, that person could share his or her story among many believers. But most people would not actually know that person relationally. If there are many nonresistant nonbelievers, then more believers would have the opportunity to know, in a relational way, someone who was a nonresistant nonbeliever.

¹⁴³ It seems to me that the nonresistant nonbeliever can convey a more consistent picture of what the world would be like if God did not exist, and thus the difference God's existence makes. The resistant nonbeliever's testimony may have *some* similarities to the nonresistant nonbeliever's testimony, but the fact of his or her resistance will play a much more central and essential role in that story. The role he or she played in his or her own nonbelief is essential to that nonbelief, and so he or she cannot relay a consistent

might be a more desirable state of affairs than resistant nonbelief, since nonresistant nonbelievers do not sin in their nonbelief. If God knows some individual would (or would be very likely to) resist belief in Him, He might withhold from that individual evidence sufficient for belief in Him, until that person is ready to respond appropriately to knowledge of God.

If what I have said here is correct, then it seems to me that there is value from personal testimonies about coming to know God which can be incorporated into the MGR. The individual benefits would be unconditional goods – neither non-patient-centred nor requiring incompatibilist free will. The community benefit, on the other hand, is a non-patient-centred good.

4 Conclusion

In this chapter I established two necessary conditions which must be met for any good or set of goods to constitute a sufficient reason for God to allow nonresistant nonbelief: the outweighing goods and optimal means conditions. I also suggested that the *best* strategy for offering a greater goods response to the hiddenness argument involves weighing the value of the *many* goods which come from nonresistant nonbelief. I discussed how there are already quite a number of goods proposed in the literature, and offered very brief assessment of whether these can be incorporated into the many goods response – though, as I noted above, many of these goods require a much more in depth treatment than I can offer here. Finally I discussed and defended a *new* good which, I argue, can plausibly be incorporated into the many goods response. I noted that there will be *more* value from this good if one allows *non-patient-centred* goods to play a role in a response to the hiddenness

picture of what experience of the world would be like if God did not exist. And so (furthermore) he or she cannot give as complete a picture of the difference God's existence makes. This does not mean that the resistant nonbeliever's testimony is not valuable; it only means that its value is not *the same* as the value of the nonresistant nonbeliever's testimony.

argument. In the next chapter I discuss whether such goods *can* contribute to such a response.

Chapter III Who Must Benefit?

“Surely I haven't suffered simply that I, my crimes and my sufferings, may manure the soil of the future harmony for somebody else. I want to see with my own eyes the hind lie down with the lion and the victim rise up and embrace his murder. I want to be there when everyone else suddenly understands what it has all been for.”¹⁴⁴

1 Introduction

Would God be justified in allowing someone to be a nonresistant nonbeliever for the sake of some good which meets both the outweighing goods condition and the necessary means condition, no matter *who* that good benefited? Or must the good for the sake of which God allows someone to be a nonresistant nonbeliever benefit *that very person*? This raises the more general question of whether God would let anyone suffer or be deprived of a significant good – that is, would God let anyone be “disadvantaged” – for the sake of a good which in no way benefits that particular individual. While this question has received some attention in the literature on the problem of evil, it has not often been addressed in discussion on the argument from divine hiddenness. In what follows, goods which benefit the disadvantaged individual (“the patient”) I will call “patient-centred” goods.¹⁴⁵ Goods which benefit someone other than the disadvantaged individual I will call “non-patient-centred” goods.¹⁴⁶ Goods which have benefits for both the disadvantaged individual and for someone else I call “complex” goods. I argue in this chapter that both patient-centred and non-patient-centred goods are appropriate to appeal to in a greater goods response to the argument from divine hiddenness.

¹⁴⁴ Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, trans. Constance Garnett (Dover Publications, 2012) 386-387.

¹⁴⁵ William Alston uses the term “sufferer-centred” in his “The Inductive Argument From Evil and the Human Cognitive Condition,” *Philosophical Perspectives* 5 (1991) 29-67. I follow Klaas Kraay’s use of “patient-centred” in his “Absence of Evidence and Evidence of Absence,” *Faith and Philosophy* 24(2) (2007) 203-228. “Patient” is more neutral than “sufferer” and can refer to individuals who are deprived of a significant good, since they may not necessarily suffer because of this.

¹⁴⁶ There may also be goods that God is interested in, but which have no benefit for any created person. For reasons which should become apparent below, these goods should be treated as a distinct category from non-patient-centred goods, though I do not directly address them in this chapter.

In what follows, I will argue that there could, in principle, be at least *some cases* in which God would be justified in allowing nonresistant nonbelief for the sake of *only* non-patient-centred goods. I will begin by discussing the general question of whether God can allow some person to suffer or lose out on a significant good for the sake of non-patient-centred goods. I will argue that there are some cases in which a perfectly loving God *would* allow this, and that they may be applicable to the argument from divine hiddenness. After that, I turn to the more specific question in the context of divine hiddenness. By contrasting *suffering* with *losing out on a good*, I hope to demonstrate that there are some considerations to make in the argument from divine hiddenness which are not open in discussions of the problem of evil.¹⁴⁷ Even if God might not allow someone to suffer significantly entirely for the sake of a good for someone else,¹⁴⁸ He might withhold a significant good from someone entirely for the sake of a good or set of goods for someone else.

2 The General Question

Most of the discussion on patient-centred and non-patient-centred goods has occurred in the literature on the problem of evil. Because of this, it will be helpful to start the discussion in a way that is general enough to be relevant to both the problem of evil and the argument from hiddenness. To that end, I want to introduce the term “disadvantage”. A person S is disadvantaged just in case S undergoes some sort of suffering or evil, or loses out on a good. Now consider what I will call the “patient-centred” principle:

PC: God would be justified in allowing some person S to be disadvantaged for the

¹⁴⁷ And especially the problem of suffering.

¹⁴⁸ As I go on to discuss, there *are* plausible cases in which God *might* allow someone to suffer significantly entirely for the sake of a good for someone else.

sake of some good or set of goods G¹⁴⁹ only if G sufficiently benefits S (rather than someone or something else).

Strictly speaking, PC is not quite right because there are at least two kinds of counterexamples to it which most people will find uncontroversial.¹⁵⁰ Consider first, if S is *willing* to be disadvantaged for the sake of a good for another person.¹⁵¹ In this case – assuming the outweighing goods condition and the optimal means condition are met – God might be justified in allowing S to be disadvantaged.¹⁵² This should be intuitive. It seems more than plausible, for example, that God would permit one to willingly sacrifice one’s life in order to save a friend’s life.

Consider a second counterexample to PC. If S *deserves* some instance of disadvantage, then God might be justified in allowing S to be disadvantaged. This might be the case *even if* there is no good at all – beyond justice itself – which comes about from S’s disadvantage. Of course, it will be even more plausible if we allow that – at least – the outweighing goods condition is met. Consider this case. If Harry intentionally destroys Luna’s window, it would be just for Harry to pay to replace the window, and perhaps a bit more for the inconvenience and trauma he has caused. This is true even if he must pay against his will. It should be uncontroversial that God would allow such a case.

¹⁴⁹ As I stipulated earlier “greater goods” includes the prevention of evils. For simplicity I am currently grouping goods and prevented evils together, but their relevant differences will become important later this chapter.

¹⁵⁰ These exceptions are noted by Eleonore Stump in “Providence and the Problem of Evil,” in Thomas P. Flint (ed.), *Christian Philosophy* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1990) 66-67.

¹⁵¹ It’s worth pointing out that the sort of “willingness” that is important here should be a more-or-less *reasonable* willingness; one is “willing” in the right sense only if one is in the right mind.

¹⁵² It’s plausible that even the outweighing goods condition and optimal means condition do not need to be met. If S is willing to take on a disadvantage D for the sake of some good G (say, because it is for the sake of someone who S loves dearly), and if S knows that D is slightly worse than G is good then it may be that God would honour that desire. And God may be justified in allowing S to be disadvantaged for the sake of G even if God could achieve G by giving a lesser disadvantage to someone else, if (for example) S is willing to be disadvantaged but no one else is. But I do not expect that any of this will be uncontroversial. Moreover, certainly willingness might not be a *sufficient* condition for God to allow suffering; He might plausibly prevent a masochist from taking on *too much* pointless pain.

These counterexamples to PC can be accommodated by revising the principle in the following way:

PC*: (PC) unless S willingly sacrifices, or is deserving of the disadvantage.

PC* looks better than PC. But even if PC* is true, there will be details which must be determined, such as *how much* G must benefit S in order to “sufficiently” benefit S. Let’s start by looking at the “worst case scenario” for the aims of greater goods responders.

Consider the following condition:

PC^{max}: (PC*) and G sufficiently benefits S only if G *outweighs* for S the value lost from S’s being disadvantaged.

If PC^{max} were true then, outside willed sacrifice or deserved disadvantage, *only* patient-centred goods would have any relevance to either the problem of evil or the hiddenness argument. If PC^{max} is right, then non-patient-centred goods could play no role in a response to either the hiddenness argument or the problem of evil. But I think there are good reasons why we should accept that non-patient-centred goods are not *entirely* barred from inclusion in these discussions, at least in principle.

First, it seems plausible that in some cases non-patient-centred goods could be tie-breakers. Suppose there is a patient-centred good G and the optimal way for God to bring about G would be to allow some person P to have some disadvantage D. But let’s stipulate that the value of G offsets *for P* the negative value of D. In *some* such cases God might plausibly choose whether to allow *both* G and D or neither based on something analogous to a coin flip.¹⁵³ But now suppose that there is *also* a non-patient-centred good, F, for some other person S, and the optimal way for God to bring about F for S is to allow D. *In* those cases where God might decide based on something analogous to a coin flip, the existence

¹⁵³ At this point I acknowledge that this may not be true in all cases. Some disadvantages may be bad enough that, even if they are the optimal way to bring about an offsetting patient-centred good, God might only allow them when the person is willing to take on the disadvantage. Intuitions will probably differ on what should be considered “bad enough”.

of a non-patient-centred good such as F will plausibly break the tie so that God allows D. Person P's well-being is not overall negatively affected, since D has been offset by G, and God *also* brings about more good than He otherwise could in bringing about good F for person S.

Could non-patient-centred goods function as tie-breakers when considering greater goods responses to the hiddenness argument? Recall from the first chapter that plausibly God would break ties in *favour* of relationship, given His own desire for such relationship. Could non-patient-centred goods override that to break ties *against* relationship? It seems plausible to me that they could. For again, if God is perfectly loving this may entail that He would *desire* relationship, and yet *refrain* from satisfying His desire if doing so were not what was best for the beloved. Now if there *were* offsetting patient-centred goods from some person P's nonresistant nonbelief, but there were also *non-patient-centred* goods for person S from person P's nonresistant nonbelief, God may again refrain from satisfying His desire in order to bring about those non-patient-centred goods. Given that God loves *everyone*, and given that P's nonresistant nonbelief has been offset for P, God's love for S might plausibly give Him a reason to (again) refrain from satisfying His desire in order to bring about goods for S. If this is right then, at the very least, non-patient-centred goods can function as tie-breakers in greater goods responses to the hiddenness argument.¹⁵⁴

So plausibly PC^{max} is false. That means, if one accepts PC*, one should accept something weaker than PC^{max}. To give a sense of the range of options there are here is the opposite extreme:

¹⁵⁴ What if there is some patient-centred good G and allowing a certain instance, D, of disadvantage is the optimal way to bring about G, but the value of G falls *just short* of offsetting the negative value of D? In such a case could non-patient-centred goods make up the difference and provide God with a sufficient reason to allow D? For instance, if there were some very great non-patient-centred good that benefited a large number of people, would this provide God with a sufficient reason to allow D? Without a specific example at hand it's hard to know, but immediate intuitions may plausibly be split on this. Utilitarians, for example, may readily accept it as plausible, while Kantians will probably not.

PC^{min}: (PC*) and G sufficiently benefits S so long as G has any benefit at all for S. If one thinks PC* is true, one might find that PC^{min} is too loose. “Surely,” one might say, “some small amount of benefit to S is not enough to justify S’s disadvantage, especially when that disadvantage is very great.”

Despite this intuition, I will argue that PC* *itself* is false. First I will demonstrate that there are several counterexamples to PC*, and suggest another revision of the principle. While the revised principle *may* hold in the case of suffering, ultimately I am concerned with withheld goods, and not suffering. I will argue that there is a relevant difference between the two. While there may be reasons for thinking that God would not allow evil or suffering only for the sake of non-patient-centred goods, I argue that those reasons do not apply with withheld goods. I will conclude that non-patient-centred goods are appropriate to appeal to in a reply to the hiddenness argument, even when they are not accompanied by patient-centred goods. But before this, I turn to discuss some of the reasons one might have for accepting PC*.

3 In Support of PC*

William Alston suggests that the main consideration in favour of (something like¹⁵⁵) PC* is “one of justice and fairness.”¹⁵⁶ He appeals to Eleonore Stump, who writes:

Undeserved suffering which is uncompensated seems clearly unjust; but so does suffering compensated only by benefits to someone other than the sufferer.¹⁵⁷ Consider, for example, the notorious case in which the U.S. Army secretly administered doses of LSD to unsuspecting soldiers for the sake of understanding the drug’s military potential. Perhaps the end sought in this experiment was information worth having. But the appearance of injustice in this case, which seems

¹⁵⁵ Alston, of course, does not address PC* itself. He is writing on the problem of evil, and PC* is broader than that.

¹⁵⁶ William Alston, “The Inductive Argument From Evil and the Human Cognitive Condition,” *Philosophical Perspectives* 5 (1991) 47.

¹⁵⁷ Suffering compensated only by benefits to someone other than the sufferer is no different from suffering totally uncompensated, as far the sufferer is concerned. Thanks to Brian Leftow for pointing this out.

striking to most of us, is at least in part a consequence of the fact that the end aimed at did not directly or primarily benefit those who suffered to achieve it.¹⁵⁸

How might we think this example demonstrates that PC* is true? Roughly, the argument is that *this* example is relevantly like a case of God imposing a disadvantage on an unwilling, undeserving person for the sake of some *other* person. This example is unjust, and therefore wrong, and so God doing so would be unjust and therefore wrong. Since it's an argument by analogy, it's non-deductive. Its strength relies on how similar the two cases are in the relevant ways, and how plausible it is that the US Army acted unjustly, and therefore wrongly.

The example offered by Stump does seem to be a case in which the US Army acted unjustly, but it does not seem to me that it demonstrates that it is *always* unjustified for one to allow someone to go through some unwilling, undeserved disadvantage for the sake of a good which benefits someone else. Ultimately, that Stump's example does not demonstrate PC* as a *general rule* I hope to demonstrate in the following section. I aim to offer *overriding* reasons for rejecting PC*.

4 Against PC*

As we've seen, PC is false because it has counterexamples in the cases of willing and deserved disadvantage. I think there are also some counterexamples to PC*. In what follows, I describe several cases in which someone is plausibly justified in allowing undeserved, unwilling disadvantage for the sake of a non-patient-centred good. I discuss these cases in the order I suspect to be least controversial to most controversial. After this,

¹⁵⁸ Stump (1990) 66.

I will discuss whether and how these cases might be relevant to God and divine hiddenness.¹⁵⁹

First, we might make an exception when a “minor” disadvantage to one person is used to grant another person a great good. Suppose two students, Rich and Penny, are up for a university scholarship. Academically, they are equals, but only one of them can receive the scholarship. If Rich does not receive the scholarship, his parents will only cover part of the cost of his education, and he will have to cancel many of his summer plans in order to work to make up the difference. Penny is an orphan, and if she does not get the scholarship she will not be able to afford to go to university at all. Now suppose the benefactor of the scholarship knows all this. Surely that person would be justified in giving the scholarship to Penny, so she can have the great good of an education, even if it means that Rich will be inconvenienced by this. In the same way, God is plausibly justified in allowing a person to have a minor disadvantage for the sake of a much greater non-patient-centred good, if such a situation arose.¹⁶⁰

Second, it might be morally right to allow S to undergo even a *great evil* for the sake of something that does not benefit S when a great evil must come to *either S or P*. Here is an adapted example from Alvin Plantinga.¹⁶¹ Suppose Peter and Paul are both marooned on far away desert islands, slowly starving to death. I know that I have the time and resources to save *either* Peter or Paul, but I cannot save both of them. If I choose to rescue Peter, Paul’s parents, upon learning that I could have saved Paul (by leaving Peter behind) might ask me, “Why did you let Paul starve to death?” I answer, “For the sake of

¹⁵⁹ Many of the human cases I appeal to involve scarcity of resources. This is what frequently forces humans to choose between several imperfect options. Presumably, God never has a scarcity of resources. Nevertheless, God will be in a similar position whenever He is bound by the laws of logic to choose between imperfect options. And so, as long as the optimal means condition is met for some good, God may be in an analogous position to the human case with regards to allowing nonresistant nonbelief. I return to this point at the end of the chapter.

¹⁶⁰ Again, I address whether God might ever be in an analogous situation later this chapter.

¹⁶¹ In his *God, Freedom, and Evil*, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1974) 19.

Peter.” Most will agree that (all else being equal) I did what was morally best given the situation, and it would have been the same had I abandoned Peter for the sake of Paul. And so it seems intuitive that there could be many cases in which it would be morally permissible to sacrifice the welfare of one person in order to benefit someone else, even when there is no benefit at all to the person sacrificed – such as in cases where one evil is allowed for the sake of preventing an equally bad or worse evil. Similarly, if God could ever be in an analogous situation, He would be justified in allowing great harm to come to one person if it were the only way to keep another person from coming to great harm.¹⁶²

I expect these first two counterexamples should be relatively uncontroversial, and many will find the examples I have provided intuitive. The next few counterexamples to PC* may be a bit more controversial. The first of these counterexamples are cases in which the disadvantaged individual is *compensated*. Marilyn McCord Adams, for example, suggests that God might allow an evil for the sake of some good which does not outweigh it, so long as those disadvantaged by that evil are compensated by some *other* good – which might be very different from the good for the sake of which God actually allows that evil.¹⁶³ She intends compensation to help *meet* the outweighing goods condition in the problem of evil. My proposal is a bit more modest. I suggest that compensation could justify God in allowing someone to be disadvantaged for the sake of goods which *meet* the outweighing goods condition, but are wholly non-patient-centred.

Here is a case of justified compensation which seems plausible to me. Tony has owned a home in an ideal downtown location for many years. The city, in an attempt to relieve traffic, wants to put in a new light rail track, but Tony’s home blocks their ideal route. Without giving him a choice, they seize the property from him. Of course, they pay

¹⁶² Or if all other ways would cause even greater harm.

¹⁶³ Marilyn McCord Adams, “Ignorance, Instrumentality, Compensation, and the Problem of Evil,” *Sophia* 52(1) (2013) 17.

him the market value of his property, and they also add an additional 50% for the inconvenience. In this case, the good for which the city seized Tony's property – the light rail route – was non-patient-centred. Tony's compensation does not result directly from their seizing his property, and nor was their property-seizing a necessary condition for his receiving the money. But it seems like the city is justified in their action.¹⁶⁴

This may not convince everyone that cases of compensation such as this are justified. Compensation, one might say, can never *permit* one to violate another person's consent. This seems implausible to me. Perhaps compensation can never be enough *on its own* to permit one to violate another person's consent. But the example of Tony, I think, demonstrates that compensation can be *part* of what justifies someone in violating another person's consent.¹⁶⁵ If we remember that the city has a responsibility to *all* of its citizens, then we can understand that the city acted fairly.¹⁶⁶ They do not seize Tony's property *for no reason* – they do it to improve public transportation for everyone in the city.¹⁶⁷ But at the same time, Tony is not merely a scapegoat for the sake of everyone else – he is

¹⁶⁴ A similar example is offered by Peter van Inwagen in his article, "The Magnitude, Duration, and Distribution of Evil: A Theodicy," *Philosophical Topics* 16(2) (1988) 184.

¹⁶⁵ It might also be that one can never be justified in inflicting disadvantages of *certain kinds* on another person against that person's consent – even if it is for an outweighing good and even if the disadvantaged person is compensated. Alex Pruss, in *One Body* (University of Notre Dame Press, 2012) 72-73, contrasts a government's nonconsensual seizing of property with government enforced sexual assault. The former can be justified if the right conditions are met, while the latter cannot be justified. But what makes the difference? I propose *the human dignity* condition. There are disadvantages which one could not inflict on another without violating that person's dignity, unless that person consents. That God's allowing nonresistant nonbelief *does not* violate the human dignity condition I discuss in the section below.

¹⁶⁶ Very often we think of God as a loving parent, and therefore we should expect our relationship to God to be that of child to parent. I think another way to think of our relationship to God is that of citizens to their government. Biblically God is both "King" and "Father". I do not think either analogy on its own suffices.

¹⁶⁷ Strictly speaking, the group which benefits from improved transportation includes Tony. Obviously the amount he benefits from this does not nearly outweigh his lost value, but it is nevertheless a *complex* good rather than a purely non-patient-centred good. But I think it should be clear that the plausibility of the example does not hinge on whether Tony benefits at all from the improved public transportation, and slight alterations could make this an example of a purely non-patient-centred good.

compensated for the lost value and inconvenience.¹⁶⁸ When one remembers both of these things, it should seem plausible that the city's actions were right and fair.¹⁶⁹

One might object that, at the very least, *tacit* consent was necessary for the city to be justified in its action – and that such tacit consent is not present in the case of God allowing us to be disadvantaged. The basic idea is that Tony's tacit consent to have his house seized in *particular* comes from his *general* consent to live under the government's laws, whatever they may be.¹⁷⁰ But while tacit consent might be necessary when it comes to the *government*, it is plausibly not necessary when it comes to God. It seems plausible to me that tacit consent is necessary for governments to be justified in acting this way because governments have authority only *given* the more general consent by the citizens they govern over. But God's authority does not come from people; it comes from *who He is*, as ultimate, just, and sovereign. And so if God is ever in analogous situation to the Tony case, surely He has the authority to act as the city did, provided that He offers compensation.¹⁷¹

The final two potential counterexamples to PC* I expect to be most controversial. I call them “counterfactually willing sacrifice” and “ultimately willing sacrifice”

¹⁶⁸ It is important to keep in mind that compensatory goods are *not* the goods for the sake of which God allows someone to be disadvantaged.

¹⁶⁹ Some, perhaps van Inwagen, might think that the city could be justified in seizing Tony's house, without compensating him, since the benefit to the others in the city is great enough to justify this. By contrast Eleonore Stump (in “Providence and the Problem of Evil,” 88-89) thinks that this case is not even a counterexample to PC*. She thinks that Tony has a *responsibility* to hand over his house to the city, and by refusing he is culpable. Therefore, he *deserves* having his house seized, and so the city is justified, and this does not count as a counterexample to PC*. If Tony's house is the *only* house which could be removed to make way for the new light rail track, Stump might be right that Tony has a responsibility to hand it over. But in most cases, it is not the disadvantage to some person *in particular* that is required to bring about greater good; rather someone *in general* must be disadvantaged. Suppose the city could seize *either* Tony's house, or one of his two neighbours' homes in order to accomplish the same purpose. It would be supererogatory for Tony to stand up and offer his own home, and so Tony would not be at fault for refusing to do so. So if all three refuse, none are culpable and yet the city is justified in choosing *one* of their homes to seize, and compensating the owner.

¹⁷⁰ Within reasonable limits. Plausibly that I consent to the government's laws in general does not imply that I have tacitly consented (for example) to being tortured by government agents.

¹⁷¹ In the next section I discuss in more detail whether compensation could ever apply to God allowing nonresistant nonbelief.

respectively.¹⁷² Both are cases in which some person S experiences some disadvantage D which results in a benefit to *another* person P, but S *does not know* that D benefits P.¹⁷³ This is a case of a counterfactually willing sacrifice if S *would* willingly go through D for the sake of P if S *knew* that D would benefit P. Alternatively, this is a case of ultimately willing sacrifice if, at some point *after* S has experienced D, S learns that D benefits P, and S is ultimately able to “joyfully endorse” God’s allowing S to have gone through D for the sake of benefitting P.¹⁷⁴

One might object that whether or not someone is counterfactually or ultimately willing never matters if the person is not *actually* and *presently* willing. Intuitively there are *some* cases where only actual present consent will do. But I think it’s plausible that there are cases in which a person’s counterfactual or ultimate willingness *can* make the difference. Suppose for example that Dave wants to cheer up his daughter by bringing her to the movie theatre, but in order to do so he must borrow his sister Alice’s car without her permission – since he cannot get a hold of her. He reasons that Alice would willingly lend her car to him if she were asked – and also that she will gladly endorse His choice when he tells her about it the next day. In this particular case, some might find it intuitive that Dave is justified in borrowing Alice’s car.

One might argue that it is not Alice’s counterfactual or ultimate willingness that makes the difference in justifying Dave’s actions. Instead this is just a case of the first kind of counterexample I discussed – where the disadvantage is very minor and the advantage sufficiently greater. But I think this is not the case. If Dave and Alice were complete strangers, and so Alice was not counterfactually or ultimately willing, then Dave would

¹⁷² As with actual and present willingness, counterfactual and ultimate willingness should be understood as *reasonable* willingness. That is, willed while in the right mind.

¹⁷³ Whether anyone actually ever *is* counterfactually willing, and whether anyone is ultimately willing but not presently willing, is part of why these are controversial. These controversies, and others, will be discussed in the following section.

¹⁷⁴ Alston 48.

surely not be justified in borrowing Alice's car. And so it seems like in this case at least, counterfactual and ultimate willingness can play a significant role. Whether or not this is relevant to divine hiddenness I discuss in the next section.

4.1 Relevance to Divine Hiddenness

While these counterexamples to PC* strictly speaking demonstrate that it is false, one might redraft the principle to account for them. Let's recap. Here is the original principle:

PC: God would be justified in allowing some person S to be disadvantaged for the sake of some good or set of goods G only if G sufficiently benefits S (rather than someone or something else).

And here is the original revision, after taking into account willing sacrifice and deserved disadvantage:

PC*: (PC) unless S willingly sacrifices, or is deserving of the disadvantage.

The other counterexamples I have discussed lend themselves to another revision:

PC**: (PC*) unless (i) S's disadvantage is minor, and the non-patient-centred good brought about is significant, or (ii) the non-patient-centred good prevents an *evil* equally bad as or worse than S's disadvantage, or (iii) S is *compensated* for S's disadvantage, or (iv) S is counterfactually or ultimately willing.¹⁷⁵

But what is the significance of PC** for using non-patient-centred goods in a greater goods response to the hiddenness argument? The "unless" clause is disjunctive. So if some non-patient-centred good (or set of non-patient-centred goods) meets the condition specified by any one of these disjuncts (as well as the outweighing goods and optimal means conditions) with regards to a case of nonresistant nonbelief, then that good (or set of goods) might justify God in allowing that case of nonresistant nonbelief. But is it plausible that the conditions specified by these disjuncts could apply to God and cases of nonresistant nonbelief? I will take each disjunct in turn.

¹⁷⁵ As I will discuss below, (iv) is an exception to PC* only if a few additional conditions are met.

We can skip past (i), cases in which S's disadvantage is minor, fairly quickly. It is implausible that (i) applies when it comes to nonresistant nonbelief. If one is deprived of a personal relationship with God, this is not a "minor" disadvantage. What about (ii): cases in which the non-patient-centred good prevents an evil equally bad or worse than S's disadvantage? Plausibly (ii) is relevant to greater goods replies to the argument from divine hiddenness. What it tells us is that if a particular case of nonresistant nonbelief prevents a very great evil for someone *other* than the nonbeliever, it could justify God in allowing that nonresistant nonbelief. There is no reason why, in principle, something like this could not be the case. And so if one proposes that there *is* such an evil which can be best prevented by nonresistant nonbelief, it should be taken seriously.

Could (iii), cases in which S is compensated for S's disadvantage, ever be relevant to the argument from divine hiddenness? I think it could be, but there are a couple of worries to address. One might reject that compensation could ever apply to God. For if there are goods that God *could* give us to compensate us for our disadvantage, then there's something that God is *currently* holding out on us. If God truly loved us, one might argue, then we would just *have* these goods. But in that case, if God disadvantaged us for the sake of a non-patient-centred good, He would have no way to compensate us for it. And therefore, compensation does not apply to God. I think this is mistaken. Perhaps there are some goods that would not be good for us if they are not, in one way or another, earned. Certainly such goods exist. Certain *honours* we receive – awards for example – are hollow unless we actually merited them. If there are similar *divine* goods, then God could use those to compensate us.

But there is a second problem for (iii). Even if the goods God could use to compensate nonresistant nonbelievers would only be valuable for them if they merited those goods, one might be skeptical that those goods could possibly outweigh for them the

value lost from their nonresistant nonbelief. A personal relationship with God, if He exists, is plausibly the greatest single good for creatures. Schellenberg thinks it would be *unsurpassably* great, meaning that no *set* of other goods could possibly outweigh its value. If Schellenberg is right, then this creates a problem not only for compensatory goods, but also for greater goods responses in general. This issue will be discussed in a later chapter, where I will argue that a personal relationship with God is *not* unsurpassably great, even if it is the greatest single good for creatures. If I am right, then plausibly compensatory goods can play some role in God allowing nonresistant nonbelief for the sake of some non-patient-centred goods.¹⁷⁶

Finally I turn to disjunct (iv): cases in which S is counterfactually or ultimately willing. Would God be justified in allowing a case of nonresistant nonbelief for the sake of a non-patient-centred good when the nonresistant nonbeliever in question is *counterfactually* or *ultimately willing*? It is not immediately clear whether God would be justified. As I pointed out in a note above, there are likely some *additional* conditions which must be met in order for cases of counterfactual and ultimate willingness to count as exceptions to PC*. So we must first determine which conditions must be met for God to be justified in allowing S to be disadvantaged for the sake of non-patient-centred goods due to S's counterfactual or ultimate willingness.

I propose the following conditions. First, the *justifying goods* condition. The good for the sake of which God allows S to be disadvantaged must be sufficiently valuable relative to the disadvantage. In some cases, the good in question might have to do more than merely *outweigh* the disadvantage. Second, the *epistemic* condition. God must know,

¹⁷⁶ Given my proposed "many goods response" there might also be cases in which God allows some person P to be a nonresistant nonbeliever for the sake of a *set* of goods which includes both patient-centred and non-patient-centred goods. In such a case, the patient-centred goods might go most of the way toward compensating P, and so strictly compensatory goods would only be necessary to make up the difference.

or know that it is sufficiently probable, that S is counterfactually or ultimately willing.¹⁷⁷

Third, the *human dignity* condition. There may be some disadvantages which God could not inflict on us without violating our dignity *unless* we are *actually* and *presently* willing.

Could these conditions be met in the case of nonresistant nonbelief?

The justifying goods condition will, of course, depend on the good in question. The epistemic condition can plausibly be met regardless of what turns out to be the correct view of God's knowledge about counterfactuals and the future,¹⁷⁸ though some views may plausibly allow that it is met more often than other views might allow. Molinists, for example, would accept that God always knows *both* whether someone would be willing to be a nonresistant nonbeliever if he or she knew the benefit that would come from it *and* whether he or she will ultimately come to endorse God's decision.¹⁷⁹ Most theistic determinists would also be able to accept that God *knows* whether someone is counterfactually or ultimately willing. Open theists, on the other hand, will say that (at best) God knows the *probability* that some person will ultimately be willing, or the *probability* that some person *would have* been willing. In some cases that probability might be high enough that God might be justified in allowing some person to be a nonresistant nonbeliever. But plausibly that probability is not *always* high enough for God to be justified. And so, depending on which view of God's knowledge about counterfactuals and the future turns out to be right, the epistemic condition may be met

¹⁷⁷ One might object that God must *know* whether someone is counterfactually or ultimately willing in order to be justified. Knowledge of the probability just is not enough, one might argue. But it seems to me that, if *humans* can be justified with merely knowledge of a sufficiently high probability, then plausibly God can too. Whether or not this matters depends on what turns out to be the correct view of God's knowledge of counterfactuals and the future. I briefly discuss the differing views below.

¹⁷⁸ What turns out to be the correct view of God's knowledge of counterfactuals and the future depends on, *inter alia*, on whether there *are* any facts of the matter about the truth values of counterfactual or future propositions. If statements of the form "If such-and-such had happened then S *would have* done so-and-so" do not always or do not usually (or never) have determinate truth values, then God cannot always or usually (or ever) know those truth values, and the same goes for future propositions. However, God may still know *probabilities* related to these statements.

¹⁷⁹ Molinists think that God knows what His creatures *would* freely do in every circumstance.

more or less often. Finally there is the human dignity condition. It seems to me that withholding from someone the knowledge of God's existence – and thereby the possibility of a conscious personal relationship with Him – does not violate that person's dignity. That is because withholding a good from someone, in most normal cases, does not violate a person's dignity. If withholding a good *leads* to great suffering for S, or if S *deserves* the withheld good, then these *might* violate S's dignity. But these do not normally apply in the case of nonresistant nonbelief.¹⁸⁰

And so, if PC** is true, it's plausible that there is room for there to be *some* cases in which God is justified in allowing nonresistant nonbelief for the sake of only non-patient-centred goods, so long as the outweighing goods and optimal means conditions are met. If nonresistant nonbelief is the optimal way for God to prevent sufficiently bad evil, then He would be justified in allowing it. And if God can bring about significant non-patient-centred goods by allowing nonresistant nonbelief, He may be justified in doing so if He *compensates* the nonresistant nonbeliever. Furthermore, there may be at least some cases in which God is justified in allowing some person P to be a nonresistant nonbeliever for the sake of non-patient-centred goods due to His knowledge that that person would or will (or very likely would or will) be willing to be a nonresistant nonbeliever for the sake of those goods. If this is right, then non-patient-centred goods are plausibly part of a greater goods *defense* against the hiddenness argument.

But we are left with some uncertainty. Certain positions about God's knowledge can make better use of counterfactual and ultimate willingness than others, and that compensatory goods exist is at best plausible for all we know. So even if PC** is true

¹⁸⁰ One might argue that nonresistant nonbelief *can* lead to great suffering, if it leads one to hell. In response to this, I note first that theism does not necessarily commit one to maintaining that there is a hell. But even if one believes that there is a hell, one only needs to maintain that God would not allow nonresistant nonbelief to cause anyone to end up there. Building an account for this is outside the bounds of this chapter, but I do briefly discuss eschatological issues in chapter V.

rather than PC*, non-patient-centred goods are still going to come with more asterisks than patient-centred goods. They plausibly have some use – for example, as tie-breakers when a set of patient-centred goods merely *offsets* the negative value from nonresistant nonbelief. But whether they can explain cases of nonresistant nonbelief on their *own* will be less than certain if PC** is true. I think I can do better than this. In what follows, I argue that God might plausibly be permitted in allowing nonresistant nonbelief for the sake of non-patient-centred goods in significantly more cases than those allowed by PC**.

4.2 Evil and Withheld Goods

Up until this point I have been content to use the term “disadvantage” as an umbrella term which included both instances of suffering and withheld goods. This was done in order to bring considerations made regarding the problem of evil into the discussion on hiddenness. But at a certain point it ignores the potential that there are important differences between instances of suffering and instances of withheld goods. In addition to the distinction between suffering and withheld goods there is a parallel distinction between *greater goods* and *prevented evils*. The parallel is between means and ends. When I talk about suffering God allows and goods He withholds these are means, while greater goods and prevented evils are the ends God is after. Responses to the problem of evil consider one means – evil – and try to justify it by looking for various ends – greater goods, or preventions of other evils. In contrast, responses to the argument from hiddenness consider a different means – nonresistant nonbelief, which *withholds a good* – but also try to justify it by looking for greater goods or preventions of worse evils. When I lumped goods and prevented evils together, I ran the risk of ignoring some of the potentially significant differences between them. We can illustrate these distinctions using the following chart:

		Ends	
		Greater Good	Prevented Evil
Means	Withheld Good	1A	1B
	Suffering/Evil	2A	2B

This chart shows that there are four basic means-end pairs.¹⁸¹ God might withhold goods for the sake of greater goods (1A), withhold goods for the sake of preventing evil or suffering (1B), Allow suffering or evil for the sake of greater goods (2A) and allow suffering or evil to prevent other cases of suffering or evil (2B).¹⁸² For the sake of the present discussions, these means-end pairs are all *non-patient-centred*: the ends are for the sake of someone *other than* the person who is disadvantaged by the means.

The means-end pairs most relevant to the hiddenness discussion are 1A and 1B.¹⁸³ It seems plausible that if God is justified in withholding a good to bring about a greater good (1A), then God would *also* be justified in withholding a good to prevent an evil (1B). If this is right then I need only demonstrate the former, and the latter will follow. But it should be noted that it is not clear that there *are* any straightforward examples of 1B

¹⁸¹ I've omitted the "neutral" means and ends for simplicity, and since they are irrelevant to the following discussion.

¹⁸² Strictly speaking, God never *needs* to allow a case of suffering to prevent other cases of suffering. God can prevent *all* suffering simply by never creating (and plausibly, He can still create quite a lot without ever allowing suffering). And so *whenever* one argues that God allows lesser suffering to prevent greater suffering, one really means to argue something slightly different. For example one might argue that God allows some good (say, free will) which entails some degree of suffering, and *only given this* does God allow instances of lesser suffering to prevent instances of greater suffering. But He could have also prevented *both* by withholding free will. So cases of 2B never *strictly speaking* occur; they are all ultimately cases of 2A.

¹⁸³ One might argue that God's hiddenness from someone can cause suffering, and so 2A is also relevant. It is no doubt true that one might suffer because God remains hidden. But for my purposes I am content to address hiddenness only insofar as it withholds the possibility of a personal relationship with God from nonbelievers. The suffering which can come from hiddenness is an additional issue which should be addressed independently.

relevant to the hiddenness literature.¹⁸⁴ And so even if it is plausible that God *would* be justified in 1A, while this might give us *some* reason for thinking He would also be justified in 1B, it might amount to a moot point if 1B is an empty category.

But what about 1A? Would God be justified in withholding a good from someone in order to bring about a greater good either for that person or for someone else? In what follows I discuss whether 1A can be justified for God. I argue that it can be. If I am right, then God can be justified in each of these means-end pairs. Most importantly, for the present section, this means that PC** is false and God would be justified in allowing nonresistant nonbelief for the sake of non-patient-centred goods in more cases than those specified by PC**.

In “Providence and the Problem of Evil” Eleonore Stump maintains that, in general, it is unjust to allow someone to unwillingly suffer for the sake of a *good* – even if it is a good for *that very person*.¹⁸⁵ So she denies that either version of 2A is justified. Although I *do not* concede that Stump is right about this, even if she is, it will not necessarily matter for 1A. While one may have the intuition that it would be wrong to allow someone *to suffer* unwillingly for the sake of some good (2A), one may *not* have the additional intuition that it would be wrong to withhold a good from someone for the sake of some other good (1A). It seems quite plausible that withholding one good from someone for the sake of *another* good is – in many cases – justified. It is most obviously justified when it is an outweighing patient-centred good. But I argue that, plausibly, it could also be true of outweighing *non-patient-centred* goods.

¹⁸⁴ Take for example Dumsday’s “one sheep” good discussed in chapter II. The idea is that God hides from the nonresistant because it is necessary for Him to hide from the resistant, and He hides from the resistant so that they will not reject Him (and thus increase their moral culpability). In this case, God wants to prevent a case of evil (moral culpability) and so He allows nonresistant nonbelief. But He could plausibly also have prevented that evil by withholding free will. And so it is not a simple case of God withholding a good to prevent an evil; it is a case of God withholding a good so that He does not have to withhold a *different* good in order to prevent that evil.

¹⁸⁵ Stump, “Providence and the Problem of Evil,” 66.

The idea is fairly simple. If there is a good G for person P which can only come about at the expense of withholding a good F from person S, then either P must lack G or S must lack F. If P must lack G or S must lack F, and God can control whether P lacks G or S lacks F, then God must decide whether to allow P to lack G or S to lack F. If God *must* decide whether to allow P to lack G or S to lack F, then He is either justified in allowing P to lack G for the sake of S to have F *or* He is justified in allowing S to lack F for the sake of P to have F.¹⁸⁶ But if God is justified in allowing P to lack G for the sake of S to have F *or* God is justified in allowing S to lack F for the sake of P to have F, then God is justified in withholding a good from one person to bring about a good for a different person. And so if there *is* a case in which G can come about for P only if F lacks S, then God is justified in withholding a good from one person to bring about a good for a different person. So if there are such cases, this would demonstrate that God is justified in 1A.

It will be helpful to take things out of the abstract and discuss examples. Cases in which *humans* are justified in withholding goods from one person to allow goods for another are not difficult to come by. When I was young my father received two tickets to go to a Maple Leafs game. He had to decide whether to bring along *either* me or my brother, since he could not bring us both, and we were far too young for both of us to go without him. He decided to bring my brother, and it seems to me that he was perfectly justified in withholding this good from me for the sake of my brother. But one might argue that such cases do not apply to God; as Alston notes, these examples only apply in the human cases due to scarcity of resources. If my father *had* 3 tickets, there would be no issue. Because of this, one might wonder how God could ever be in an analogous situation.

¹⁸⁶ Though He may not be justified in allowing *either*. That is, He might be obligated to allow P to lack G in order for S to have F (if, for example, F is much more valuable than G, and all else is equal).

The simple answer is that there are some goods that cannot logically come about except for the existence of nonresistant nonbelief, or else something worse.¹⁸⁷ God will find Himself in this situation with regards to *any* good or set of goods that meets the optimal means condition. Recall from the previous chapter, for example, the good of providing believers with the opportunity to help nonbelievers to come to know God.¹⁸⁸ Unless there is nonbelief in general, this good cannot come about, and plausibly the optimal means to get this good is nonresistant nonbelief, since resistant nonbelief would increase moral culpability. And so, this good plausibly meets the optimal means condition.¹⁸⁹

One would be right to note that this good probably does not meet the *outweighing goods* condition on its own, but that is not a problem for my purposes this chapter. The fact that such a good exists demonstrates that there *can be* such goods which require hiddenness, and so if a non-patient-centred good is proposed which *would* outweigh the value lost from nonresistant nonbelief, it may meet the optimal means condition and therefore should be taken seriously. Furthermore, even if no such good meets the outweighing goods condition on its own, if *enough* non-patient-centred goods are proposed then *they* may collectively outweigh the value lost from nonresistant nonbelief, and so this chapter demonstrates that (in theory) non-patient-centred goods alone may justify some cases of nonresistant nonbelief. And even if no such set of non-patient-centred goods exists, it's plausible that non-patient-centred goods may help bolster a set of *patient-centred* goods so that they collectively meet the outweighing goods condition. For if non-

¹⁸⁷ Or those goods are made *greater* only by nonresistant nonbelief.

¹⁸⁸ See Richard Swinburne, *The Existence of God* (Oxford University Press, 2004) 271.

¹⁸⁹ I discuss in more depth whether this good (along with other goods) meets the optimal means condition in chapter VI.

patient-centred goods *on their own* would be sufficient (if they existed), then *a fortiori* they can contribute to a collection of patient-centred goods.¹⁹⁰

6 Conclusion

In this chapter I have argued that non-patient-centred goods are appropriate to appeal to in discussion on the hiddenness argument. They are *at the very least* appropriate to appeal to as tie-breakers if there is a set of *patient-centred* goods which offsets the value lost from some case of nonresistant nonbelief. I have also argued that non-patient-centred goods may serve as complete explanations for certain cases of nonresistant nonbelief, specifically when one is ultimately or counterfactually willing to make the sacrifice, or when God compensates the nonresistant nonbeliever. In addition to this, I argued that non-patient-centred goods might serve as complete explanations *of any case* of nonresistant nonbelief – at least in principle – since God would be justified in withholding a *good* from someone in order to secure a greater good (or set of goods) for another person, when He can only bring about one of these.¹⁹¹ More plausibly, given the state of the goods from hiddenness which have *actually* been proposed in the literature, I have offered reasons for thinking that non-patient-centred goods should be taken seriously as *part* of a many goods response to the hiddenness argument which also includes patient-centred goods.¹⁹²

¹⁹⁰ I want to stress again that *none* of what I am saying here amounts to a greater goods defense against the hiddenness argument. At best what I am arguing is a defense of the strategy *in theory*. If one proposed such a defense, my argument suggests that such a defense should be taken seriously.

¹⁹¹ Or when nonresistant nonbelief is the *optimal means* to bring about a greater good or set of goods.

¹⁹² That is, they should not be barred from discussion *just because* they are non-patient-centred.

Chapter IV Greater Goods and Free Will

1 Introduction

I established in chapter II that there are at least two necessary conditions which must be met by any good or set of goods in order for that good or set of goods to constitute a successful greater goods response to the hiddenness argument. I called these the outweighing goods and optimal means conditions. In the previous chapter I discussed whether there is a third necessary condition: the patient-centred condition. I argued that a successful greater goods response to the hiddenness argument *does not* have to meet the patient-centred condition. In this chapter I will discuss whether there is an additional necessary condition: the compatibilist condition.

One might argue that it is unacceptable to appeal to goods that – in some way – require *libertarian* (or incompatibilist) *free will* when replying to the argument from divine hiddenness. The idea that goods requiring libertarian free will would be unacceptable initially seems counter-intuitive. After all, it is already standard practice to appeal to libertarian free will in the literature on both the argument from divine hiddenness and the closely related argument from evil.¹⁹³ Moreover, libertarian free will itself seems, at least *prima facie*, like it would be an intrinsically good thing to have. So why might it be inappropriate to use in a response to the hiddenness argument?

There are at least two reasons one might be skeptical that free will belongs in a response to the argument from divine hiddenness. First, one might think that God would not be justified in allowing nonresistant nonbelief for the sake of some good if that good *requires* free will. One might argue that libertarian free will is *not* actually that valuable in

¹⁹³ For examples of the latter see Alvin Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity* (Oxford University Press) 1974, and Richard Swinburne, *Providence and the Problem of evil* (Oxford Scholarship Online) 1998, and John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love* (London: McMillan) 1985. For the former see Swinburne, 1998.

itself, and it leads to an incredible amount of evil and suffering, and so an all-loving God would not create creatures with such free will. Second, one might think that libertarian free will does not belong in a reply to the hiddenness argument because it is controversial that we possess it at all. By relying on libertarian free will in *one* controversial debate (hiddenness) we can only push the argument into *another* controversial debate (free will).

In the bulk of this chapter I focus on Schellenberg's "free will offense", in which he argues that God would not allow creaturely libertarian free will, given the great evil and suffering it causes. If God would not allow free will, then critics of the hiddenness argument cannot rely on any response to the hiddenness argument which relies on libertarian free will. I will argue that there are good reasons to think that God *would* allow free will. Given that discussion of the value of free will is still in its infancy, I do not expect that what I conclude here will settle the issue decisively. Nevertheless, I hope to offer a strong enough response to the free will offense that we should be confident in offering responses to the *hiddenness argument* which rely on libertarian free will. At the end of this chapter I briefly discuss whether it is acceptable to appeal to libertarian free will in response to the *hiddenness argument*, given that the very existence of libertarian free will is controversial.

2 Preliminary Issues

Before getting started, there are a couple of preliminary issues to address. First I want to clarify what I mean by "libertarian free will".¹⁹⁴ I intend to apply the term broadly, so that it refers simply to any kind of free will one might have that is incompatible with determinism. Whether or not this requires alternative possibilities I will leave as an open question. Moreover, libertarian free will does not *necessarily* include everything one might

¹⁹⁴ One might prefer the term "incompatibilist free will".

want to call “free will” in an indeterministic world. For certainly compatibilists would agree that one might have a sort of free will in an indeterministic world that would *also* be compatible with a deterministic world.¹⁹⁵ Again, what *is* important is that the sort of free will I refer to as “libertarian” is *incompatible* with determinism. Hereafter, for simplicity, I will refer to this sort of *incompatibilist* libertarian free will simply as “free will”, except where I need to stress the “libertarian” element for one reason or another. I will refer to any other sort of free will as “compatibilist free will”.

Second, I want to discuss some of the different ways a response to the hiddenness argument might “require” free will. First, a response might appeal to the value of *free will itself*, or of some *subcategory* of free will, such as *morally significant* free will. Richard Swinburne, for example, cites morally significant free will as a hiddenness-justifying good.¹⁹⁶ Call these “intrinsic value” free will responses. Second a response might appeal to goods from hiddenness which are good in and of themselves, but which cannot come about unless there is some degree of free will. Call these “instrumental value” free will responses. Third, a response may *presuppose* that free will exists. Certain responses may be able to explain (to some degree) the phenomenon of divine hiddenness, even if God exists, but *only* if it is already taken for granted that free will exists. Take, as an example, Daniel Howard-Snyder’s suggestion that God allows nonresistant nonbelief in order to prevent people from responding *inappropriately* to knowledge of His existence.¹⁹⁷ Inappropriate response only needs to be *prevented* if creatures have the free will to respond inappropriately in the first place. Call these “presupposed” free will responses.

¹⁹⁵ For example, there might be a world in which certain processes occur by random chance, but humans are completely determined. And even in a world where humans *are not* completely determined, it might be that the indeterministic processes in humans play no role in the (compatibilist) free will humans actually exercise.

¹⁹⁶ Richard Swinburne, *The Existence of God* (Oxford University Press, 2004) 267-270.

¹⁹⁷ Daniel Howard-Snyder, “The Argument from Divine Hiddenness,” *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 26(3) (1996) 433-453.

With these preliminary issues taken into account, I will discuss the first reason one might argue that it is *unacceptable* to appeal to free will in a response to the hiddenness argument.

3 The Free Will Offense

The first reason one might have for thinking that it would be unacceptable for a response to the hiddenness argument to rely on free will is that one might think that God would not allow (creaturely¹⁹⁸) free will to exist at all. If God would not allow free will to exist, then any reason God might have for allowing nonresistant nonbelief would not involve the actual existence of free will. J.L. Schellenberg argues that God would not create a world that contained free will which poses a serious risk of evil. Here is a sketch of Schellenberg's "free will offense" argument¹⁹⁹:

1. If God exists and free will exists, and if free will poses a serious risk of evil, then God must have no way to bring about good that is *qualitatively and quantitatively equal to or greater than* the good brought about by free will *without also* allowing a similarly serious risk of evil.
2. God *could* bring about good that is qualitatively and quantitatively equal to or greater than the good brought about by free will without also allowing a serious risk of evil.
3. Free will does pose a serious risk of evil.

Therefore,

4. Either God does not exist, or free will does not exist.

The conclusion of this argument is that there cannot be both God and free will. There might be no God, or no free will, or neither God nor free will, but not both. If this is true, then it would certainly entail that God would not allow nonresistant nonbelief *for the sake of* some good (or set of goods) which requires free will. And so, if Schellenberg's argument is sound, then the greater goods replies relying on free will cannot refute the argument from divine hiddenness.

¹⁹⁸ Hereafter "free will exists" stands for "creaturely free will exists", unless otherwise noted.

¹⁹⁹ J.L. Schellenberg, *The Wisdom to Doubt* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007) 283.

But recall that there are three ways responses to the hiddenness argument rely on free will. The first two kinds of free will responses, intrinsic value free will responses and extrinsic value free will responses, appeal to the value which can come about only if there is free will. Insofar as they really *require* free will, they may actually contribute to a response to the free will offense (in addition to contributing to a response to the hiddenness argument). They offer some reason (though perhaps, on their own, no sufficient reason) for thinking that premise 2 is false. If these goods really do *require* free will which allows a serious risk of evil, then there are goods which God *cannot* bring about without also allowing a serious risk of evil. If there are *enough* goods like this of sufficient quality, then God *cannot* bring about good that is qualitatively and quantitatively equal to or greater than the good brought about by free will without also allowing a serious risk of evil, and so this would demonstrate that 2 is false. And so intrinsic and extrinsic value free will responses to the hiddenness argument (since they require *both* hiddenness *and* free will) may actually help to answer *both* the hiddenness argument and the free will offense, if they could be demonstrated to be of great enough value.

For these types of responses to the hiddenness argument, the only difficulty the free will offense creates is that there is *extra negative value* which needs to be accounted for in order for God to be justified in bringing about these goods: the risk from free will. It seems clear that the free will offense should not (in principle) render appeal to responses such as these *unacceptable* in the context of the hiddenness argument. One might even consider appeal to them as a *joint* response against the hiddenness argument and the free will offense. But unless the free will offense is independently explained away, there *is* a higher amount of negative value these goods must justify, and so the free will offense *does* raise the bar on how much they have to outweigh. And so, if there *is* an independent way of explaining away the free will offense, then less will be demanded of these extrinsic and

intrinsic value free will responses, and all of the value from those goods can go towards justifying divine hiddenness.

But it is more difficult for the third category of free will responses to the hiddenness argument: presupposed free will responses. They are more at risk from the free will offense. There are a few kinds of responses to the hiddenness argument which presuppose free will. First, and most relevant for my purposes, some *greater goods* responses argue that hiddenness can help God to bring about certain goods,²⁰⁰ but these goods could *alternatively* be brought about by God withholding free will and determining creatures. And so these goods can actually be brought about in *two ways*: *either* by allowing nonresistant nonbelief, *or* withholding free will! Second, replies which argue that all nonbelievers are *resistant* plausibly presuppose free will. If there were no free will, we might expect that there would not even be *resistant* nonbelievers. Third, replies which argue that one can have a personal relationship with God *without* believing that God exists plausibly presuppose that free will exists unless they *also* claim that *everyone actually has* a personal relationship with God, whether they believe He exists or not. Unless they make this second claim, then, without free will, it is unclear why there would be anyone who lacks a personal relationship with God.²⁰¹ Presupposed free will responses all rely on some independent response to the free will offense. If there is no good reason for God to allow free will in the first place, then the hiddenness argument cannot be refuted by presupposing free will.

And so while all three categories of response would *benefit* from independent justification of free will, presupposed free will responses *require* independent justification of free will. In what follows I address several potential replies to Schellenberg's argument

²⁰⁰ Or prevent certain evils.

²⁰¹ They might escape reliance on free will if they appeal to greater goods.

(hereafter called “the free will offense”). Most of these replies deny premise 2. I also discuss a reply that denies premise 1. But first I discuss a potentially overriding reason for thinking that it *can be* appropriate to appeal to free will in a response to the argument from divine hiddenness.

3.1 Independent Arguments for Atheism

It is important to remember that the reason we are looking at the free will offense in the first place is to determine whether it is acceptable to include free will in a response to the hiddenness argument. The free will offense is one reason for thinking that it might not be acceptable since, if God and free will are incompatible, then any response to an argument *against* God’s existence which appeals to the actual existence of free will must just end up disproving God’s existence in another way. One’s first instinct in responding might be to demonstrate that God and free will are *compatible*. But since our focus is determining whether appealing to free will is acceptable, there may be some practical considerations *besides* outright arguing that God and free will are compatible. Chris Tucker offers a consideration of this sort.

Tucker notes that it is desirable for the hiddenness argument and the free will offense to be *independent* arguments against the existence of God.²⁰² Perhaps the ultimate conclusion of the free will offense is *not* that God and free will are incompatible.

Plausibly, Schellenberg intends the theist to fill in a missing premise (that free will exists) and infer (as the *real* conclusion of the free will offense) that God does not exist. But in order for two arguments for the same conclusion to be *independent* arguments for that conclusion, the success of one *must not* rely on the success of the other. The hiddenness

²⁰² Chris Tucker, “Divine Hiddenness and the Value of Divine-Creature Relationships,” *Religious Studies* 44 (2008) 270.

argument and the free will offense might plausibly have the same conclusion (God does not exist) and so for one to succeed independently of the other, its success should not require that the other argument also succeeds. Suppose there is a sufficient objection to the hiddenness argument, if only God allows free will – and suppose further that free will *does exist*. By appealing to the free will offense to demonstrate that God is incompatible with free will, and thus that such a response to the hiddenness argument must fail, one makes the hiddenness argument dependent on the free will offense, since its success now relies upon the success of the free will offense.

And so if one wants the hiddenness argument and the free will offense to be *independent* arguments for atheism, then one should not prohibit appeals to free will in response to the hiddenness argument *only* on the grounds that the free will offense claims that free will is incompatible with God's existence. Theists, obviously, will still be concerned about supplying an answer to the free will offense. But, if one is sympathetic to Tucker's consideration one might think that the free will offense is another question for another time, and right now we are concerned with hiddenness.

Tucker's argument initially strikes me as plausible, but consider another way of viewing what work is accomplished by the free will offense. One might (plausibly) say that when theists read into the free will offense the "missing premise" (that free will exists) we are putting words into Schellenberg's mouth. After all, Schellenberg does not devote any space in his discussion of the free will offense to the plausibility that free will actually exists. And it is charitable to assume that Schellenberg would not have taken the existence of something as controversial as free will entirely for granted. So there seems to be a more plausible interpretation of Schellenberg's intention for his free will offense.

Plausibly, Schellenberg intends the free will offense to set up a dilemma for theists. It is obvious that theists cannot take the first horn of the dilemma: that God does not exist.

And so we must take the second horn: that free will does not exist. But this is also undesirable to many theists, since our most promising replies to the most notorious challenges to theism (evil and hiddenness) tend to take for granted that free will exists, and in some cases they take for granted that free will is incredibly valuable. And so in taking the second horn of Schellenberg's dilemma, we forfeit our most promising replies to the problems of evil and hiddenness. And if we cannot come up with better replies, then the conclusion that God does not exist will seem inescapable. If Schellenberg's free will offense is viewed in this light, then it seems less like an independent argument for atheism and more like an objection to our free will theodicies and defenses.

Furthermore, Schellenberg seems to deny that the arguments he provides in *The Wisdom to Doubt* are intended as independent defeaters to theism. Of the argument from horrors he writes, "I want to underline again that my main aim in [*The Wisdom to Doubt*] was not to show any such argument to succeed as a stand-alone proof of atheism, but instead to weave various atheistic arguments into a defeater of theistic attempts to defeat my more general religious scepticism."²⁰³ And regarding the hiddenness argument, he writes, "The main role of this argumentation in my work today is to serve as one strand in a multi-strand defeater of any theistic attempt to defeat my argument for a general religious scepticism by inferring the truth of ultimism from that of theism."²⁰⁴ While he does not explicitly mention the free will offense here, he implies that it is one of the arguments he is talking about.

However, there are a couple important points to make here. First, if we *are* able to construct a strong and plausible objection to the argument from divine hiddenness, which also appeals to free will, that itself *will* be significant philosophical work. It would be

²⁰³ J.L. Schellenberg, "Replies to my Colleagues," *Religious Studies* 49(2) (2013) 268.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid* 264.

significant to demonstrate that the hiddenness argument *relies* on the free will offense. Of course, if it turns out that Schellenberg's free will offense is successful, then we will have to return our attention to the argument from divine hiddenness.²⁰⁵ But even this would not mean that there was no philosophical value in demonstrating that the hiddenness argument relies on the free will offense.

Second, there is actually a *degree* to which the hiddenness argument and free will offense *are* independent arguments. A complete answer to the free will offense requires an explanation or justification for all the evil and suffering that *actually* comes from free will. But many of the responses to the hiddenness argument which in some way rely on free will *do not* require that we have the free will to cause great evil and suffering. The free will they require is more limited. Some require the freedom to *accept* or *reject* relationship with God. Others require freedom with regards to *how* one chooses to engage with God. Still others may require the freedom to tell others or refrain from telling others about God. Even Swinburne's proposed good of "morally significant free will", in the context of the hiddenness argument, does not *necessarily* require one to have the free will to cause great evil and suffering. And so as long as free will to the extent required for the goods from *hiddenness* can be demonstrated to be compatible with God's existence, it can be acceptable to appeal to *that level* of free will in the hiddenness argument. If *this* level of free will is demonstrated to be compatible with God's existence, then even though theists may still want an answer to Schellenberg's free will offense, it will now have been safely pushed into the realm of independent argument with regards to hiddenness.

So in what follows, I aim to demonstrate that there are some reasons for thinking that God would be justified in allowing free will to the extent that is necessary for the

²⁰⁵ But it may also turn out that the free will offense is somehow mistaken, and if that is so then a strong reply to the hiddenness argument involving free will may be all that is necessary to conclusively refute the hiddenness argument.

goods from nonresistant nonbelief.

3.2 Greater Goods

Perhaps there are *greater goods* reasons for thinking that God would allow free will to the extent that it is necessary for the goods proposed in the hiddenness literature. It will potentially be confusing to discuss greater goods responses in the hiddenness literature alongside greater goods responses to the free will offense, especially since *all* the goods I'm concerned with in this chapter require some degree of free will, whether they are primarily supposed to be relevant to hiddenness or the free will offense! Because of this, where it is helpful, I will refer to goods which are intended to justify hiddenness as "DH-goods" and goods which are intended to justify free will as "FW-goods". As previously discussed, some goods might be *both* DH-goods *and* FW-goods.

The idea behind greater goods responses to the free will offense, in the context of the hiddenness argument, is this. If the quality and quantity of value brought about by FW-goods *could not* be brought about without allowing the degree of free will necessary for DH-goods (and the risk of negative value that entails), and if the value of FW-goods would be *worth the risk* (of that negative value) then God is justified in allowing the degree of free will necessary for DH-goods. In this section I discuss various goods which seem to require some degree of incompatibilist free will, and I place particular emphasis on goods which *improve* the quality of one's personal relationship with God, as that would be amongst the highest goods.

There are a number of goods which, at least intuitively, seem to require some degree of free will (and thus may be considered FW-goods). Perhaps, for example, it is good for creatures to have *morally significant free will* because creatures can earn *merit* when they use their free will to act rightly and avoid acting wrongly. Perhaps free will

affords creatures a certain kind of *dignity* they could not otherwise have.²⁰⁶ One might also argue that free will is itself intrinsically good. Much could plausibly be said for and against all of these goods counting as (at least) part of the justification for God allowing free will. But I will focus my attention instead on defending a particular set of goods from free will. These are goods which *enhance* one's personal relationship with God.

It is central to Schellenberg's *hiddenness* argument that a personal relationship with God would be the greatest of all goods for creatures. So great, in fact, that he dismisses all greater goods responses to the hiddenness argument as mistaken *in principle*. While I will contest *that* charge in the next chapter, his high estimation of the value of a personal relationship with God, if God exists, has import in discussion of the free will offense. There are a number of ways in which a personal relationship with God might be *enhanced* by free will. The more a personal relationship with God might be enhanced by free will, the more reason God has to *allow* humans to have free will – at least to a certain degree.

3.2.1 True Gifts

The first way a personal relationship with God might be enhanced by free will is that it allows creatures to give God what I will call *true gifts*. In general, it is beneficial to a personal relationship between two persons if they give gifts to one another. I am speaking more broadly than *material* gifts one buys or makes. The encouragement we offer etc. can be a gift, the favours we do for one another are gifts, the time we spend with one another when we could have spent it apart can be a gift, and of course we do give material gifts to each other as well. But there is a sense in which some person A does not give another person B some gift G if G ultimately *comes from* B. G is only a *true gift* if it comes from A.

²⁰⁶ In a later section I will discuss another way dignity might play a role in response to the free will offense.

One might consider as a counterexample to this the case of a child giving a gift to his mother. If a mother gives her son the money to purchase a gift for her birthday, there is a sense in which the gift is *from* the mother, to the mother. But, one might argue, this does not seem to entail that the gift is not a *true* gift. And so one might argue that the case of a child giving a gift to his mother which he bought with her money is a *counterexample* to my claim that some person A does not give another person B some gift G if G ultimately comes from B. But I would argue that the *true gift* – what matters to the mother’s relationship to her son – is not G itself. The son put *thought* into what to get his mother. His *desire* to get a gift for his mother and his *acting upon* that desire are also part of the *true gift* He gets for his mother. These are all part of the *true gift* he gave her. One would be right to point out that the gift would remain *true* even if the mother told her son *what* to get for her, but in such a case *his choosing* what to get her would simply no longer be part of the true gift,²⁰⁷ in the same way that his using his own money to buy it is not part of the true gift (because he *didn’t* use his own money). However, if we changed the example so that the credit for *the whole* of the gift ultimately came from the mother, it seems to me that it would no longer be a true gift! If the mother set things up so that he had no choice but to *desire* to get her a gift, and if she set things up so that he had no choice but to *act upon* that desire, the true gift would be lost.

And so, if God completely determines us then we cannot give Him true gifts: gifts including our worship of Him, acts of service towards Him, choosing to spend time with Him, etc.²⁰⁸ These would all ultimately be *from* God, not from us. But it is very good for

²⁰⁷ Though his choosing to get her *what she asked for* instead of something else may plausibly still be part of the true gift.

²⁰⁸ I will also suggest in a later section that love itself may be a true gift. If this is the case, then we can have a loving relationship with God only if we have free will.

our relationship with Him that we are able to offer Him *true gifts*. And so this seems to be a good that comes from free will.²⁰⁹

3.2.2 Surprise

The second way a personal relationship with God might be enhanced by free will is that it might allow there to be an element of *surprise* in our relationships with God. Personal relationships in general benefit from having some element of surprise. Consider the following cases. Case one: when I was a child, one Sunday afternoon as my family was driving in the car, my father said, “let’s go visit Niagara Falls”. And we did. None of us were expecting this, since the falls were about a two hour drive away, but we were all pleasantly surprised and excited since many of us had never seen the falls. Case two: On a Tuesday afternoon, a man shows up at his fiancée’s workplace with a bouquet of roses. There is no special occasion. Case three: A woman has to leave early for work, before her husband wakes up, and she leaves notes of love and appreciation scattered throughout the house for him to find when he wakes up.

These cases are examples of how surprise might show up in our relationships. But certainly not all cases of surprise need to be as elaborate as these. There are subtler examples, like when, in the middle of watching a film, or reading, or some other activity, one leans over to her spouse and says, “I love you” with no particular prompting. Or when a friend offers a word of encouragement even though there was no indication that it was required. These “micro-surprises” are mostly unplanned, but they are valuable parts of day to day relationship. It should also be pointed out that we do not need to be surprised that

²⁰⁹ One positive side of my account of true gifts is that, even if one ultimately argues that there is *something* of a true gift that we can offer to God without free will, it’s plausible that our gift will nevertheless be “truer” if we have free will. In the same way that a child’s gift becomes truer the more is “up to him” (if he chooses, uses his own money, etc.), our gifts to God are truer the more they are up to us. And so even if it is *possible* to give God a true gift without free will (which I do not accept), it is nevertheless greater if we have free will.

our loved ones do these things *in general*; it is enough that the particular *instances* of these events are unexpected immediately before they occur. Furthermore, while many of these things are valuable *in themselves*, regardless of whether they are surprising, it seems that there is *extra* value to the fact that they happen when we are not explicitly expecting them.

It is *prima facie* plausible that we cannot surprise God if we have no free will.²¹⁰

We cannot surprise someone who knows precisely what we will do. If God determines us then He knows everything we will do, why we do it, as well as our response to anything He may do. However, Schellenberg might disagree that free will would be a necessary condition for us to surprise God. God, he argues, might first determine the world just by setting up laws of nature and initial conditions and letting everything else unfold,²¹¹ and second choose to suspend His knowledge of how things will actually end up unfolding.²¹² If God does this, then we might be able to surprise Him.

While Schellenberg may be right that it is possible for God to be surprised even if we have no free will, there is good reason to think that free will is the *optimal means* for God to allow for surprise. This is my argument. God takes a risk in suspending His knowledge of how things end up unfolding. While He also takes a risk in allowing free will, there are *other* goods which come from free will, but there are not obviously other goods which come from suspending His knowledge. So, assuming that the risk in allowing free will is not significantly *greater*, it follows that the best way for God to allow surprise is for Him to allow free will. I have already discussed some of the other goods which come

²¹⁰ On certain views, God can know what we will freely do before we do it. If this is right, then we cannot surprise God even if we *have* free will. So these accounts plausibly cannot make use of the good of “surprise”. The rest of what I say regarding surprise assumes that free will and perfect foreknowledge of human free choices are incompatible.

²¹¹ J.L. Schellenberg, “The Atheist’s Free Will Offence,” *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 56 (2004) 4.

²¹² *Ibid* 5.

from free will, and will move on to discuss more later, so in what follows I argue that there is significant risk in God suspending His knowledge.

Depending on whether God is temporal or atemporal, there are different stories to tell regarding how God could make it possible for us to surprise Him, apart from giving us free will. First, if God is *in time* then in order to be surprised He must (at some point) suspend His knowledge of the future and then learn as time unfolds. Like any agent, it would be rational and prudent²¹³ for God to reason about *present* states and events to *near future* events. Given a determined world,²¹⁴ and God's perfect knowledge about the *present* and *past* states of the world, God would certainly be *able* to reason toward every last detail of how the world will unfold. Perhaps He is also able to *keep* Himself from reasoning to every last detail. But when it comes to relationships with people, it seems that (if they are determined, and He is reasoning from the past and present to the future) He will come to know how they will act at *some point* before they have acted. There are only three ways He might not. The first way is that He makes Himself ignorant about some detail about the *present* state of the world. The second way is that He suspends His practice of reasoning to the future (even just the next minute) with regards to some information. And the third way is that He suspends, to some degree, His capability to *reason well*. But it seems dangerous for God to abandon His knowledge about the present state of the world, His practice of reasoning completely, *or* His capability to reason well. These might make it so that *He* acts in ways which cause harm. For if He acts out of perfect reason, but limited knowledge, He may make a mistake. And if He acts out of

²¹³ And, perhaps, a moral duty.

²¹⁴ Perhaps, as Schellenberg points out, the world God creates is not *determined* but includes random or merely probabilistic events and yet no libertarian free will. In this case God will not know what we do before we do it. However, if we act in a way that surprises God due to a random or probabilistic event unrelated to our *will*, this does not seem to be a case of us surprising God as much as it is a case of the non-personal world surprising God. Moreover, it seems that having random or probabilistic events which have an influence on how we behave might be just as risky as giving us some degree of free will.

perfect knowledge, but flawed or limited reasoning, He may make a mistake.²¹⁵ And so, if God is in time, there is risk involved in God suspending His knowledge in order to allow us to act in a way that is surprising to Him.

I now argue that there is risk if God is *outside of time* as well. If God were outside of time and determines the world then, when He chooses how He creates (when He chooses the laws of nature and initial conditions), He either takes everything into account or He does not. If He takes everything into account when He chooses how He creates, then he will not be surprised by what happens when He *does* create. If He does not take everything into account when He chooses how He creates, He takes a risk that He will make a mistake. And so, if God is outside time, there is risk involved in God suspending His knowledge in order to allow us to act in a way that is surprising to Him.

So whether God is inside or outside of time He would take a risk in suspending His knowledge in order to allow creatures to act in ways that surprise Him. If there were no other way to allow us to be surprising to God, and thus allow our relationship with Him to be enhanced in that way, God may still consider the risk worthwhile – as certainly there are some steps He can take to minimize the risk, even if He cannot get rid of it completely. But given that *free will* might allow us to act in ways that surprise God, and given that it also allows for *other* goods, free will looks like the overall better way to bring about surprise.

If one is not convinced by this, then I can at least say that our surprising God is a particular *kind* of true gift we can offer to God. If God were to bring about surprises by determining us, it would seem more accurate to describe Him as (ultimately) surprising

²¹⁵ One might object that God *may* suspend either his knowledge of the present state of the world, or his practice of/capability to reason about the future, so long as He *does not act* during that period of suspension. Instead, during that time, He merely allows Himself to be acted upon (prayed to, worshipped, etc.) and in that moment humans can be surprising toward God. However, if He does this it might be that the mistake He makes is *not acting* when He *should act*.

Himself, than to describe us as surprising Him. While our actions may be surprising *to* Him, it is a different phenomenon than the cases of surprise I discussed at the beginning of this section. In all those cases, surprise was part of the true gift that was given. My father could have informed us well in advance of our trip to Niagara Falls that we would be going there, but the fact that he chose to surprise us in doing so was part of the gift of taking us there. If God determines us, then when we surprise Him it is not *from us* in the right sense to be considered a true gift. And so, even if surprise *itself* is possible if we are determined, we can only give God the true gift of surprise if God does not determine us.

3.2.3 Vulnerability

Another way in which our personal relationships with God might be enhanced if God gives us free will is that free will allows us to be *mutually vulnerable* with God.²¹⁶ One might initially suspect that God simply *cannot* be vulnerable to anyone. He does not lack for anything, and, one might argue, He cannot be hurt by anyone. Eleonore Stump replies to this worry that God can be vulnerable in that He *desires* for humans to respond appropriately to Him and not to reject Him.²¹⁷ God depends on humans responding appropriately to Him, since He desires it, and in this way He is vulnerable to humans.

So, how is it that free will is necessary for God to be vulnerable to humans? If humans had no free will, then they *could not* reject God or act against God's will unless God *determined* them to do so.²¹⁸ But, even setting aside the problems we might expect

²¹⁶ For a short example of how vulnerability is also relevant in the hiddenness literature, see Ebrahim Azadegan, "Divine Love and the Argument from Divine Hiddenness," *European Journal for the Philosophy of Religion* 6(2) (2014) 113.

²¹⁷ Eleonore Stump, *Wandering in Darkness: Narrative and the Problem of Suffering* (Oxford University Press, 2010) 123.

²¹⁸ One might object that if humans had no (libertarian) free will, they might still act against God's will (and yet be undetermined to do so) if *random* or *uncaused* occurrences caused them to do so. As Schellenberg points out, it is possible for a world to be undetermined *and* lack agents with free will. But if there *were* the possibility of random occurrences which caused humans to act against God's will, God would not ultimately be vulnerable to the *humans* but to those random occurrences.

with the idea of God determining someone to act against God's will, it would not be *humans* that God is ultimately vulnerable to, but Himself. Assuming that God can *only* be vulnerable to humans if they have the ability to reject Him or act against His will, it follows that God cannot be vulnerable to humans unless they possess free will.

One might wonder what value there is in God being vulnerable to us. First, I appeal to the intuition that vulnerability is just a standard mark of intimacy in real relationships. It is taken to be a fault in close personal relationships when two people are invulnerable to each other.²¹⁹ It seems to put a distance between them. So, intuitively, mutual vulnerability benefits close personal relationships. But second, *mutual* vulnerability helps to decrease the *power imbalance* between us and God – which is the next good from free will I will discuss. So at the very least, vulnerability is good in this sense.

3.2.4 Decreased Power Imbalance

The final way I will discuss in which our personal relationships with God might be enhanced if God gives us free will is that free will decreases the power imbalance between us and God. A close personal relationship between two people will benefit the more the power imbalance between those two people decreases. I will discuss a couple of examples.

First, my oldest close personal relationships are those with my parents, and those relationships have gone through significant changes since they began, as well as massive changes in the power balance. When I was a baby, I was dependent on my parents for everything. This (mostly) one-way dependency created a kind of power imbalance. As I grew up I gradually became less and less dependent on them, until I became an adult and reached a point where I now depend on them only as much as they depend on me (more or

²¹⁹ That is, it is a sign of intimacy when each person puts his or herself in a position to potentially be harmed by the other. It is a fault in such relationships when one person "puts up a shield" so that nothing the other person does can harm him or her.

less). We depend on each other now in the ways that *friends* depend upon one another: that we will keep our word, give them comforting words when they need them, take their side when they are victim to injustice, etc. The power we have over each other is much more *balanced*. And while something may have been lost when I grew up, ultimately the friendship we have now is closer and stronger than the relationship we had when I was a child. This is the first example of how a closer power balance enhances personal relationship.

Second, consider a time not too long ago when it was common to think that husbands were absolute heads of their households. Husbands had total control over finances, major life decisions, and in some cases even what activities wives were and were not allowed to participate in outside the house. Husbands were also the only member of the family who could vote for the leadership of their country (assuming they had no adult children). It seems plausible to me that marriages can become stronger when this power imbalance decreases. When women became less dependent on their husbands – they began to work, received the vote, etc. – their relationships to their husbands were able to become closer than they had been. They had the opportunity to become relationships between equals.²²⁰

Plausibly, as I will soon argue, it is also true of our relationships with God that they benefit from decreased power imbalance. It should go without saying that there is a massive power imbalance and asymmetry between creatures and God – one that we might think *could never* be balanced. Schellenberg even takes this fact to lend itself to an

²²⁰ It should be noted that this opportunity came with (what some might see as) costs. Not all marriages are *actually* strengthened by the greater equality which has become possible; some end when they would have otherwise continued. And while in some cases the increased *opportunity* to divorce is actually a very good thing for at least one member of the marriage (cases of abuse and infidelity are the most clear-cut examples of opportunity for divorce being good) even in these cases it is not right to say that the *relationship* is strengthened by divorce; the relationship ends, and in these cases it's good that it ends. So this equality does not in *all* cases *actually* strengthen relationships. But I am suggesting that this equality nevertheless allows for an *opportunity* for stronger relationships.

argument that power imbalance *is not* a reason for thinking God would grant us free will.²²¹ His idea essentially comes down to the following. Since the power gap can never be closed, God might as well not bother doing anything to try to close it.

But Schellenberg's argument strikes me as mistaken. Just because the power imbalance can never go away, this does not mean that God would not nevertheless want to *decrease* that imbalance, especially if He could do so in meaningful ways. Plausibly, my relationship to my parents as a teenager (given that I was not too rebellious) was closer than my relationship to them as a child. But I was still very dependent on my parents as a teenager, and yet much less so than when I was a child. And though my relationship with my parents was not as close when I was a teenager as it is now that I am an adult, if our relationship *could never* reach the point it's at now that I'm an adult, that would be no reason for thinking it might as well have stayed as it was when I was a child. It would *still* be better for our relationship to be like when I was a teenager than it would be for it to be like when I was a child.

It strikes me that we can say something similar about our relationship with God. Just because there must always be a power imbalance it *does not follow* that God should do nothing to decrease that imbalance. And giving us free will seems like a *significant* way to do so. While there are many ways God could increase our power in general (He could give us new powers ranging from, for example, the ability to fly to the ability to create universes), the specific problem of power *imbalance* is that we have no power *over God*, while God has complete power over us. Free will gives us *a degree* of power over God (however slight). It gives us the power to do what God does not want us to do. When we have that power, but choose to use it to do what God *does* want, our relationship becomes

²²¹ Schellenberg (2004) 5-6.

closer. And so plausibly *decreased power imbalance* is a way free will enhances our relationship with God.

3.3 Is Free Will Necessary for Personal Relationship With God?

In the previous section I discussed some of the ways free will might enhance a personal relationship with God. Given that Schellenberg rates a relationship with God as the greatest good, if God exists, it plausibly justifies God in allowing (a certain extent of) free will, if free will enhances relationship with God. If this is so, then *a fortiori* God would be justified in allowing free will if free will were *necessary* for personal relationship with God. But are there reasons for thinking that free will *is* necessary for one to have a personal relationship with God?²²² In what follows, I argue that personal relationship with God plausibly *does* require free will.

3.3.1 Hick's "Hypnosis" Argument

Hick argues that God's relationship to us would be like that of a hypnotist to her patients if He predetermined us to love, trust, and adore Him.²²³ Since a hypnotist's relationship to her patients is not a true close, personal relationship, neither would our relationship with God be if He determined us. To understand Hick's reasoning, consider the following case.

Suppose Hippolyta is a lonely hypnotist who is looking for someone to love, and who will love her back as well. She has a patient named Patrick and decides to hypnotize him so that he will love her. As a result of the hypnosis, Patrick believes that he enjoys spending time with Hippolyta, that he cares about her well-being, and that he likes her as a

²²² Derk Pereboom considers whether love would be possible if one were determined by a "benevolent manipulator". See his *Living Without Free Will* (Cambridge University Press, 2001) 199-204. Pereboom suggests there is no reason for thinking so. In what follows I address a reason for thinking so, from John Hick, which Pereboom does not consider.

²²³ See Hick 271-275.

person. He believes that he is close to Hippolyta, and that they love each other. Likewise, to outsiders, Hippolyta and Patrick seem like an ordinary couple in a loving relationship – Patrick’s behaviour is perfectly consistent with that being the case. He spends his free time with Hippolyta, he goes out of his way to help her when she is in need, and he seems to enjoy her company.

Nevertheless, Hick insists that Patrick does not love Hippolyta. Their seemingly loving relationship would be inauthentic to Hippolyta because *she* knows that there is a significant difference between the relationship she has with Patrick, and the one that she might have with someone “whose mind had not been conditioned by hypnotic suggestion.”²²⁴ The difference is that the relationship she has with Patrick is purely a “technical achievement”, while if Patrick truly loved Hippolyta, that love would be based on the actual merits of Hippolyta herself as a person.²²⁵ Hick concludes that true love is entirely different from the sort of thing that can be caused by a process like hypnosis. “Hypnotized love” is *logically* impossible, according to Hick. For Hick, saying that Hippolyta and Patrick love each other is like saying: Hippolyta forced Patrick to have “love-unforced-by-anything-outside-himself” for Hippolyta.²²⁶ But obviously it is logically impossible to force Patrick to do *anything* that is “unforced by anyone outside himself”. So, Hick concludes, it is impossible for Hippolyta to hypnotize Patrick to love her.

Hick goes on to draw the comparison to God. While it may be logically possible for God to create human beings so that they are biologically determined to never act wrongly, it is *not possible* to create human beings so that they are biologically determined

²²⁴ Ibid 273.

²²⁵ If this were true would it make *unconditional* love impossible? For a defense of the consistency of the claim that unconditional love can be based on qualities of the beloved see Alex Pruss, 39. But it does seem somewhat plausible to me that romantic relationship and friendship *cannot* be unconditional. Certain unrepentant behaviours *must* lead to the end of a friendship or romantic relationship, even if the desire for the other’s *well-being* is unconditional.

²²⁶ Ibid.

to love God, trust God, etc. Doing so would always be like Hippolyta hypnotizing Patrick. If this is right, then free will is plausibly necessary for creatures to share in close personal relationships with God.

Schellenberg objects directly to Hick's reasoning. He argues, for several reasons, that the hypnosis analogy is a faulty one. First, he points out that a world without free will would not *necessarily* be a completely determined world. Humans might lack free will and yet it might not be that God has determined every detail of our lives. As Schellenberg states: "free will notoriously requires more than choices not determined by antecedent conditions outside the agent's control: it entails as well *the agent's control over those choices*".²²⁷ A world which includes random occurrences (even if they happen in human brains) does not guarantee that anyone has free will. For Schellenberg, this is supposed to subvert the idea that a world lacking free will would be one in which God pulls all the strings like a puppet master.

But even if the world *were* determined, Schellenberg thinks the hypnosis picture would be a mistaken. It might be that God determines a set of laws from which everything else unfolds, and yet He might not *directly* determine all the details of the world that actually unfolds. So even if the world is determined by God, Schellenberg thinks that this does not entail that God is busy manipulating every detail of our psyche. He furthers this point by noting that on most compatibilist kinds of free will, we act freely when we act according to our *nature*; even if that nature is completely determined. We are not forced by determinism to do what we do not *want* to do; we are determined by our nature to want *what in fact we want*. Part of the intuitive force of Hick's hypnotist example, according to Schellenberg, is that we recognize that Patrick would *not* love Hippolyta if she had not hypnotized him. But if God determines a world, He does not force us to act in a way that

²²⁷ Schellenberg (2007) 274.

we would otherwise not like to act – He creates us so that it is in our *nature* to act in certain ways, we do what we desire to do.

Schellenberg goes on to point out another way that the hypnosis case would not be like the case of God determining us. In the hypnosis case, Hick points out that Patrick does not love Hippolyta because, rather than respond with love to Hippolyta because of *her* merits, Patrick behaves as though he loves Hippolyta *just because* Hippolyta has tinkered with his brain to “trigger” that response. But Schellenberg thinks that God’s determining us is *compatible* with our responding to God because of His merits. We would not merely have our brains triggered into responding to God with admiration and worship. Instead, we would be programmed to respond to a *real awareness* of God’s good and loving nature.²²⁸

Might we save Hick’s argument? There are a few points to make in response. First, Schellenberg’s point that a world without free will would not necessarily be determined is beside the point. If there is any indeterminacy in the world it either affects human behaviour or it does not. If it does not affect human behaviour, then as far as human behaviour is concerned *we* are still completely determined. If the indeterminacy in the world *does* affect human behaviour, then God might as well give humans free will – even if it is limited free will – since it is hard to see what reason God would have for allowing such indeterminacy about human behaviour which would not also *a fortiori* be a reason for God to allow free will. If the only reason for allowing such indeterminacy would be so that God is not puppet-master, He might as well allow free will, at least to the extent that that free will allows a similar range of options as the indeterminacy in the world.

Second, I am not convinced by Schellenberg’s claim that what we find intuitive in the hypnosis case is that Patrick behaves in a way that he would not otherwise like to behave. It seems that even if Hippolyta had, rather than *hypnotized* Patrick, *biologically*

²²⁸ Ibid 275.

engineered him from conception so that he would “love” her, we would not want to call Patrick’s behaviour towards Hippolyta *love*. Even if she had engineered him so that he would recognize her actual merits and respond accordingly, *she* would recognize that what she had accomplished was only a technical achievement, as Hick would say. At this level it may come down to intuition, but it seems to me that love (at least of the relevant kind) *must* be what I called above a “true gift”.²²⁹ If it is ultimately *from* the very person who receives that love, as in the case of Patrick and Hippolyta, it is not truly love.²³⁰

3.4 God Has Duties

The replies to the free will offense have, up to this point, considered reasons for rejecting a (modified version of) premise 2 of the free will offense. But one might think that there are also reasons for rejecting 1. Perhaps God would allow that free will exists even though it brings about a serious threat of evil *and* He could bring about good that is *qualitatively and quantitatively equal or greater than* the good brought about by free will *without also* allowing a similarly serious risk of evil. The assumption that God would make all of His choices about how to act based on weighing goods and evils against each other, an objector might claim, is mistaken. These kinds of “greater goods” theodicies and defenses – against the problem of evil, the problem of divine hiddenness, and (in this case) the free will offense – look uncomfortably like God is a utilitarian.²³¹ Instead, the objector might continue, perhaps God has *duties* which He must perform, since He is wholly good. If one of those duties is to bestow free will on all personal creatures, and not to violate that free

²²⁹ Furthermore, even if one is unconvinced that love *must* be a “true gift”, it seems that love *as* a true gift would be another greater good that comes from free will.

²³⁰ Brian Leftow tells me that he made a very similar point in a lecture a couple of years ago; it is very likely that I attended that lecture. While I do not remember this, it is possible that this is ultimately or partly where I got this idea from. If this is the case then credit for this idea should go to him.

²³¹ Or a consequentialist of *some* kind. Or so an objector might claim.

will then, the objector concludes, we should not be surprised if God and free will coexist.²³²

But one might wonder whether – if God has duties at all – creating and maintaining free will would be one of those duties. In defense of this claim, one might bring dignity back into the conversation here; if God has a duty to maintain creaturely dignity, and certain kinds of creatures (such as persons) lack a certain degree of dignity if they are not free, then God has a duty to ensure that persons have free will. But Schellenberg maintains that humans who *do not* possess free will might actually enjoy a *greater* level of dignity than those who have free will, if they are “lovingly” determined by *God*. Humans on *his* model do not have to experience the suffering and evil that comes with free will, and this is a more dignified position to be in.²³³ I expect intuition may be split here. But it is important to note once again that, in the context of the hiddenness argument, there is no need to demonstrate that God bestows more dignity on us by giving us free will than He does by preventing terrible evil and suffering from befalling us. The level of free will which must be justified is only the amount necessary to allow the various goods from nonresistant nonbelief which require free will. These goods require, *inter alia*, the freedom to accept or reject God, accept God for the right reasons, have *morally significant* free will (to *some* extent), and to tell others or refrain from telling others about God. None of these seems like it *must* result in a serious risk of terrible evil or suffering. Plausibly, the possible negative effects of the freedom of will in *these* domains do not lead to a great loss of dignity, but having freedom in these domains does give one dignity. And so, if this is

²³² Travis Dumsday points out that this issue of deontology has not received enough attention in his “How Divine Hiddenness Sheds Light on the Problem of Evil,” *International Philosophical Quarterly* 55(3) (2015) 321.

²³³ Schellenberg (2007) 280.

right, then dignity *might* be the reason God allows us to have the free will necessary for the goods from nonresistant nonbelief.²³⁴

But there may be more objections to this “deontological” response. The deontological responder maintains that God’s duty to create and maintain creaturely free will is sufficient to demonstrate that God and free will are compatible. But one might ask what we should say if God has *conflicting* duties. Suppose, for example, that God has the duty to prevent human suffering from rising above a certain quantitative or qualitative threshold. Or suppose that God has the duty to ensure that humans have equal opportunity to participate in the richest goods. One could argue that both of these duties entail that God has the duty to withhold free will from (at least some of) His creatures (or at least to a certain degree). But then, one might argue, these duties conflict with God’s duty to ensure that creatures *can* exercise free will.

With regards to the duty God might have to prevent human suffering from rising above a certain quantitative or qualitative threshold, this can be dealt with in a way similar to my reply to Schellenberg’s claim that preventing suffering brings about more dignity than allowing free will. God’s duty to prevent too much suffering from occurring would only entail that He would not allow us free will beyond a *certain extent*. While this move will not work if one wants to completely reject the free will offense, it is enough to move the problem out of the domain of the hiddenness argument. Plausibly, the kind of free will necessary for the goods from nonresistant nonbelief *do not cause* too much suffering. Regarding God’s duty to ensure that everyone has equal access to participate in the richest goods, it’s not obvious why God *would have* such a duty. Appeals to God’s benevolence will not do, since that only gives us reasons to think that God would *want* to grant access

²³⁴ Of course, a *full* answer to the free will offense *will* have to explain why it is justified that free will *has* in fact allowed great evil and suffering in our world (or at least a plausible explanation of why it might be justified). But if what I have argued here is correct, then that would be enough to push the free will offense out of the terrain of the hiddenness argument, and firmly into “independent argument” territory.

to the richest good, but would not if it conflicted with one of His duties. Appeals to *fairness* also will not do, as fairness best understood takes into account what we *deserve*. But apart from perhaps (eg.) dignity and a life that on balance is worth living, it is not clear that we deserve much more from God. And so it is not clear that God would have a duty to ensure equal access to the richest goods.

Clearly, the deontological response to the problems of evil, hiddenness, and free will deserves more attention than I can give here. It is evident that there will be challenges to presenting a plausible deontological theodicy or defense, and I do not claim to have provided a compelling account of how an appeal to deontology can demonstrate that God and free will are compatible. But I hope I have, at the very least, made it clear that there is potentially something worth investigating further here.

4 Free Will is Controversial

There may be reasons independent from Schellenberg for thinking that a reply to the argument from divine hiddenness which involves free will would not be acceptable. In particular, we might point to the high degree of rejection within the contemporary philosophical community at large of the actual existence of libertarian free will.²³⁵

Libertarian free will is unquestionably a minority view amongst philosophers, so the argument goes, and so any response to the argument from divine hiddenness relying on the *actual existence* of free will is bound to be rejected by the broader philosophical community. Unless critics of the argument from divine hiddenness can also demonstrate

²³⁵ For some evidence of this, see David Bourget and David Chalmers, "What Do Philosophers Believe?" *Philosophical Studies* 170(3) (2014) 494. Bourget and Chalmers survey 1,972 philosophers from 99 departments throughout Europe, North America, and Australasia. Of those respondents, only 13.7% accepted or leaned toward libertarian free will. 59.1% accepted or leaned toward compatibilism, while 12.2% accepted or leaned toward there being no free will of any kind. The remaining 14.9% listed other answers which included 4.1% who were agnostic/undecided and 2.8% who thought the question was too unclear to answer.

that free will plausibly exists, one might argue that free will does not belong in their response to hiddenness. And since a plausible demonstration that free will exists would be as great an accomplishment as (if not greater an even greater accomplishment than) refuting the argument from divine hiddenness, one might conclude that free will is not acceptable to appeal to in a reply to hiddenness.

One response to this is that even though the existence of free will is a minority view amongst philosophers in general, it enjoys a slight *majority* amongst philosophers of religion.²³⁶ And since discussion of the argument from divine hiddenness is aimed at philosophers of religion, many would accept a strong response to the argument from divine hiddenness which relied on the actual existence of free will.²³⁷ But I think this response will not do on its own. Even if most philosophers of religion would tend to accept a response relying on free will, there still seems to be a problem if the majority of *other* philosophers would not accept it.

A better response is that it is still acceptable to offer a *defense* against the hiddenness argument relying on free will, even if most philosophers do not think humans actually have free will. Since a defense only requires that it is *possible* that humans have libertarian free will, there is a lower bar for a defense including libertarian free will to be considered acceptable.

²³⁶ This is according to the same survey. Amongst respondents who listed philosophy of religion as their area of specialization, 57.4% accepted or leaned towards libertarianism. 25.5% accepted or leaned towards compatibilism, and 10.6% accepted or leaned toward there being no free will of any kind. 6.4% had other answers. It should be mentioned that since this group of respondents is a very small subset of the total respondents to the survey, it is much less reliable that these findings reflect the philosophy of religion community as a whole (only 47 respondents listed philosophy of religion as their AOS).

²³⁷ After all, it has been common practice to employ free will in response to the problem of evil.

5 Conclusion

I have argued that it is acceptable to appeal to free will in a response to the argument from divine hiddenness. The bulk of this chapter addressed the free will offense: Schellenberg's argument that God would not allow free will. First I argued that appealing to "intrinsic and extrinsic value" free will responses is acceptable, despite the free will offense, since *enough* of these goods of *great enough* value might justify both hiddenness and free will. Second I addressed "presupposed" free will responses. I noted that, since I am concerned with the hiddenness argument, I do not have to demonstrate that God is justified in allowing free will beyond the extent that it would be necessary for "presupposed" free will responses to the hiddenness argument. Third, I argued that there is a considerable value that can only come from free will – and this is value that enhances relationship with God. Relationship with God is enhanced by free will because it makes possible true gifts, surprise, vulnerability, and decreased power imbalance. Though I do not pretend to have conclusively demonstrated that there is *sufficient* value from free will, I hope that I have demonstrated that it is far from clear that there is insufficient value from free will for God to be justified in allowing it (to a certain extent). Fourth, I provided some reason for thinking that a close personal relationship with God requires free will, to some extent. To that end, I defended John Hick's "hypnosis" analogy. Fifth, I provided some reason for thinking there may be a plausible *deontological* response to the free will offense, though plausibly there is still much more left to be said regarding this. Finally I argued that the fact that the existence of free will is controversial need not make it unacceptable to appeal to free will in answering the hiddenness argument, since a *defense* requires only that free will is possible.

Chapter V The Problem of No Greater Goods

1 Introduction

The previous two chapters addressed a couple of ways one might try to restrict the sorts of goods which could count as part of a reason for God to allow nonresistant nonbelief. But one might argue that greater goods responses must fail *in general*. Recall that there are two necessary conditions which must be met in order for any greater goods response to demonstrate that God might have a reason to allow nonresistant nonbelief. I called these necessary conditions the outweighing goods and optimal means conditions. If one demonstrates that either condition *cannot* be met by any good or set of goods G, then one has demonstrated that greater goods responses in general must fail. This chapter addresses a problem for greater goods responses called the problem of “no greater goods”. The problem of no greater goods is an attempt by critics of greater goods responses to demonstrate that no good or set of goods G can possibly meet the outweighing goods condition, and that therefore greater goods responses must fail in general. I consider some arguments that the outweighing goods cannot be met and argue that they fail. At the end I offer some reason for thinking that the outweighing goods condition *can* be met.

The primary concern of the problem of no greater goods is the incredible value that a conscious personal relationship with God would have for creatures. The problem is stated succinctly by Schellenberg when he writes, “Such a relationship with an infinitely rich personal reality would have to be the greatest good any human being could possibly experience, if God exists. But then, one wants to ask, why this talk of some *other* good, for the sake of which God might *sacrifice* such a relationship.”²³⁸ This is the idea. Greater goods responses attempt to demonstrate that, because of some good or set of goods, God is

²³⁸ J.L. Schellenberg, *The Wisdom to Doubt* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2007) 210.

justified in allowing nonresistant nonbelief. But one of the *necessary conditions* for a successful greater goods response is the outweighing goods condition:

Outweighing Goods: God would be justified in allowing some person P to be a nonresistant nonbeliever *only if* there is some good (or set of goods) G the value of which outweighs the value lost because of P's nonresistant nonbelief combined with any other value lost because of G

But part of the value lost because of P's nonresistant nonbelief is the opportunity for P to have a conscious personal relationship with God. So if *nothing* can outweigh the value of a conscious personal relationship with God, then nothing can outweigh the value lost because of P's nonresistant nonbelief. If this is right, then the outweighing goods condition cannot be met, and greater goods responses must fail *in principle* to demonstrate that the hiddenness argument is unsound.²³⁹

2 Preliminary Issues

Up to this point I have been speaking very roughly in saying that the problem of no greater goods states that greater goods responses to the hiddenness argument must fail because nothing can outweigh the value of a conscious personal relationship with God. But there is some nuance missing. First, a "conscious personal relationship with God" is an entity with *duration*, so there is *temporal* nuance missing which I address in the next section. Second, there may be some ambiguity about what might be meant when one claims that "nothing" could outweigh the value lost from nonresistant nonbelief. What I will call "weak problems" arise when "nothing" is interpreted as "no individual good", while the problem of no greater goods is stronger if "nothing" is interpreted as "no set of goods".

²³⁹ In my usage, some claim C is an "in principle" problem for greater goods responses if the truth of C would entail that *any* greater goods responses *must* fail to demonstrate that the hiddenness argument is unsound. If one can demonstrate the truth of a claim such as C, then, when a greater goods response is proposed, one can reject that response *just on the basis* that it is a greater goods response. One will not have to look at the particulars of the response to know that it fails (if C is true and an "in principle" problem for greater goods responses).

2.1 Temporary or Permanent Nonresistant Nonbelief?

The class of nonresistant nonbelievers can be divided into two broad types.²⁴⁰ Some person P is a “temporary” nonresistant nonbeliever if and only if there is some finite period of time T at which P is a nonresistant nonbeliever, but P ultimately comes to believe that God exists at a time after T. Some person P is a “permanent” nonresistant nonbeliever if and only if the *ultimate* state P experiences is a state of nonresistant nonbelief.²⁴¹ When the critic of greater goods responses claims that nothing can outweigh the value of a “conscious personal relationship with God”, this might make it seem as though the problem is that some people are permanently deprived of the opportunity for such personal relationship. In other words, it might seem as though the problem is that some people are *permanent* nonresistant nonbelievers. But Schellenberg is saying something even stronger. He claims that God would *never* allow nonresistant nonbelief for even a moment.²⁴² So Schellenberg’s claim is that God would not even allow *temporary* nonresistant nonbelief.

The first important point to take away here is that the problem of no greater goods, if Schellenberg has his way, will claim that nothing can outweigh the value lost from even *one second* of nonresistant nonbelief. Nevertheless, if Schellenberg were proved wrong in *this*, surely the problem of no greater goods would not completely go away. There seem to be people who are nonresistant nonbelievers for much longer than one second. One might argue that the existence of *permanent* nonresistant nonbelievers *is* the most obvious problem for theism. At least at the intuitive level, it seems much less likely that God would be justified in allowing permanent nonresistant nonbelief than that He would be justified in allowing one second of nonresistant nonbelief. So the critic of greater goods responses might forego defending the stronger “not one second” claim made by Schellenberg in

²⁴⁰ Though I do not suggest that both of these classes are actually instantiated.

²⁴¹ This is true of some person P either if P is a nonresistant nonbeliever just before ceasing to exist, or if P exists into eternity as a nonresistant nonbeliever.

²⁴² Schellenberg (2007) 201.

favour of the intuitively stronger claim that the value lost from *permanent* nonresistant nonbelief could never be outweighed by other goods. In this section I argue that permanent nonresistant nonbelief cannot be used in a non-question-begging independent argument for atheism. If this is true, then greater goods responses must only show that God could be justified in allowing *temporary* nonresistant nonbelief.

If permanent nonresistant nonbelief *did* pose a threat to theism, it would involve a particular solution to (something like) the following inconsistent triad:

- (A) If God exists, then permanent nonresistant nonbelief does not occur.
- (B) Permanent nonresistant nonbelief occurs
- (C) God exists

The conjunction of any two of these propositions entails the negation of the third. So the argument from permanent nonresistant nonbelief for atheism would be the argument from (A) and (B) to the negation of (C). But, unlike temporary nonresistant nonbelief, no one actually knows if permanent nonresistant nonbelief occurs. For all we know, we may continue to exist after death, and it is *then* that God reveals Himself to everyone.²⁴³ Even if (A) is true, it does not pose a threat for theism unless (B) is also true.

One might object that, in contrast to what I have just said, it is *very likely* that permanent nonresistant nonbelief occurs. After all, it is very likely that many people die as nonresistant nonbelievers.²⁴⁴ It is not at all obvious that people who die continue to exist after death, much less that they come to believe that God exists. But if this is so, then – the critic will claim – it seems very likely that there are a huge number of permanent nonresistant nonbelievers. And thus, if (A) is true and (B) is very likely true, then it is very

²⁴³ The idea that some people – or all people who die as nonbelievers – might come to believe post-mortem, and that this could be significant to the argument from divine hiddenness, comes from Timothy Mawson, “The Rationality of Classical Theism and Its Demographics,” in Yujin Nagasawa (ed.), *Scientific Approaches to the Philosophy of Religion* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2012) 195.

²⁴⁴ Though there are certainly some who would object to this claim, such as those who claim that there *are* no nonresistant nonbelievers at all. I briefly discussed such views in Chapter II.

likely that (C) is false, and we have a strong inductive argument against the existence of God.²⁴⁵

But this inductive argument for atheism seems to sneak in some question-begging assumptions. To see how, consider the reasons provided for thinking that permanent nonresistant nonbelief occurs. The fact that people die as nonresistant nonbelievers can be very strong evidence for (B) *only if* we also assume that people cease to exist when they die. On atheism it is very likely that we cease to exist when we die.²⁴⁶ But if we continue to exist after death, then it is not nearly as obvious that permanent nonresistant nonbelief occurs. And, as we can infer from (A), if God exists then the probability that permanent nonresistant nonbelief occurs is very low.²⁴⁷ So the fact that people die as nonresistant nonbelievers is evidence for atheism *only if* we assume atheism²⁴⁸ – or at least that atheism is more probable than not. But this begs the question against the theist.²⁴⁹

What this shows is that we do not have a compelling, non-question-begging independent argument for atheism from permanent nonresistant nonbelief. And so, when discussing the problem of no greater goods, the phenomenon the greater goods responder wants to explain is *temporary* nonresistant nonbelief – instances which plausibly range in duration from one second to one (earthly) lifetime. And so the critic of greater goods responses who endorses the problem of no greater goods must claim that nothing can

²⁴⁵ This is actually a simplification. (B) must actually be significantly *more likely* than (C) in order for it to count as strong evidence against (C). I personally think (B) is *not* significantly more likely than (C), and if that is so the argument fails. But I suspect that there are some who will disagree with me, so I will leave this matter behind.

²⁴⁶ And this is particularly likely on naturalism.

²⁴⁷ It is exactly 0 if (A) is true.

²⁴⁸ Or something even stronger, such as naturalism.

²⁴⁹ The point that I'm trying to make here is that the argument from permanent nonresistant nonbelief is strong if atheism is very probable, but it is weak if theism is very probable. This means that the argument from permanent nonresistant nonbelief cannot be used as an independent argument for atheism. It can only raise our confidence in atheism if we already have independent reasons for having a high level of confidence that atheism is true.

outweigh the value lost from a temporary period of nonresistant nonbelief which ranges from one second to one (earthly) lifetime.

2.2 The Weak and the Strong Problems of No Greater Goods

Some “no greater goods” claims might *seem* to cause an “in principle” problem for greater goods responses, but turn out to be too weak.²⁵⁰ A successful problem of no greater goods must claim that nothing can outweigh the value lost from a temporary period of nonresistant nonbelief which ranges from one second to one earthly lifetime. But depending on how we understand “nothing”, there are at least two degrees of strength “problems of no greater goods” can have. “Weak” problems of no greater goods, when examined closely, turn out not to cause an *in principle* problem for greater goods responses, even if initially they seem problematic. The “strong” problem of no greater goods *would* cause an *in principle* problem.

One claim which might appear to create a problem for greater goods responses is that a conscious personal relationship with God is the greatest single good. If a conscious personal relationship with God were *merely* the greatest single good, but not by much, then plausibly its value might be surpassed. If a conscious personal relationship with God is the greatest good, then it seems (at least initially) plausible to infer that no *single* good could give God a sufficient reason to deny one of His creatures access to a conscious personal relationship with Him, even if that good could not obtain without His doing so. But what is clear is that the “greatest *single* good” claim does not *on its own* demonstrate that no *set* of goods could justify God in (at least temporarily) allowing nonresistant nonbelief. And so

²⁵⁰ Recall from a previous note my definition of an “in principle” problem.

this is only a *weak* problem of no greater goods.²⁵¹ I will focus the rest of this chapter discussing the *strong* problem of no greater goods.

3 The Strong Problem

I will now discuss the strong problem of no greater goods. Weak problems make claims that, even if true, do not necessarily demonstrate that greater goods responses fail in principle. But the claim of the strong problem, if true, *will* entail that greater goods responses fail in principle. Therefore, the only option for the defender of greater goods responses is to offer reasons for thinking that the claim made by the strong problem is unsupported or false. So what claim is it that the strong problem must make? I discuss that shortly.

In determining the claim that the strong problem should make, it will be convenient to introduce some terms. First, one's overall "life-value" is the total value in, and produced by, one's life. One's "life" includes all of the time when one exists as an actual, concrete individual.²⁵² Thus, one's "life" may extend beyond one's *earthly* life if one continues to exist after death as an actual, concrete individual. It is also important to note that one's "life-value" includes more than just the value one *enjoys* in one's life, but extends to the value one contributes to *others'* lives as well. This is to account for *non-patient-centred* goods, as I discussed in chapter III.²⁵³

²⁵¹ It may turn out that there are other claims which appear to create problems of "no greater goods", but which also turn out to be weak problems.

²⁵² Note that "concrete" is not to be considered synonymous with "material" or "physical". My use of "concrete" can be contrasted with "abstract". If one exists as an actual, concrete individual, it is an *additional* question whether one may or may not be a *physical* or *material* individual.

²⁵³ Most of what is interesting about this I discussed in that chapter, and so I will not retrace that ground here. This is not to say that there are no challenges in weighing and comparing life-values when those values involve both patient-centred and non-patient-centred goods. Some of those challenges were addressed in Chapter III, while others may take additional work. But these challenges do not necessarily entail that life-values cannot be compared.

Second, a “life-set” (of goods) is a set which includes *all* the goods in, and produced by, one’s life. Notice that the definition of a life-set (of goods) mirrors the definition of life-value. One’s life-value will be influenced – and perhaps completely determined – by one’s life-set of goods. But, importantly, I will argue later this chapter that it is not necessarily the case that one’s life-value has a one-to-one correspondence with the sum value of all the goods in one’s life set.

Consider what I argued in the above section about temporary and permanent nonresistant nonbelief. If the problem of no greater goods is supposed to demonstrate that greater goods responses fail *in principle* to justify even a moment of nonresistant nonbelief, then it must argue that one’s life-value is *necessarily* greater if one’s life-set *always* includes a conscious personal relationship with God than if it *ever lacks* a conscious personal relationship with God.²⁵⁴ Consider the following principle, which I call the strong problem thesis:

SPT: For every person P, P’s life-value is greater if P’s life-set of goods *always* includes a conscious personal relationship with God than if P’s life-set of goods *ever* lacks a conscious personal relationship with God.

The claim of SPT is that one’s life-value will be greater if one *always* has a conscious personal relationship with God than if one *ever* lacks such a relationship. This claim, if true, would constitute a plausibly air-tight refutation of greater goods responses to the hiddenness argument. For if one’s life-value *would* be greater if one always has a conscious personal relationship with God than if one ever lacks such a relationship, then there could never be any good or set of goods great enough for God to allow someone to *ever* lack a conscious personal relationship with God. And this would entail that there could never be any good or set of goods which could provide God with a reason to *ever*

²⁵⁴ Since life-sets range over the length of time one exists, I will frequently speak as though some good G is absent from one’s life-set at some time T but present in one’s life-set at some other time U. In an absolute sense, this life-set *includes* G. But it is nevertheless true to say that this life-set lacks G at T.

allow nonresistant nonbelief. And so if SPT is true, then this entails that God would never be justified in allowing *any amount* of nonresistant nonbelief for the sake of greater goods.

SPT, therefore, would entail that greater goods responses to the hiddenness argument fail. But are there good reasons to think that SPT is true? In the next few sections I will discuss a few attempts at arguing for SPT and conclude that they fail to establish SPT. At the end of this chapter I will offer some reasons for thinking that SPT is plausibly false.

Before I continue, I make one final note. I take SPT as my target because it would create a very strong problem of no greater goods, and it is consistent with Schellenberg's claim that God would *never* allow anyone to be a nonresistant nonbeliever. But, given that some people may plausibly remain nonresistant nonbelievers for the length of their earthly lives, there are weaker claims than SPT which would *still* plausibly cause problems for greater goods responses. Consider the following:

SPT2: For every person P, P's life-value is greater if P's life-set of goods includes a conscious personal relationship with God *at all times after P turns 80 years old* than if P's life-set of goods *lacks* a conscious personal relationship with God *up until P dies at age 90*.

SPT2 may plausibly cause problems for greater goods responses if there is anyone who remains a nonresistant nonbeliever until their death at age 90. While I take SPT as my direct target for this chapter, ultimately I will be concerned with problems caused by claims such as SPT2 as well. In practice, I *do* offer some reason in this chapter for thinking that the outweighing goods condition might be met for cases of nonresistant nonbelief lasting as long as one's earthly life. With this in mind, I turn to discuss the arguments for SPT.

3.1 “Infinite” Value

Schellenberg provides an illustration which he suggests gives us a reason for rejecting greater goods responses to the hiddenness argument in general. He describes a personal relationship between God and finite persons like this:

Finite created persons could grow infinitely, developing knowledge and experience of God and the world ever more comprehensive and fine-grained. The greatness of God could be reflected in them and in the content of their growing awareness. What one has to try to imagine here is the following sort of thing: an eternal process, limitless in its variations.²⁵⁵

In what follows I discuss whether this description gives us a reason for accepting SPT, and therefore a reason for rejecting greater goods responses on the basis of the problem of no greater goods. I will argue that it does not give us support for SPT.

There are just two qualities Schellenberg mentions here which seem relevant to an argument that a conscious personal relationship with God is unsurpassably great. First is the *eternal duration* of a conscious personal relationship with God. Second is the *limitless variation* of a conscious personal relationship with God. If a conscious personal relationship with God is *eternal*, then there is a sense in which it *could* be infinitely valuable. The idea here is that any positive value multiplied over an infinite amount of time would yield infinite positive value. So long as some good G has positive value over an infinite amount of time, the value from G is ultimately infinite. But, due to diminishing returns – which might eventually turn into *negative* returns – eternal duration cannot be enough on its own to guarantee infinite value. With a personal relationship with God, this is where *limitless variation* comes in. The limitless variation of a conscious personal relationship with God might prevent the problem of diminishing returns. And so at each moment throughout eternity a personal relationship with God might be very valuable for

²⁵⁵ J.L. Schellenberg, “A New Logical Problem of Evil,” in Justin P. McBrayer & Daniel Howard-Snyder, eds., *The Blackwell Companion to the Problem of Evil* (Blackwell, 2013) 40.

us. If this is so then plausibly a conscious personal relationship with God *would* have infinite value. And so the eternal duration and limitless variation of a personal relationship with God may give us some reason for thinking that a conscious personal relationship with God has infinite value. And if a conscious personal relationship with God has infinite value then, so long as there is no other way to obtain infinite value, a conscious personal relationship with God is unsurpassably great.

There are a few problems with this as an argument. Most notably, it seems that it does not, on its own, get us all the way to SPT – or even to something like SPT2. Even if the reasoning is right, it only demonstrates that one's life-value is greater if one's life-set always includes a conscious personal relationship with God than if one's life-set *never* includes a conscious personal relationship with God. This on its own would only give God a reason not to allow *permanent* nonresistant nonbelief. But it is possible that a life-set both includes an eternal conscious personal relationship with God and yet *temporarily* lacks a conscious personal relationship with God. To take an arbitrary example: one could live ninety years without a conscious personal relationship with God and then after that begin a conscious personal relationship with God that never ends. By the same reasoning, the life-value of *that* life should also be infinite in value.

The second problem with the infinite value argument is that it seems possible for a life-set which *never* includes a conscious personal relationship with God to have infinite value for similar reasons. Surely God can extend one's life infinitely without ever making a conscious personal relationship with Him available. And it might even be possible that He grants one goods throughout eternity that are limitless in variation, again without ever making a conscious personal relationship with Him available. And so if this is all that is necessary for infinite value (of this kind), then there is some reason to think that one's life-value can be infinite even if one *never* has a conscious personal relationship with God.

One might object, at this point, that surely one's life-value would be *greater* if one's life-set always includes a conscious personal relationship with God than it would be if one's life-set never included such a relationship, but which God nevertheless fills with an eternity of goods limitless in their variation. This may be a plausible objection. But it also reminds us that "infinite value" resulting from eternal duration and limitless variation *is not* enough on its own to ensure that something is unsurpassable. And so SPT is not guaranteed by the fact that a conscious personal relationship with God may have this sort of "infinite" value (I hereafter refer to this sort of "infinite" value in scare quotes). For two sets of goods with "infinite" value of this kind may admit of *better* and *worse* judgments. Intuitively, if two sets of goods both have infinite value we might expect them to be judged *equally* valuable. But there may be two life-sets of goods which could be judged to have "infinite" value due to eternal duration and limitless variation, and yet they might still be ranked as greater and lesser. For example if one person P spends an eternity feeling mildly pleasant in ways that are infinitely varied, while another person S spends an eternity constantly experiencing deeper and deeper degrees of meaning, the lives of both P and S may be judged as having "infinite" value due to eternal duration and limitless variation. Yet the value of S's life will surely be judged greater than the value of P's life. And so "infinite" value of this type is *not* enough on its own to guarantee that some good is unsurpassably great.

And so "infinite" value does not on its own give us a reason for thinking SPT is true: that one's life-value will be greater if one *always* has a conscious personal relationship with God than if one *ever* lacks such a relationship. But it may nevertheless be that "infinite value" is a *necessary condition* for a life-set of goods to be considered unsurpassably great. And so something must be *added* to "infinite" value to give us a reason for thinking SPT is true.

3.2 The “Always as Good, Sometimes Greater” Argument

One might recognize that the “infinite” value argument cannot, on its own, establish SPT.

But one may nevertheless argue that, if a life-set which always includes a conscious personal relationship with God has “infinite” value plus some quality “X”, then a life-set which includes such a relationship gives one a greater overall life-value than a life-set which ever lacks such a relationship. And therefore, if a life-set which always includes a conscious personal relationship with God has “infinite” value plus X, then SPT is true, and greater goods responses to the hiddenness argument must fail.

What I take to be the most plausible version of this kind of argument I call the “always as good, sometimes greater” (AGSG) argument:

1. For every person P, P’s life-value is guaranteed to be greater with life-set L than it would be with life-set K if L has “infinite” value and if, at all times T, the value of L-at-T is at least equal to the value of K-at-T, and if at *some* times U, the value of L-at-U is greater than the value of K-at-U.
2. A life-set which includes a conscious personal relationship with God at all times has “infinite” value.
3. The value of a life-set which *always* includes a conscious personal relationship with God is, at all times T, at least as great at T as the value of a life-set which *ever* lacks a conscious personal relationship with God.
4. The value of a life-set which *always* includes conscious personal relationship with God is, at *some* times U, greater at U than the value of a life-set which *ever* lacks a conscious personal relationship with God.

Therefore,

5. For every person P, P’s life-value is greater if P’s life-set of goods *always* includes a conscious personal relationship with God than if P’s life-set of goods *ever* lacks a conscious personal relationship with God.

The basic idea behind the AGSG argument is that one’s life, if it always includes a conscious personal relationship with God, will at all times be at least as good as, and will sometimes be greater than, it would be if it sometimes lacked a conscious personal relationship with God. And this is a reason for thinking that one’s life-value would be greater if it always includes a conscious personal relationship with God than if it ever lacks such relationship. Given that this argument is valid, if its premises are true then so is SPT, and if that’s the case then greater goods responses to the hiddenness argument must fail.

Premise 2 was established last section, but what about premises 1, 3, and 4? The support for 1 is primarily intuition: if there is never a time that A is better than B, but B is sometimes better than A, then plausibly B is better than A overall. I will argue below that there are good reasons to reject this intuition. In what follows immediately, I will discuss the main reason for thinking that 3 and 4 are true.

3.2.1 Support for 3 and 4

Here is the primary reason for thinking that a life-set which always includes a conscious personal relationship with God would at all times be at least as great as, and would sometimes be greater than, a life-set which sometimes lacked such a relationship. There may be reasons for thinking that at every time T, a conscious personal relationship with God can contribute more value at T than any other set of goods at T could.²⁵⁶ Now, with this in mind, compare the two ways one's life could go: either always including (AI) a conscious personal relationship with God, or sometimes lacking (SL) it. At all times T at which SL includes a conscious personal relationship with God, AI would at least match SL in value at T. And at all times U at which SL *lacks* a conscious personal relationship with God, AI is *greater than* SL at U, since AI includes a conscious personal relationship with God at U. If this is right then, given that times T and U taken together exhaust all possible times during one's existence, it follows that life-set which always includes a conscious personal relationship with God would at all times be at least as great as, and sometimes greater than, a life-set which lacked such a relationship. This entails premises 3 and 4 of the AGSG argument.

But why think that at every time T, a conscious personal relationship with God contributes more value at T than any other set of goods at T could? Here's a reason one

²⁵⁶ I will discuss the reasons for thinking this might be true below.

might offer for thinking so. A conscious personal relationship with God, one might maintain, is not just one good among many, which can be weighed and considered along other goods. It is a good in a league of its own: a higher *tier* good. If there *are* higher and lower orders of goods, a conscious personal relationship with God belongs in the highest order, of which there are no other members. Higher order goods are such that no amount of lower order goods can outweigh them. Thus the higher order good of a conscious personal relationship with God “trumps” all other goods.²⁵⁷ A set of other goods will be composed entirely by *lower* order goods, and consequently there will be no time T at which any set composed only of goods *other than* a conscious personal relationship with God contributes more value to one’s life than a set which includes a conscious personal relationship with God. If this is true at all times then this entails that, at every time T, a conscious personal relationship with God contributes more value at T than any other set of goods at T could.

One might take it for granted that (if God exists) a conscious personal relationship with God *will* be of the highest order of goods, an order which has no other members, and thus will trump sets composed of other goods. But others may want a reason for thinking a conscious personal relationship with God belongs in the highest order all by itself. We may find such a reason in Aquinas, who writes, “There can be no complete and final happiness for us save in the vision of God.”²⁵⁸ For Aquinas, the happiness for which humans were *made* can only be found in vision of God (hereafter “beatific vision”). No other goods can take the place of the good for which humans were made. And since the beatific vision can only be found in a conscious personal relationship with God, such a relationship must belong in its own order of goods, above all others.

²⁵⁷ I take this notion of “trumping” from James Griffin, *Well-Being* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986) 83.

²⁵⁸ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiæ*, I-II.3.8, trans. Thomas Gilby (Cambridge: Blackfriars, 1969).

I now turn to discuss whether we ought to accept the AGSG argument. I argue that three of its premises are either false or can be undermined.

3.2.2 Nonresistant Nonbelief and Enhanced Relationship

There are good reasons for thinking premise 3 is false. Premise 3 states that the value of a life-set which always includes a conscious personal relationship with God, at all times T, at least as great at T as the value of a life-set which *ever* lacks a conscious personal relationship with God. The support for this premise essentially amounted to looking at the comparison between the two ways one's life could go: either always including (AI) a conscious personal relationship with God, or sometimes lacking (SL) it. It was then pointed out that at all times T at which SL includes a conscious personal relationship with God, AI at least matches SL in value at T, since AI also includes a conscious personal relationship with God at T. But this does not strike me as strictly correct. While there may be reasons for thinking that AI is greater whenever SL *lacks* conscious personal relationship with God (premise 4), it is not clear why AI must always be at least equal to SL when SL includes a conscious personal relationship with God (premise 3). And there are actually reasons for thinking premise 3 may be false.

First, the reasons behind premise 3 are flawed because they assume that the value in one's life when it includes a conscious personal relationship with God is fixed. The idea is that when AI and SL both include a conscious personal relationship with God, their value at that time can be considered equal simply *because* they both include a conscious personal relationship with God at that time. But this is not obviously the case. First, I will get a trivial point out of the way. The value in one's life plausibly fluctuates over time even when one has a conscious personal relationship with God. And so we can at least doubt the support for 3 given that, plausibly, SL might occasionally be greater at some

time T than AI merely by circumstance. This would not have to be due to any reason related to the times SL lacks conscious personal relationship with God – it would just be (more or less) by chance. But, if this is right, then this is technically enough to undermine the support for 3. To establish 3 we cannot simply assume that, at those times T when both SL and AI include a conscious personal relationship with God, SL and AI are equal at T *just because* they both include such relationship at T. That being said, if this were the only reason for doubting premise 3, it would not be that useful for my purposes. For it would take only a slight revision in the AGSG argument to take into account the fluctuating value of a conscious personal relationship with God. After all, plausibly AI is also at some times greater than SL when both include a conscious personal relationship with God, merely due to fluctuation in value.

But there *are* reasons for thinking that SL might occasionally be greater than AI *due to* the fact that SL sometimes lacks conscious personal relationship with God. Here is the idea. It might be that the value from G can be greater *later* if one lacks G *earlier*. We've seen this already with the goods discussed in chapter II. As I argued, it might be that temporary nonresistant nonbelief gives one a *unique* and *enhanced* appreciation of one's personal relationship with God, which in turn deepens that very relationship. In addition to one's enhanced appreciation, it's plausible that one's conscious personal relationship with God might be enhanced by the *effort* one puts into it. For some people, a temporary period of nonresistant nonbelief might later provide them with *extra motivation* to put more effort into their relationship with God. What both of these considerations suggest is that a temporary period of nonresistant nonbelief can lead to a time T in which one has a conscious personal relationship with God and the value in one's life *at* T is greater than it would have been if one had never been a nonresistant nonbeliever. But this entails that it is *false* that a life-set which always includes a conscious personal relationship

with God is, at all times T, at least as great at T as the value of a life-set which ever lacks a conscious personal relationship with God. On the contrary, there can be times when a life-set which sometimes lacks a conscious personal relationship with God is *greater* than one that never lacks such relationship. And so there is reason to think that premise 3 is false.

3.2.3 Against Premise 1

Now consider premise 1, which states that for every person P, P's life-value is guaranteed to be greater with life-set L than it would be with life-set K if L has "infinite" value and if, at all times T, the value of L-at-T is at least equal to the value of K-at-T, and at *some* times U, the value of L-at-U is greater than the value of K-at-U. While this might enjoy *prima facie* plausibility, what other reasons are there for thinking that it's true? If life-value is calculated purely by adding up all the value in one's life-set of goods, and if there is no value over and above the value "at a time", then premise 1 does indeed turn out to be true. That is, if one's life-value is purely determined by adding together all the value in each temporal slice of one's life, then it's true that the life-value of one life-set L will outweigh the life-value of another life-set K so long as, at every time T, L-at-T is at least equal to K-at-T, and at some times U, L-at-U is greater than K-at-U.

But it seems to me that calculating life-value is not this simple. It seems to me that some life-set K might bring about overall greater life-value than another life-set L even if, at all times T, L-at-T is at least as great as K-at-T, and, at some times U, L-at-U is greater than K-at-U. Consider an example. Tracy has just graduated from university and she has at least two choices about how to spend the next year. She has the opportunity to begin a highly fulfilling career, or to spend the year travelling the world. Suppose that *in that year* she would gain more value from beginning her career than by travelling – and in fact, this

will be true of every following year.²⁵⁹ However, she knows that she may not have another opportunity to spend as much time travelling in such a way once she has begun her career. And travelling is still certainly a valuable thing to do! So she decides to spend the year travelling. It seems to me that Tracy is not irrational to temporarily choose the lesser good. What I take to be the best explanation for this is that the *overall* value of Tracy's life could be greater with a year of travelling than having spent that year beginning her career – even though there is no single year where it would be the better option *for that year*.²⁶⁰

Consider next, Carl, who is deciding whether to look for a spouse or work on advancing his career before doing so. He does not anticipate that choosing to look for a spouse will result in financial instability for him and his spouse (he will earn sufficient money either way, and his spouse may very well have a high income), nevertheless he chooses to spend a few years single and focusing on his career before looking for love. But suppose that, were he to marry, the value he gains from marriage *in those years* would be greater than the value he gains *in those years* focusing on his career. Nevertheless, it does not strike me as *irrational* for Carl to decide to wait to marry. Again, if this is true, then the best explanation seems to be that the *overall* value of his life could be better having taken a few years to focus on his career.

These examples were chosen deliberately to show how even temporarily choosing *lower order* goods over higher order goods can be rational, and can even result in an overall greater life-value. It seems to me that a fulfilling career is a higher order good than

²⁵⁹ While plausibly travelling would be more “fun” than beginning her career, that is not enough on its own to entail that she would gain more *value* from travelling than from her career (even limiting the value from her career to the value *in that year* from her career). The security she would feel, the fulfillment she would gain, and the fact that she actually *does* enjoy her career more generally might plausibly outweigh – in that year – what she gains from travelling, even if she has more fun travelling.

²⁶⁰ It's important to be clear that I am *not* claiming that that her life would be better if she spent *every* year travelling rather than working on her career. This is plausibly not true, assuming that each year it would be better *in that year* for her to work on her career. But I do find it intuitive that her life may be overall greater if she *temporarily* chooses the lesser good.

travel, and a loving marriage is a higher order good than a fulfilling career. But nevertheless, given that one is not *permanently* foregoing the higher order good for the sake of the lower, one might rationally choose the lower temporarily.²⁶¹

It seems to me that the same sort of thing might be true with regards to a conscious personal relationship with God. So long as one is not *permanently* deprived of the possibility for a conscious personal relationship with God, it might actually be good that one is able to *temporarily* experience goods which are only made possible given nonresistant nonbelief. One's life-value might *overall* be better if it temporarily includes a period of time which is *at that time* less valuable than it might have otherwise been at that time.

And there is a reason for thinking this is perhaps even *more* plausible than the cases of Tracy and Carl. In Tracy and Carl's cases, their decision to temporarily choose the lesser good actually has an effect on how long they will be able to enjoy the greater good. Tracy's decision to forego her career in order to travel for a year ultimately means that she will have one fewer year to enjoy her career.²⁶² But this is not true regarding temporary nonresistant nonbelief. If one temporarily lacks a conscious personal relationship with God, but eventually comes to have a conscious personal relationship with God that lasts an eternity, one has the opportunity to make up for lost time. As the final verse of Amazing Grace goes: "when we've been there 10,000 years, bright shining as the sun, we've no less days to sing God's praise than when we first begun".

²⁶¹ If it is not obvious that a fulfilling career is a higher order good than travelling, or that a loving marriage is a higher order good than a fulfilling career, consider this example. It seems that many young people actually do choose to spend a few years – usually in their 20s – engaging in a "partying life-style" filled with very low-order goods. But many, and perhaps most, of these young people only spend a few years living this way before settling down to focus on either a career, a marriage/family, or both. Many of these people do not consider their choice to temporarily choose lower order goods as mistaken or irrational, and it is not obvious that they are. (This is also setting aside those individuals who indulge to such an excess that – for example – they risk doing permanent damage to their health or mental well-being).

²⁶² Assuming that choosing to travel does not somehow lengthen her life or extend the time before she has to retire.

If what I have suggested is correct, then this undermines the support for premise 1 of the AGSG argument, and plausibly gives us a reason for thinking it is false. Plausibly, it is not the case that, for every person P, P's life-value is guaranteed to be greater with life-set L than it would be with life-set K if L has "infinite" value and if, at all times T, the value of L-at-T is at least equal to the value of K-at-T, and at *some* times U, the value of L-at-U is greater than the value of K-at-U. Plausibly, there is a counterexample in the good of a conscious personal relationship with God *itself*, and the lower order goods which come from nonresistant nonbelief.

3.2.4 Against Premise 4

Premise 4 may initially seem to be the most plausible premise, but there may be reasons to think that it, also, may be false.²⁶³ The primary intuition behind this premise again compares the two ways one's life could go: either always including (AI) a conscious personal relationship with God, or sometimes lacking (SL) it. The assumption is that at all times T at which SL lacks a conscious personal relationship with God, AI's value at T will be greater than SL's value at T. This in turn assumes that, at all times T, a conscious personal relationship with God brings about more value for one than any other set of goods could. I will argue that these assumptions are mistaken, and there are reasons for thinking that a set which *lacks* a conscious personal relationship with God could, at some time T, bring about *more* value for one at T than a conscious personal relationship with God could at T.

²⁶³ If what I said above about the fluctuating nature of the value of a conscious personal relationship with God is correct, then premise 4 is probably true. However, as I noted, a simple revision to the AGSG argument might take fluctuation into account, and so premise 4 would be changed to something like the following: The value of a life-set which always includes conscious personal relationship with God is, at *some* times U, greater at U [*for reasons other than fluctuation*] than the value of a life-set which *ever* lacks a conscious personal relationship with God. This section addresses reasons why *this altered* premise is false. But for simplicity, I discuss it as though fluctuation is not a factor.

Recall the reasons discussed for thinking that a conscious personal relationship with God would at all times bring about more value for one than any other set of goods. The idea is that a conscious personal relationship with God is a *higher order* good – in fact the highest order – and there are no other goods of that order. Since higher order goods *trump* lower order goods, so that no amount of lower order goods could outweigh a higher order good, a conscious personal relationship with God trumps *all* other goods. Further, one might argue that a conscious personal relationship with God was of the highest order because it is only in *that context* that one has access to the beatific vision, which is the good for which humans were made. I will argue that a conscious personal relationship with God is *not* uniquely the highest order good.

First, I want to offer a reason for thinking that the beatific vision is no reason for thinking that a conscious personal relationship with God always trumps any other set of goods. Presumably, the beatific vision gives us good reason to think a conscious personal relationship with God *at all times* trumps (at that time) any other set of goods *only if* one can have the beatific vision *at all times* during a conscious personal relationship with God. If there is ever a time T when one might have a conscious personal relationship with God but cannot have the beatific vision, then the beatific vision cannot – on its own – give us a reason for thinking that a conscious personal relationship with God *at T* would trump any other set of goods at T.²⁶⁴

²⁶⁴ One might argue that not everyone's experience of the beatific vision will be the same. Various factors might influence the value one has by having the beatific vision. Having a conscious personal relationship with God (*before* one ever has the beatific vision) might increase the value one has *later* when one eventually has the beatific vision. Thus there may be a kind of *extrinsic* value one enjoys from conscious personal relationship with God even before one ever has the beatific vision. In response I note a couple things. First, when an earlier state E (at time T1) allows for a later good G (at T2), it is not obvious that G adds any value *at T1* – rather, the *extrinsic value* of E comes in the form of G, and only at T2. So it is not obvious that a later enhanced beatific vision (at T2) resulting from an earlier conscious personal relationship with God (at T1) adds any value *at T1*. Instead, that earlier conscious personal relationship with God adds value at T2. But even if *some* value is added at T1, surely it is not obviously so overwhelmingly great that the value it adds *at T1* could not be outweighed *at T1*. Second, as I argued above, there are *also* ways one's later conscious personal relationship with God can be enhanced due to *nonresistant nonbelief*. Plausibly if one is a temporary nonresistant nonbeliever one may be able to have *both* the benefit from

In order to demonstrate that the beatific vision *does not* give us a reason for thinking that a personal relationship with God would *at all times* trump any other set of goods at that time, it will *not* be enough to demonstrate that most (probably all) *actual* living humans who claim to have a conscious personal relationship with God do not have the beatific vision. We need, in addition, a reason for thinking that no one *can* always have the beatific vision within a conscious personal relationship with God.²⁶⁵ For if all actual living humans who claim to have such a relationship do not have the beatific vision, and there is no reason why they cannot (or perhaps *should* not) have the beatific vision, then the lack of an explanation for why they *do not* have the beatific vision calls into question God's existence in a way parallel to the hiddenness argument itself. If God wants to ensure our optimal well-being, and the beatific vision is *always* part of our optimal well-being, and God *can* ensure that we always have the beatific vision, then presumably we *would* always have the beatific vision if God existed; the fact that we do not, then, suggests that God does not exist.²⁶⁶ And so one must argue that there is a reason for thinking that no one *can* always have the beatific vision.²⁶⁷

It is worth noting that throughout *Christian tradition* it has been commonly held that one has access to the beatific vision only after one has died and gone to be with God – this even though one might have access to a conscious personal relationship with God

nonresistant nonbelief *as well as* the eventual benefit within the beatific vision that comes from having had a prior conscious personal relationship with God (for one might *first* be a nonresistant nonbeliever, and *then* enjoy a conscious personal relationship with God, and *then* experience the beatific vision). Although one who is *never* a nonresistant nonbeliever may enjoy this latter benefit *sooner*, such a person will *never* enjoy the former benefit.

²⁶⁵ Alternatively, one might argue that, while one *can* always have the beatific vision, it would not be *good* if one always had the beatific vision (or, it might be very *bad* if one did) and so one *should not* always have the beatific vision. One might argue, for example, that the beatific vision is incredibly valuable for those who are prepared to experience it (those who are sanctified and without sin), but it is incredibly bad (perhaps tortuous) to those who are not prepared to experience it (those who are not without sin).

²⁶⁶ Much more could plausibly be said both for and against an argument such as this, but I will pursue just one kind of response; I will suggest that there are reasons for thinking that we *cannot* always have the beatific vision.

²⁶⁷ Or that it is better if one does not always have the beatific vision.

before one has died. This would entail that there are times when one could not experience the beatific vision despite having a conscious personal relationship with God. But, apart from appeal to tradition, are there reasons for thinking that, if God exists, there might be times when one could not experience the beatific vision even within a conscious personal relationship with God? And is it plausible that these times might last as long as an earthly life? I suggest that there is potentially a *long* period of time at which the beatific vision is *not* open to one, even if one has a conscious personal relationship with God. Specifically, it is plausible that human sin bars one from experience of the beatific vision. While God could plausibly bring sinful humans into conscious relationship with Him, these relationships would necessarily lack the beatific vision as long as those humans remained sinful. Since God is perfectly holy, we cannot experience Him directly in our sin. And so creatures are unable to experience the beatific vision as long as they are sinful. It's very plausible that most, if not all, humans remain sinful up until their death, and so it's plausible that the beatific vision would be unavailable to most, if not all, humans during the entirety of our earthly lives – despite the fact that many humans may nevertheless enjoy a conscious personal relationship with God during that time.

If this is right, then the beatific vision on its own gives us no reason for thinking that a conscious personal relationship with God would, at all times T, trump a set of other goods at T. But one might nevertheless maintain that a conscious personal relationship with God would, at all times T, trump a set of other goods at T. Regardless of the beatific vision, one might argue that a conscious personal relationship with God *just is* uniquely the highest order good. I will argue that a conscious personal relationship with God is *not* uniquely the highest order good.

But why think that a conscious personal relationship with God is *not* uniquely the highest order good? What other goods might belong in the same order of goods as a

conscious personal relationship with God? I argue that, if they are possible, *nonconscious* personal relationships with God belong in the same order of goods as conscious personal relationships with God. In what follows, I argue first that there are good reasons to think that nonconscious personal relationships are possible. I then argue that, if that is so, they are in the same order of goods as conscious personal relationships with God. After that, I will argue that a set which includes a nonconscious personal relationship with God along with *other goods* could plausibly contribute more value to one's life at some time than a conscious personal relationship with God.

3.2.4.1 Is *Nonconscious* Personal Relationship with God Possible?

Several authors have suggested that it is possible for one to have a personal relationship, such as a friendship or a romantic relationship, without also having explicit belief that the other person in that relationship exists. Some authors have argued that one can relate personally to another person one has only a weak *de re* belief exists, but whom one has no strong *de dicto*²⁶⁸ belief exists.²⁶⁹ Others have argued that one can relate personally to another person whom one does not believe exists *at all*.²⁷⁰ Still others have argued that we can have a personal relationship with God even if we don't believe He exists, and even if we are not aware that we *might* be engaged in relationship with someone.²⁷¹ All of these might be termed "nonconscious" personal relationships with God. But are these sorts of

²⁶⁸ I discuss below what this might look like, but the idea is that meaningful personal relationships can happen between two persons (say, Smith and Jones) even when Smith can only identify Jones by some description (in the example below, "my anonymous benefactor") but does not know that *it is Jones* that is identified by that description. Thus Smith and Jones might have a meaningful personal relationship even though Smith has no *de dicto* belief that Jones exists.

²⁶⁹ Ted Poston and Trent Dougherty, "Divine Hiddenness and the Nature of Belief," *Religious Studies* 43(2) (2007) 183-196.

²⁷⁰ Andrew Cullison, "Two solutions to the Problem of Divine Hiddenness," *American Philosophical Quarterly* Vol. 47(2) (2010) 199-134.

²⁷¹ Terence Cuneo, "Another Look at Divine Hiddenness," *Religious Studies* 49 (2013) 151-164. See also: M Weidler and I. Aijaz, "Divine Hiddenness and Discrimination: A Philosophical Dilemma," *Sophia* 52(1) (2013) 95-114.

relationships with God actually possible? In what follows I briefly summarize the arguments and intuitions that such relationships are indeed possible, if God exists.

First, Trent Dougherty and Ted Poston argue that someone with neither a high degree of belief in God, nor even a *de dicto* belief in God, might have a meaningful personal relationship with God. They describe a case which, they argue, suggests that meaningful personal relationships (in general) can be enjoyed by two individuals with only *partial* belief in one another's existence. They describe two individuals, Jones and Smith, each in solitary confinement cells with a shared wall separating them. Neither Jones nor Smith knows that there is another person on the other side of the wall. But Jones begins to hear faint taps from the other side of the wall, and he taps back. He has a credence below full belief, though above disbelief – 0.5 – that there is another person in the next cell, and while he seems to be able to interpret the taps as messages, the signs are ambiguous and he knows he might be making things up. And yet the tapping back and forth continues. And it lifts Jones's spirits during his difficult time in solitary confinement. Sometime later, after Jones and Smith are both released from solitary confinement, they meet each other and realize what was going on. They both look back at their time spent tapping back and forth as a significant and foundational part of their relationship.²⁷²

This example is supposed to demonstrate that it is possible for one to have a meaningful personal relationship with someone that one does not have full belief exists. Poston and Dougherty also offer some reason for thinking that even whatever *partial* belief might be necessary for a meaningful personal relationship to be possible needs only to be *de re*, not *de dicto* belief. They describe a case in which an unknown benefactor deposits a large sum of money into your bank account. You express thanks to the benefactor, though you do not know who it is. Nevertheless, Poston and Dougherty suggest it is fair to say you

²⁷² Poston and Dougherty, 190-191.

have a meaningful relationship, especially if the benefactor can see your reaction, even though you only have *de re* belief in your benefactor. They then put together the above tapping case and the unknown benefactor case to argue that one can have a meaningful relationship with someone in whose existence one only has a partial, *de re* belief. They argue that if, in the unknown benefactor case, you do not know that there actually has been a benefactor – but you nevertheless express thanks just in case there is one – then, given that there *is* in fact a benefactor, you have a meaningful relationship with that person, especially if that person sees your expression of thanks.²⁷³

Another case of meaningful, nonconscious personal relationship without belief comes from Andrew Cullison. He argues that it is possible for one to have a meaningful personal relationship with someone one does not believe exists at all. He describes the case of Bob and Julie, two lonely and grieving individuals who begin having conversations with each other over the internet. They offer each other words of encouragement and comfort. Then Bob learns that there are highly sophisticated computer programs that can imitate human conversation to the point that other humans cannot tell the difference. With this knowledge, Bob begins to doubt that Julie actually exists; he even tells her he no longer believes she exists. Nevertheless, he holds out *hope* that she exists, and the slight chance that she does is enough for him to continue pursuing relationship with her. Eventually they meet, marry, and later reminisce fondly about the time in their relationship when Bob didn't even believe Julie existed.²⁷⁴ If Cullison is right that Bob and Julie had a meaningful personal relationship throughout this entire case, then it demonstrates that one *can* have a meaningful personal relationship with someone one does not believe exists. What replaces belief *in this case* seems to be hope.

²⁷³ Ibid 192-193.

²⁷⁴ Andrew Cullison (2010) 120.

While Poston and Dougherty argue that meaningful personal relationship is possible with just partial, *de re* belief, and Cullison argues that such relationship is possible *without* belief, in both cases the individuals in question are still conscious that there *might* be *some* individual to whom they are relating personally. Terence Cuneo goes further still. Cuneo argues that one can have a meaningful personal relationship with God without any awareness that one even *might* have such a relationship, or without awareness that a being such as God even *might* exist. He appeals to Matthew 25:34-40 in which Jesus addresses those on His right hand, telling them that they fed Him when He was hungry, gave Him something to drink when He was thirsty, clothed Him when He was naked, invited Him in when He was a stranger, and visited Him when He was sick and when He was in prison. When asked when they did these things, Jesus responds that what they did for others, they did for Him. Cuneo suggests that what Jesus means is that actions done for others can *count* as actions done for Jesus – and thus for God.²⁷⁵ He suggests that these actions are capable of forming the foundation of a meaningful relationship with God, even if one is not aware of God and does not realize that one's actions “count” as actions done for God. In return, these individuals are able to experience God through *God's creation*, though they do not realize that they are able to do so.

But why should we be able to say that divine-human relationships are possible even when humans are not aware that they *might be* relating in a personal way with God? Schellenberg does not find it plausible that personal relationships are possible in such cases, and he offers an analogy. He describes a mother who cares for her child in every way – except that she does not allow him to be consciously aware of her. Schellenberg suggests that, despite the fact that her “handiwork” and “signs of her love” are everywhere

²⁷⁵ Terence Cuneo, “Another Look at Divine Hiddenness,” *Religious Studies* 49 (2013) 151. See also chapter 3 of Cuneo's *Ritualized Faith* (Oxford University Press, 2016) 52-65.

for her child to experience and enjoy (she designed the home he lives in) and despite the fact that the child has the opportunity to love the mother's other children (which she may "count" as love for her) there is no meaningful personal relationship present. There is no union and no intimacy between the mother and this child.²⁷⁶ And so, he reasons, if such a relationship between mother and child does not constitute a meaningful and loving personal relationship, then neither would a relationship with God and a human of the sort Cuneo describes.

But what Schellenberg does not appreciate, which Cuneo tries to emphasize, is how profoundly *different* God is from other persons. Schellenberg attempts to draw an analogy between how God is related to His own creation and to His personal creatures, and how a mother relates to a house of her own design and to her other children. But no matter how far he tries to push the analogy, it is flawed because the mother just does not relate to her house and her other children in the same way – or to the same extent – that God relates to creation and other people.²⁷⁷ First, the way in which our love for others can count as love for God is much deeper than any sense in which one child's love for his mother's other children can count as love for her. It is common for theists to maintain that human persons are images of God, and so if we love other humans it is plausible to say that we thereby love God – especially if we love them for the qualities which make them images of God.²⁷⁸ But if it is appropriate *at all* to say that a child is an image of her mother, the sense in which that claim *might* be true will be weaker than the sense in which it is true that human persons are images of God, if God exists.

²⁷⁶ J.L. Schellenberg, "Reply to My Colleagues," *Religious Studies* 49(2) (2013) 266-267.

²⁷⁷ To Schellenberg's credit, Cuneo uses a similar analogy to demonstrate how an action done for one person can "count" as being done for others as well. But Cuneo does *not* suggest that such actions can form the basis of meaningful personal relationships between two finite persons. His example can help us understand to some extent how God can relate *personally* to us through His creation and His other creatures, but it cannot bring us all the way there.

²⁷⁸ Thanks to Brian Leftow for this point.

Second, God can be encountered in the world in a much more important and interesting way than the mother can be encountered through her house, regardless of the fact that she designed it. Some theists hold that something is (for example) beautiful or good *only insofar* as it reflects God's beauty and goodness. In fact, some say that God *is* beauty and goodness. For many theists, God is, at all moments, sustaining everything in existence. God is also viewed by most theists as, in some sense or another, omnipresent (after creation). Though theists disagree on some details, God's relation to creation, if He exists, is widely accepted by theists to be much closer than any person's relation to their creations.²⁷⁹ So God's relation to his creation *and* to other persons is much closer than any human's relation to her creations and children. This gives us good reason to think that we cannot conclude that meaningful relationships with God of the type Cuneo describes are not possible only on the basis that no analogy with human-human relationships exists.

Furthermore, while one might passively experience God through His creation, there are also ways God can *actively* engage with humans without them believing He exists, and without them having any awareness that they *might* be relating personally with someone. As an example I appeal to a passage from C.S. Lewis's novel, *The Horse and His Boy*. In the scene included below, the main character, Shasta, meets with the lion Aslan – a representation of Jesus²⁸⁰ in Lewis's world of Narnia – for the first time, and discovers how Aslan had already been present with him, and his companion Aravis, for quite some time. These are the words Aslan speaks to Shasta:

I was the lion who forced you to join with Aravis. I was the cat who comforted you among the houses of the dead. I was the lion who drove jackals from you as you slept. I was the lion who gave the Horses the new strength of fear for the last mile so that you should reach King Lune in time. And I was the lion you do not remember who pushed the boat in which you lay, a child near death, so that it came to shore where a man sat, wakeful at midnight, to receive you.²⁸¹

²⁷⁹ Human creations are really only reorganizations of God's creation, after all!

²⁸⁰ Or more precisely, a representation of the incarnate second person of the Trinity.

²⁸¹ C.S. Lewis, *The Horse and His Boy* (Original copyright 1954, Reprint, New York: HarperCollins, 2005) 185.

To Shasta's knowledge, these were all isolated and unrelated events. But we see how Aslan had been present with him and working in Shasta's life the whole time. And while some of the ways he worked may be more akin to an impersonal benefactor, he also worked in Shasta's life in ways characteristic of meaningful personal relationship. The most clear-cut example is that Aslan was the cat who *comforted* Shasta.

God (if He exists) has the ability to comfort us, encourage us, motivate us, make us feel loved, etc. He can do this *through* his creation, whether through other persons or impersonal creation. But He can also do this directly. He can simply make us feel comforted, encouraged, loved or motivated. And whether He acts through creation or directly, we can receive His comfort etc. without knowing that it's from God. While the mother from Schellenberg's analogy can indirectly comfort etc. her child through anonymous hidden notes, or through telling her other children to comfort him, she cannot do so directly the way God can without revealing her existence. Furthermore, if what I said above about God's close relationship to creation is correct, there's a sense in which even God's comforting etc. someone *indirectly* through personal or impersonal creation is more direct than *anything* the mother can do without revealing her existence. And while Schellenberg maintains that "union and intimacy" is a freeloading expression when applied to the mother and child in his analogy, there seems to me to be a *real* kind of union and intimacy with God when God comforts someone (etc.), even if one does not recognize that it is God.

If all this is right, then here is what one sort of meaningful personal relationship with God might look like. By loving other humans, protecting the vulnerable, taking care of the hungry, sick, homeless, and disadvantaged, we thereby love God. As with Poston and Dougherty's case above, we can also express (for example) gratitude, though we know

not to whom.²⁸² God, in turn, can relate to us by comforting us, encouraging us, motivating us, making us feel loved, etc. both directly and through impersonal and personal creation. We can also experience God's goodness, beauty, and creativity through creation. This, I suggest, leads to real union and intimacy with God. And all of this is possible without believing that God exists, or being aware that one might be relating to God (or anyone!) personally.

I suggest that this *can* constitute a meaningful personal relationship with God. And if I am right, it demonstrates that one can have a meaningful personal relationship with God without believing that God exists or even being aware that one might be relating to God personally. So with this, I have now proposed three different models for how meaningful personal relationships with God are possible without (full, *de dicto*) belief that God exists. Poston and Dougherty gave us reason to think that meaningful personal relationships are possible with merely partial, *de re* belief. Cullison gave us reason to think that meaningful personal relationships are possible without belief at all. And my augmented version of Cuneo's account gave us reason to think that meaningful personal relationships *with God* are possible without belief, and even without awareness that one might be relating personally with someone.

There may be some pushback in all of these cases to the idea that these really describe meaningful personal relationships. I hope that what I have argued will make the pushback less confident than it would have otherwise been, but, for my purposes, whether or not they are legitimate meaningful personal relationships or merely "quasi" personal relationships is not what is *most* important. What is most important is that these (perhaps quasi) relationships count as goods *of the same type* – that is, belonging to the same order

²⁸² For an example of nonbelievers giving thanks, seemingly to no one, look no further than the North American holiday of Thanksgiving.

of goods – as a conscious personal relationship with God. There are good reasons to think that they do. In all three cases, one has access to *experience* of God in some form.²⁸³ One can be comforted, encouraged, motivated (etc.) by God. One can experience the love of God. And one can in turn please God by helping those He loves. One can also express (for example) gratitude, either directly or indirectly to God in all three cases. In Cullison’s case, one can even directly address God, and when one feels comforted (etc.) one can acknowledge that comfort (etc.) as possibly coming from God.

But even if one grants that nonconscious personal relationships with God are of the same order as conscious personal relationships with God, one might argue that it does not matter. A conscious personal relationship with God is still better, one might argue, and so God would not withhold belief in his existence, and thus the possibility of a conscious personal relationship with God, even if belief is not required for other types of relationships with God. But that is not the point I am trying to make in this section.

This section disputes the support for premise 4 of the AGSG argument. Premise 4 states that the value of a life-set which always includes a conscious personal relationship with God is, at *some* times T, greater at T than the value of a life-set which *ever* lacks a conscious personal relationship with God. The primary support for premise 4 is that a life-set which always includes (AI) a conscious personal relationship with God is greater than a life-set which sometimes lacks (SL) a conscious personal relationship with God *at least at those times* when SL lacks a conscious personal relationship with God. And this is based on the assumption that, at any time T, a life-set which includes a conscious personal relationship with God at T is greater at T than a life-set which lacks a conscious personal relationship with God at T.

²⁸³ Not the beatific vision, but I argued above that one does not always have *that in conscious* personal relationships with God either.

But if what I argued in this section is correct, this assumption might plausibly be mistaken. I argue that, if a personal relationship with God is possible even if one does not believe that God exists, then SL might be greater than AI even when SL lacks a conscious personal relationship with God. So long as SL includes a nonconscious personal relationship with God of the sort proposed by Poston and Dougherty, Cullison, and Cuneo at those times T at which SL lacks a *conscious* personal relationship with God, then (I argue that) at T, SL might be greater than AI. I argue that even if a nonconscious personal relationship is not *itself* as valuable as a conscious personal relationship with God would have been at T, SL might nevertheless be greater than AI at T if SL includes *other goods*.

It may help to consider an example. Consider Aiden, whose life always includes a conscious personal relationship with God. However, at a certain time T1 his life includes almost no other significant goods *other than* a conscious personal relationship with God. He has no close friends, finds no meaning in his work, and neither does he have anything meaningful to do outside his work. Moreover, while he *has* a conscious personal relationship with God at T1, he does not have the beatific vision at T1. Eventually at T2 Aiden's situation changes for the better, but this is nevertheless the situation he finds himself in at T1. Now consider Sloan, whose life sometimes lacks a conscious personal relationship with God – in fact it is at T1 that he lacks such a relationship. But at T1 Sloan has several very close, positive relationships, finds plenty of meaning in his work, and spends much of his time outside work volunteering with the poor, which he also finds incredibly meaningful. Moreover, Sloan has a meaningful *nonconscious* personal relationship with God of the sort described above. Eventually, at T2, Sloan also enters into a conscious personal relationship with God.

Plausibly, the value of Sloan's life-set of goods *at T1* is greater than the value of Aiden's life-set of goods at T1.²⁸⁴ If this is so then, as I will argue, this is enough to undermine the support for premise 4 of the AGSG argument. Recall again that premise 4 states that the value of a life-set which always includes a conscious personal relationship with God is, at *some* times T, greater at T than the value of a life-set which *ever* lacks a conscious personal relationship with God. Again the primary support for premise 4 is that a life-set which always includes (AI) a conscious personal relationship with God is greater than a life-set which sometimes lacks (SL) a conscious personal relationship with God *at least at those times* when SL lacks a conscious personal relationship with God. The case of Aiden and Sloan serves as a counterexample, for there is a time (T1) at which the value of *Sloan's* life-set is greater than the value of *Aiden's* life-set (at T1), even though Aiden's life-set includes a conscious personal relationship with God at T1 while Sloan's life-set *does not* include a conscious personal relationship with God at T1.

It should be noted that nothing about Aiden's situation at T1 was *necessitated* by his conscious personal relationship with God. That is, the goods *Sloan* experiences at T1 do not strictly *preclude* a conscious personal relationship with God.²⁸⁵ But this nevertheless demonstrates a counterexample to the support for premise 4, which simply stated that AI is greater than SL at those times T when SL lacks a conscious personal relationship with God. The fact that SL is greater at T than AI in the case of Sloan and

²⁸⁴ One might object that the main intuition behind thinking Sloan's situation is better than Aiden's at T1 is that Aiden's life at T1 is no fun – that it is *experientially* lesser; but nevertheless (such an objection might run) what Aiden has at T1 is *objectively* better than what Sloan has. But I respond that it is important to remember that what Sloan has is not just more fun than what Aiden has; Sloan enjoys *truly* deep and meaningful friendships and he participates in truly deep and meaningful work, in both his professional life and his free time. Moreover Sloan *does* have a meaningful personal relationship with God, albeit nonconscious. So while Sloan at T1 very likely *is* experientially better off than Aiden, he *also* seems to have a very objectively valuable life at T1, and much of what is objectively valuable in his life at T1 is missing from Aiden's life at T1.

²⁸⁵ Though Travis Dumsday argues that part of the reason God does not make His existence obvious to everyone is that, in doing so, He might disrupt our meaningful personal relationships *with other people*. For details, see his "Divine Hiddenness and Alienation," *Heythrop Journal* 59(3) (2018) 433-447.

Aiden is enough to provide the counterexample; one does not need to demonstrate that SL *had to be* greater at T than AI. If the above is true, then the support for premise 4 is undermined.

3.2.5 The failure of the “Always as Good, Sometimes Greater” Argument

If what I argued above is correct, then there are good reasons to think that three of the premises of the AGSG argument are either unsupported or false. I argued that premise 1 is plausibly false. It is plausibly false that, for every person P, P’s life-value is guaranteed to be greater with life-set L than it would be with life-set K if L has “infinite” value and if, at all times T, the value of L-at-T is at least equal to the value of K-at-T, and at *some* times U, the value of L-at-U is greater than the value of K-at-U. This, I argued, is because overall life-value is *not* determined just by adding up the value of one’s life-set of goods at all times T. It is rational to choose at least temporarily, lesser goods, and the best explanation of this is that temporarily choosing lesser goods can make one’s overall life-value greater.

I argued that premise 3 is false. It is false that the value of a life-set which always includes a conscious personal relationship with God is, at all times T, at least as great at T as the value of a life-set which *ever* lacks a conscious personal relationship with God. This is because certain goods which *require* nonresistant nonbelief (and which therefore require at least a temporary period without a conscious personal relationship with God) serve to enhance one’s *later* relationship. And therefore there are times at which a life which sometimes lacks a conscious personal relationship with God is greater than a life which never lacks a conscious personal relationship with God.²⁸⁶

²⁸⁶ Again, *at that time*, not necessarily overall.

Finally, I argued that the support for premise 4 can be undermined. Premise 4 states that the value of a life-set which always includes (AI) a conscious personal relationship with God is, at *some* times T, greater at T than the value of a life-set which *at some time* lacks (SL) a conscious personal relationship with God. The primary support for this premise is that AI is greater than SL *at those times* at which SL lacks conscious personal relationship with God. I argued, if nonconscious personal relationship with God is possible then the value of a nonconscious personal relationship, along with other goods from nonresistant nonbelief, can outweigh (at least for a time) the value of conscious personal relationship with God at that time.

If all this is correct, then the “always as good, sometimes greater” argument is not only unsound, but is *resoundingly* unsound. Most of its premises have been demonstrated to be either false, or unsupported. And therefore we are again left with no reason to accept SPT, and therefore no reason to think that greater goods responses to the hiddenness argument must fail in principle. In the next section I will discuss a positive reason for thinking that SPT is false, and that greater goods responses *do not*, in fact, fail in principle.

4 Why SPT is false

Although we are left at this point without any support for SPT, do we have any reason for thinking that it’s false? I will suggest that the above considerations about the AGSG argument also give us some reason for rejecting SPT. That is, they give us some reason for thinking it’s false that, for every person P, P’s life-value is greater if P’s life-set of goods *always* includes a conscious personal relationship with God than if P’s life-set of goods *ever* lacks a conscious personal relationship with God.

One point to note before going forward is that, for the purposes of defending the *strategy* of offering greater goods responses to the hiddenness argument, one must only

demonstrate that there is a lack of support for SPT, and there is *some* reason to doubt SPT. The whole point of SPT and the problem of no greater goods is to provide a reason for thinking that *all* greater goods responses must fail in principle, and so we can dismiss some particular greater goods response *just because* it is a greater goods response; we do not have to address the specifics of the response. But if SPT lacks support, and there are some reasons in favour of rejecting it (even if they are not conclusive), then we should at least take greater goods responses seriously; they might provide counterexamples to SPT! If SPT lacks support (as I have argued) and there are reasons for rejecting SPT, then we cannot simply wave away greater goods responses in principle. The purpose of this section is to *at least* provide enough doubt in SPT that we cannot wave away greater goods responses in principle.

Another point to make is that SPT is false if *any* set of goods gives us a reason for thinking that one's life-value could be greater if one temporarily lacked a conscious personal relationship with God than if one always had such relationship. This set of goods *does not* have to also meet the optimal means condition to demonstrate SPT false. Consider again the two broad ways one's life could go: always including (AI) a conscious personal relationship with God and sometimes lacking (SL) a conscious personal relationship with God. If one can identify *any* SL which has an overall greater value than *any* AI, then SPT is false. In order to demonstrate that SPT is false, it does not matter if the set of goods G which makes some SL greater than some AI meet the optimal means condition. Demonstrating *this* of G would do more than show that SPT is false; it would plausibly demonstrate that the hiddenness argument is unsound. But SPT concerns only the outweighing goods condition. And so we can reject SPT just if there is some SL that is greater than some AI.

It seems to me that the considerations of the previous sections give us *plenty* of room to doubt SPT. Consider again Aiden and Sloan; Aiden has a conscious personal relationship with God at time T1, but virtually no other meaningful goods. Sloan, in contrast, has a *nonconscious* personal relationship with God at T1 and *many* other meaningful goods. Sloan has a fulfilling career, spends much of his free time engaging in meaningful volunteer work, and he has several very close and positive personal relationships with other people. Sloan eventually enters a conscious personal relationship with God at T2 which lasts into eternity. It seems very plausible to me already that Sloan's overall life-value might be greater than Aiden's, even though Sloan temporarily lacks a conscious personal relationship with God.²⁸⁷ But consider as well that Sloan's later personal relationship with God might be *enhanced* by his time as a nonresistant nonbeliever, as I argued above. Moreover, recall the analogy of Tracy who's life benefited from spending a year travelling even though it was the lesser good *for that time*, and even though there was no particular future time that directly benefited from it; her overall life-value was simply greater for having spent a year travelling. If something like this is possible with temporary nonresistant nonbelief (and the goods which come from that) then this gives even more reason for thinking that plausibly Sloan's overall life-value might be greater than Aiden's.

And so, if Sloan's overall life-value might plausibly be greater than Aiden's, this demonstrates that SPT is plausibly false. One's life-value *might* be greater if one temporarily lacks a conscious personal relationship with God than if one always has such relationship. This gives us reason for thinking that the problem of no greater goods *does not* demonstrate that greater goods responses must fail *in principle*. I want to emphasize again that I have *not* argued that there is some set of goods which meets *both* the

²⁸⁷ Though, remember, he has a *nonconscious* personal relationship with God.

outweighing goods and optimal means conditions; to do so would plausibly constitute a demonstration that the hiddenness argument is unsound. In order to demonstrate that the problem of no greater goods does not create an *in principle* problem for greater goods responses one must only argue that, plausibly, the outweighing goods condition can be met. I suggest that the case of Aiden and Sloan gives us reason for thinking that the outweighing goods condition *can* be met.

5 Eschatological Concerns

One final set of concerns one might have regarding my treatment of the problem of no greater goods regards whether, and how, what I have said would affect which eschatological views are available to one. Consider, for example, how my account uses the distinction between temporary and permanent nonresistant nonbelief. Does this mean that my account can only be adopted by those willing to say that God would ensure that all capable creatures would, eventually, enter into conscious personal relationship with Him? To put it another way: does my account commit one to universalism? If it does not, does it commit one to *anything* eschatological? I do not think my account commits one to universalism, though it may commit one to saying *certain* things about eschatology. In this section, I first offer reasons for thinking it does not commit one to universalism, and then I discuss what it *may* commit one to.

There is a fairly simple reason for thinking that my account does not commit one to universalism; there are plausibly, in addition to nonresistant nonbelievers, *resistant* nonbelievers. If these resistant nonbelievers are *ultimately* resistant, then one could argue that they will never enter into meaningful conscious personal relationship with God. I do not intend this as a refutation of universalism itself – that is well beyond the scope of my project. But it does seem to suggest that my account does not *commit* one to universalism.

What I mean by this is that, if (for example) conditional immortality (ie. annihilationism) and eternal conscious punishment *are coherent positions at all*, then these positions will be available to those who adopt my account.²⁸⁸

But there may be *some* details about eschatology that one must commit oneself to in order to accept my account. My view, if successful, only establishes that God would allow *temporary* nonresistant nonbelief, not permanent nonresistant nonbelief. If God allows temporary nonresistant nonbelief for the sake of greater goods which enhance one's later conscious personal relationship with Him, it seems like they eventually must have *access* to a conscious personal relationship with Him. And so one might assume that my account commits one to the view that all nonresistant nonbelievers must ultimately be saved – even if *resistant* nonbelievers will not necessarily be saved. But there are reasons for thinking that my account *might not* commit one to the view that all nonresistant nonbelievers must ultimately be saved. Nonresistant nonbelievers, after God reveals Himself to them, will then *either* become believers or resistant nonbelievers. If they become believers, they may still accept or reject God. One might accept my account but hold that those who ultimately become resistant nonbelievers (or believe but reject God) are not saved.

My account *does* seem to commit one to the view that nonresistant nonbelievers cannot be condemned *due to their nonresistant nonbelief*. God must reveal Himself to everyone at some point. So if people do in fact die as nonresistant nonbelievers, then my account commits one to the view that humans have a chance to be saved after death. But one might *supplement* my view to avoid this commitment. One might argue that no one dies a nonresistant nonbeliever. And everyone has a sufficient chance *before* death and either comes to believe or dies rejecting God. I offer no such argument and point this out

²⁸⁸ And if they are not coherent then they are not available to one whether or not one adopts my account!

only to suggest a way one might *try* to supplement my account to accommodate a more diverse range of eschatological views.

6 Conclusion

In this chapter I addressed the problem of no greater goods. Proponents of this problem want to demonstrate that greater goods responses cannot *in principle* provide a reason for thinking the hiddenness argument fails, since the outweighing goods condition in chapter II can never be met. I addressed the “strong problem thesis” (SPT), which states that a life which *always* includes a conscious personal relationship with God would be greater than a life which *ever* lacked such a relationship. I addressed two arguments in support of SPT and argued that they fail to establish SPT. Ultimately I argued that, given the possibility of nonconscious personal relationships with God, SPT is plausibly false. Thus, the problem of no greater goods does not give us a reason for thinking that greater goods responses must fail *in principle*.

Chapter VI The Accommodation Strategy

1 Introduction

I determined in chapter II that there are two necessary conditions which must be met for any greater goods response to demonstrate that God might have a reason to allow nonresistant nonbelief, and thus demonstrate that Schellenberg's hiddenness argument is unsound. I called these necessary conditions the outweighing goods and optimal means conditions. Given that there are two necessary conditions which must be met, it follows that there are at least two ways a proposed greater goods response can fail. First, it will fail if the good or set of goods proposed does not outweigh the value lost because of nonresistant nonbelief. Second, it will fail if the good or set of goods can be brought about by a more optimal means than nonresistant nonbelief. The previous chapter discussed one of the greatest challenges to the possibility of greater goods responses: the problem of no greater goods. That problem argued that the outweighing goods condition could *never* be met. In this chapter I discuss a problem related to the *other* necessary condition: the optimal means condition. The problem I will discuss has been called "the accommodation strategy."

There are two different ways Schellenberg has employed the accommodation strategy. In cases of what I will call "particular accommodation", Schellenberg rejects that some particular proposed good or set of goods can adequately respond to the hiddenness argument, on the grounds that the good or set of goods proposed does not meet the optimal means condition. "General accommodation", on the other hand, is a challenge on the scale of the problem of no greater goods. A general accommodation strategy attempts to demonstrate that *no goods* can meet the optimal means condition. If this is true, then

greater goods responses cannot succeed *in principle*, since one of the necessary conditions of the success of greater goods responses cannot be met.

This chapter will be split into two parts. In the first part I will discuss particular uses of the accommodation strategy. These, I will argue, must be dealt with on a case-by-case basis. In the second part I will discuss the general accommodation strategy. I will argue that Schellenberg's arguments for general accommodation fail to establish that the optimal means condition can never be met, and therefore they fail to undermine greater goods responses in general.

2 Some Preliminary Issues

Accommodation strategies aim to demonstrate of some good or set of goods G that G does not meet the optimal means condition. Recall that condition here:

Optimal Means: God would be justified in allowing some person P to be a nonresistant nonbeliever for the sake of some good or set of goods G *only if* (a) G cannot obtain unless God allows P to be a nonresistant nonbeliever, or (b) the only other ways G might obtain require God to allow for something worse than P's nonresistant nonbelief, or (c) the value of G itself is *greater* given P's nonresistant nonbelief than without it.

If some good G meets the optimal means condition – that is, if either (a), (b), or (c) is true of G – then G can be said to “optimally require” nonresistant nonbelief. If G fails to meet the optimal means condition, then G is “optimally possible” without nonresistant nonbelief. In what I will define below as *standard* cases of the accommodation strategy, one argues that some proposed good or set of goods G *does not* optimally require nonresistant nonbelief. One argues that G is *optimally possible* without nonresistant nonbelief.

We might expect *any* use of the accommodation strategy – particular or general – to demonstrate that some good or set²⁸⁹ of goods G does not optimally require nonresistant nonbelief. But in practice Schellenberg does not always even seem to *aim* to demonstrate this. Quite often he argues instead that, while some particular good G *cannot* be brought about within a conscious personal relationship with God (relationship incompatible), there is a similar enough good G* which *is* possible within a conscious personal relationship with God (relationship compatible).²⁹⁰ This, he concludes, is enough to demonstrate that God would not remain hidden for the sake of bringing about G, since God would be content with the similar-enough G*. But what makes a good “similar enough” according to Schellenberg? He suggests that some good G* is *similar enough* to G if the “primary concern” of G* is the same as the primary concern of G.

There are a couple ways we might read this. First it might be that G and G* are similar enough if *all* that God finds valuable in G can also be found in G*. If it is really true that there is *nothing* valuable (or of concern to God) in G that cannot also be found in G*, then it seems to me that G and G* are just different ways the *very same good* can be instantiated. If this is what Schellenberg means by “similar enough”, then when he provides some good G* that is “similar enough” to G, but which does not optimally require nonresistant nonbelief, he has really demonstrated that G and G* are actually *not* different goods (just different ways the same good can be instantiated) and that therefore the *real* good, of which G is an instantiation, *does not* optimally require nonresistant nonbelief. So if this first way of understanding “similar enough” is correct, then Schellenberg *standardly* accommodates G by identifying G*. That is, Schellenberg

²⁸⁹ For general accommodation, a set which includes *all* goods.

²⁹⁰ See, for example, J.L. Schellenberg, “The Hiddenness Argument Revisited (II).” *Religious Studies* 41(3) (2005): 288.

demonstrates that the good of which G is an instantiation *does not* meet the optimal means condition.

But the second way we might read this focuses on Schellenberg's use of the word "primary". He says goods G and G* are similar enough if the *primary* concern of G can also be found in G*. But there might be *other* things about G that are valuable or of concern to God which *are not* also found in G*. If G and G* are related to each other in this way, then I will refer to them as being the same "good-type". They are not merely two different ways the same good can be instantiated. I find this the more likely reading, but if this *is* what Schellenberg means by "similar enough" then Schellenberg does not *standardly accommodate* G by identifying G*. That is, if there is something valuable or desirable to God in G that cannot be found in G* then Schellenberg does not demonstrate that G does not meet the optimal means condition by identifying G*. For recall that G meets the optimal means condition if G meets one of conditions (a), (b), or (c). Identifying G* does not change whether (a) G requires nonresistant nonbelief. And identifying G* does not change whether (b) G can only be brought about by something worse than nonresistant nonbelief. And finally identifying G* does not change whether (c) the value of G itself is *greater* given nonresistant nonbelief than without it. Nevertheless we might still think that G* poses *some* threat to including G as part of a greater goods response to the hiddenness argument; that threat just isn't standard accommodation. It must be a *second* strategy.

Let's call this second strategy (of demonstrating that a good G* of the same "good-type" as G exists, and G* does not optimally require nonresistant nonbelief) the "loose" accommodation strategy. If the loose accommodation strategy does not demonstrate of some good G that G fails to meet the optimal means condition, then what is the threat of loose accommodation against greater goods responses? I suggest that the primary threat of

loose accommodation to some good G is that, by identifying G*, we may have reason for thinking it less likely that G can meet the *outweighing goods* condition:

Outweighing Goods: God would be justified in allowing some person P to be a nonresistant nonbeliever *only if* there is some good (or set of goods) G the value of which outweigh the value lost because of P's nonresistant nonbelief combined with any other value lost because of G.

If what is *primarily* valuable in G can be found in G*, and if G* does not optimally require nonresistant nonbelief, then what is *primarily valuable* in G does not require nonresistant nonbelief. If this is the case then, by identifying G*, we realize that there is much less value from G that optimally requires nonresistant nonbelief than we originally might have thought, and that smaller amount of value will seem much less likely to outweigh the value lost because of nonresistant nonbelief.

And so cases of loose accommodation seem to make it less likely than we might have otherwise thought that some good or set of goods G can meet the outweighing goods condition. However, unlike standard accommodation, loose accommodation cannot demonstrate on *its own* that some good G has no role to play in a successful greater goods response to the hiddenness argument. Recall my preferred strategy of offering a “many goods” response to the hiddenness argument. On this strategy, it is the combined value of the *many* goods from nonresistant nonbelief which must meet the outweighing goods condition. So long as some good G meets the optimal means condition, then even if some (or most!) of its value can be brought about without nonresistant nonbelief, it can *still* have value to contribute to a many goods response. Though, admittedly, such a good will have less value to contribute than we might have otherwise thought. Nevertheless, goods which are only loosely accommodated can be incorporated into the many goods response.

There is a caveat to this. If some good G optimally requires nonresistant nonbelief, but there is a good G* of the same good-type as G which *does not* optimally require nonresistant nonbelief, and if G and G* are somehow incompatible with each other, then

it's plausible that G can contribute to the many goods response *only if* G is more valuable than G*. For if G is not more valuable than G*, then there is just as much, if not more, value from their *good-type* without nonresistant nonbelief. However, if G is more valuable than G*, or if G and G* are not incompatible, then G plausibly *can* contribute to a many goods response. In such a case, I will say that the *good-type* (of which G and G* are both members) optimally requires nonresistant nonbelief.²⁹¹

In light of my above discussion we have what I will call two *modes* of accommodation. Standard accommodation demonstrates that some good G is optimally possible within a personal relationship with God. Loose accommodation demonstrates of some good G that there is another good, G*, which is of the same good-type as G, and G* is optimally possible within a personal relationship with God, even if G itself is *not* optimally possible within a personal relationship with God. Both of these modes of accommodation can be used in cases of particular accommodation, and both can be used when offering a general accommodation strategy. Of some particular good G, one might try to show *either* that G is optimally possible within a personal relationship with God, *or* that there is a good of the same good-type as G, G*, such that G* is optimally possible within a personal relationship with God, *or* both. These two modes of accommodation also allow at least two kinds of *general* accommodation strategies. First, one might argue that *all* goods can be standardly accommodated. Second, one might argue that *all* goods can be either standardly or loosely accommodated.²⁹² With these considerations in mind, I move into my discussion of particular accommodation.

²⁹¹ Unless some *other* good G** of the same type exists, is incompatible with G, and is as valuable as or more valuable than G.

²⁹² It is not possible that *all* goods can *only* be loosely accommodated.

3 Particular Accommodation

Particular instances of the accommodation strategy are objections to *particular* goods that have been proposed as the reason, or part of the reason, why God might allow nonresistant nonbelief. As stated, standard cases of particular accommodation attempt to demonstrate that the proposed good does not meet the optimal means condition. Loose cases of particular accommodation attempt to demonstrate that there is a good G*, *of the same* good-type as the proposed good G, such that G* does not meet the optimal means condition, and consequently G seems less likely to meet the *outweighing goods* condition.

As an example of how each mode of accommodation can be applied in particular cases, recall Richard Swinburne's proposed good of *morally significant free will*. The idea is that too great an awareness of God would limit a person's ability to make morally significant choices, because awareness of the consequences for wrongdoing or rewards for doing right would make it too easy to choose to do the right thing. And so God might hide to allow us to make morally significant free choices. Schellenberg argues first that this good can be *standardly* accommodated.²⁹³ He points out that Swinburne's argument assumes that God would provide everyone with a *strong* awareness of His existence, but argues that God would only need to give us evidence sufficient to believe He exists, and that this level of awareness might plausibly be weak enough that we could still be confronted with difficult decisions. And so, the good of morally significant free will, argues Schellenberg, is straightforwardly possible within a personal relationship with God, and thus can be standardly accommodated.

But Schellenberg *also* argues that this good can be *loosely accommodated*.²⁹⁴ He argues that even *if* everyone had a strong awareness of God, and even if such an awareness

²⁹³ Schellenberg (1993) 122.

²⁹⁴ Schellenberg (2007) 214.

made it too easy to choose to do what is right, one may still choose to do what is right *for the right reasons*. It seems plausible that the good of the choice to do what is right for the right reasons is *not* the same good as the good Swinburne proposes. Instead Schellenberg proposes a *similar* good – perhaps of the same good-type – and so thus proposes that the good of morally significant free will can be *loosely* accommodated.

In what follows I will discuss these cases of particular accommodation as well as a few others. My aim is to briefly argue how a few goods might avoid the standard and loose accommodation strategies levelled at them by Schellenberg. If there are other problems besides accommodation with any of the goods those problems will not be addressed here, as there is no space to offer robust support for each of the goods, but only a brief defense against accommodation.

As one might expect, there is no general solution to all particular uses of the accommodation strategy, as some goods simply don't meet the optimal means condition. But part of the purpose of the following discussion will be to demonstrate a couple of general *strategies* to use and *considerations* to make when defending particular goods from accommodation. First I want to emphasize again that goods might be saved from accommodation to become part of a *many goods* response, even if they cannot be saved as stand-alone greater goods responses. So long as some good G meets *one* of the clauses in the optimal means condition, then G meets the optimal means condition. We need not demonstrate that G also meets the outweighing goods condition on its own. With the many goods response, only the set of many goods brought about by nonresistant nonbelief must meet the outweighing goods condition. If G meets the optimal means condition, then it can be incorporated into the many goods response.

Second, it is important to note that some goods G may be saved from accommodation just by demonstrating that they meet clause (c) of the optimal means

condition. It may be that G does not require nonresistant nonbelief, and so does not meet (a). It may be that the other means for bringing about G are no worse than nonresistant nonbelief, and so G does not meet (b). But G may nevertheless be *greater* given nonresistant nonbelief, and so long as this is the case G meets (c) and thus meets the optimal means condition. It does not have to be demonstrated that G is *so much* greater given nonresistant nonbelief than it is without it that “G-given-nonresistant-nonbelief” meets the outweighing goods condition on its own. So long as G is even slightly greater given nonresistant nonbelief, it can be incorporated into the many goods response.²⁹⁵

So, at least with standard accommodation, one can argue that G *itself* might be more valuable given nonresistant nonbelief than without. If G is more valuable given nonresistant nonbelief than without, then G can contribute to the many goods response. One may wonder how the value of a good can vary – and thus how G could be more valuable given nonresistant nonbelief than without. There are at least two ways. First, G could be *quantitatively greater* given nonresistant nonbelief. That is, it might be that G does not *require* nonresistant nonbelief, but nonresistant nonbelief allows there to be *more of G* than there would otherwise be. Second, G could be qualitatively greater given nonresistant nonbelief. How G’s *quality* might vary may be more difficult to understand in the abstract, but hopefully how this might be will be understood in my discussion of the particular goods below.²⁹⁶ If G is somehow more valuable given nonresistant nonbelief, then it may be incorporated into the many goods response. Remember, with the many goods response only the *set* of goods needs to meet the outweighing goods condition.

Similarly, one might reply to attempts at *loose* accommodation by arguing that the *good-type* (of which G and G* are both members) is greater given nonresistant nonbelief

²⁹⁵ Of course, if G is *much* greater given nonresistant nonbelief it will contribute much more to the many goods response than if G is only slightly greater given nonresistant nonbelief. So it is desirable for the greater goods responder to demonstrate that G is *much* greater given nonresistant nonbelief.

²⁹⁶ See especially the final particular good I discuss in section 3.4.

than without it. If a critic argues of G that the similar good G* exists and does not require nonresistant nonbelief, there are a couple ways one might respond. First, the proponent of G can simply reply that G is greater than G*. And since G optimally requires nonresistant nonbelief, G may contribute to a many goods response to the hiddenness argument, even if it is not (on its own) greater than the combination of G* and the value lost due to hiddenness.²⁹⁷ But, second, even if G optimally requires nonresistant nonbelief while G* is optimally possible without nonresistant nonbelief, G and G* are not necessarily incompatible with *each other*. In these cases G itself does not necessarily need to be more valuable than G* to show that it can contribute to a many goods response; the good-type (which includes both G and G*) will be greater given nonresistant nonbelief, and so the good-type can contribute to a many goods response. When this is the case, you might say that the *good-type* optimally requires nonresistant nonbelief.

With these considerations in mind, I turn to address a few cases of particular accommodation.

3.1 Morally Significant Free Will

I will offer a few points of reply to both the standard and loose attempts at accommodating this good by Schellenberg. I'll begin by addressing Schellenberg's standard accommodation, in which he argues (contra Swinburne) that God would only need to provide creatures with *evidence sufficient for belief* in His existence, rather than strong evidence of God's existence. Evidence sufficient for belief, argues Schellenberg, would not be strong enough to seriously impede our opportunities for morally significant free choice. I will present two points of response to Schellenberg's argument. First I will argue that it might take *more* evidence than Schellenberg admits for everyone to have evidence

²⁹⁷ That is, even if it does not meet the outweighing goods condition

sufficient to believe that God exists. And second, I argue that it does not take *as strong* an awareness of God as Schellenberg admits for our will to be affected. Together these points demonstrate that it is more likely than Schellenberg admits that evidence sufficient for belief *itself* would affect our ability to make morally significant free choices. While this does not *entail* that morally significant free choice *requires* nonresistant nonbelief, it does make it more plausible that nonresistant nonbelief would allow for *more* opportunities for morally significant free choice. And therefore, this good is *greater* given nonresistant nonbelief than without it.

So, first, there is some reason to think that “evidence sufficient for belief” would require a stronger awareness of God than Schellenberg seems to imply in his response to this good. Schellenberg’s response makes it seem as though there would be room for some doubt about God in the moment of decision – never dropping below belief, but enough that there would be room for one to have a serious opportunity to exercise morally significant free will. But it’s plausible that “evidence sufficient for belief” would actually, in some cases, require a relatively strong awareness of God.

Consider an argument by Jake O’Connell that more evidence would not necessarily lead to considerably more belief.²⁹⁸ O’Connell points to several cases in which individuals were confronted with what *they* believed to be miracles, but nevertheless did not come to believe that God exists.²⁹⁹ As an analogy, he also points to the invention of the airplane. When the Wright brothers first publicly demonstrated flight, even after several demonstrations over the course of 5 years, eyewitness statements and photographic evidence were not enough to convince a large number of people – including both the scientific community and the newspapers – that they had achieved heavier-than-air

²⁹⁸ Jake O’Connell, “Divine Hiddenness: Would More Miracles Solve the Problem?” *Heythrop Journal* 54 (2013) 261-267.

²⁹⁹ *Ibid* 263.

flight.³⁰⁰ In both these above cases, there was what outside, neutral observers might have assumed should be “evidence sufficient for belief”. Nevertheless, this did not turn out to be enough to bring certain people to belief. And, at least in the case of flight, these were not conspiracy theorists, but members of the scientific community and the mainstream press. This seems to indicate that some people – perhaps many – actually require a fairly significant amount of evidence in order to believe.³⁰¹

Second, there is some evidence from cognitive science of religion that considerations about God *do* influence us to do what is right – and it actually takes much less than a “strong awareness” to see these effects. Helen de Cruz summarizes a few studies that suggest that people who are “religiously primed” tend to choose to do what is morally right more frequently than those who are *not* religiously primed.³⁰² One notable finding is that there is a “Sunday effect”; there is an increase in pro-social behaviour in religious believers on Sunday.³⁰³ “Sunday effects are more pronounced in regular churchgoers,” de Cruz writes, “indicating it may be the increased salience of God that induces prosociality.”³⁰⁴ She cites a few more studies such as this from cognitive science of religion which suggest that one’s awareness of God influences one’s moral decision-making. One thing to note is that these cases do not involve what one would call a *strong* awareness of God. Simply priming participants in studies with religious words such as “divine” or “spirit” tended to lead to increased charitable donation and decreased

³⁰⁰ Ibid.

³⁰¹ For another argument toward this same conclusion, see M. Andrews, “Divine Hiddenness and Affective Forecasting,” *Res Cogitans* 5(1) (2014) 102-110.

³⁰² Helen de Cruz, “Divine Hiddenness and the Cognitive Science of Religion,” in Eleonore Stump and Adam Green (Eds.), *Hidden Divinity and Religious Beliefs: New Perspective* (Cambridge University Press, 2016) 53-68.

³⁰³ Ibid 59.

³⁰⁴ Ibid.

cheating.³⁰⁵ This makes it somewhat more plausible that God's hiddenness *does* allow more opportunities for people to genuinely exercise their will.

The two points together provide some reason to doubt in Schellenberg's use of the accommodation strategy against the good of morally significant free will. The first point suggests that *more* evidence is needed for some people to come to believe than Schellenberg admits. And the second point suggests that *less awareness* is necessary to influence people to choose right than Schellenberg admits. The result is that it may be plausible that if God gave *everyone* evidence sufficient to believe that He exists, it would diminish the number of opportunities for creatures to have morally significant free choices, and to exercise their will. Plausibly it wouldn't *eliminate* all opportunities to exercise morally significant free will. But it does make it seem more likely that morally significant free will is a good which is *more valuable* given nonresistant nonbelief in the quantitative sense; nonresistant nonbelief simply allows for more of this good. And if this is the case, it meets the optimal means condition's clause (c), and can be incorporated into the many goods response.³⁰⁶

But what about Schellenberg's *loose* accommodation of the good of morally significant free will? He argues that humans would still be able to exercise their will, but instead of choosing between right and wrong they would have the choice between doing right for the right reasons or for the wrong reasons. This also seems like a case in which

³⁰⁵ Ibid.

³⁰⁶ Schellenberg might reply, as he often does, that these "cognitive science" explanations have no weight against his argument, since they assume that (if God existed) God would create *humans*. But Schellenberg might argue that this is just one more reason for thinking that God would *not* create humans. It would take too much space to argue that God *would* create humans, if He existed. But I will say a bit about why God *might* create humans. Plausibly, God might create some creature C if: C's existence would make the world better on the whole and things would not be *too bad* for C overall. It seems plausible to me that so long as both those two conjuncts are true of humans, then God might create humans. Plausibly humans *do* make the world better on the whole. To say too much about the second conjunct would bring me deep into the problem of evil, and so I cannot deal with it properly here. But I do not think reflecting on (eg.) God's perfect love tells us much more about what God would *create* than this. What it *might* tell us is how God would behave towards the creatures He *does* create.

there is greater value from these goods given nonresistant nonbelief. If there is nonresistant nonbelief, creatures would have this secondary good of choosing right for either right or wrong reasons, but they would *also* have the good of making a serious choice between right and wrong. And so there is *more* of this good-type given nonresistant nonbelief. If this is right, then the good of morally significant free will contributes to the many goods response.

3.2 Serious Inquiry

The second good I will discuss is the good of serious inquiry into the question of God's existence, which I outlined in chapter II. The basic idea is that, if everyone always had evidence sufficient to believe that God exists, then there would be no opportunity to seriously weigh the evidence for and against God's existence and come to make our own judgements on the issue – either individually or in dialogue with others. The prospect of trying to seriously discuss whether or not God exists would be similar to attempting, in the actual world (at the present time), to seriously discuss whether Earth is round or flat.

Schellenberg grants that this *particular* good would not be possible without God hiding to some degree – and so it cannot be standardly accommodated. However he thinks it can be loosely accommodated. He notes that there would still be *other* significant pieces of knowledge about God into which we might seriously inquire. He argues that the knowledge of the proposition that God exists would not be the most significant piece of knowledge; rather “God exists” would be just one conjunct in a grand proposition which comprises the most significant piece of knowledge.³⁰⁷ Many of the conjuncts in this grand proposition would not only be significant to know, but might actually *depend* on first knowing that God exists. They might, for example, include facts about His nature and

³⁰⁷ Schellenberg (2007) 212.

personality. And so, while serious inquiry into *part* of this grand proposition might require God to remain hidden, serious inquiry into much of it actually requires God to reveal Himself.

In response to this use of the accommodation strategy I argue that there is greater good from the “serious inquiry” good-type given nonresistant nonbelief. Remember that nonresistant nonbelievers are not *permanently* denied the opportunity to discover these significant pieces of knowledge which depend first on the knowledge of God’s existence. If their nonresistant nonbelief is temporary, then they have the opportunity to eventually learn these facts *in addition* to the opportunity to learn about the fact of God’s existence. It also seems to me that Schellenberg downplays the actual significance of the question of God’s existence. While the questions about God’s *nature* have fueled much interesting debate and rigorous research, as evidenced by the long and continuing history of theological investigation, the question of God’s *existence* nevertheless stands out as one of the most significant. This is partly because the importance of that large body of theological research *hinges* on the answer to the question of whether God exists. Serious investigation into important questions is itself valuable and so the question of God’s existence, as particularly significant, is particularly valuable question to have the opportunity to investigate. For these reasons, there is simply more value from the serious inquiry good-type given nonresistant nonbelief than without nonresistant nonbelief. And so the good of serious inquiry can contribute to the many goods response.

3.3 Evangelism

Consider next the good of evangelism. It is good, so argues Swinburne and others, that believers have the opportunity to help others to come to know that God exists. Travis Dumsday elaborates on *why* it is correct to claim that the opportunity to help others to

come to know that God exists is a good thing and not, as some might suppose, akin to claiming that it is good that we have headaches so others can give us aspirin.³⁰⁸ Dumsday argues that the best friendships are the ones in which friends have opportunities to work *together* toward joint aims.³⁰⁹ While God could accomplish most, if not all, of His aims on His own,³¹⁰ it is good for our relationship with Him that we participate with Him in His aims.

One might attempt to offer a loose accommodation of this good in a way that parallels the previous good. While the specific opportunity to help others to come to know that God exists *does* require that some people are ignorant of God,³¹¹ God could instead give people the opportunity to teach others a great variety of things about God – even when there is no nonresistant nonbelief about the mere fact of God’s existence. But we can respond to this attempt at loose accommodation in a way that parallels the previous good. In a world with nonresistant nonbelief, the opportunity to help others to come to know that God exists could be available *along with* opportunities to teach people *other* things about God too. In a world without nonresistant nonbelief, only the latter goods are available. And so there is a greater quantity of this good-type given nonresistant nonbelief. And, as with the good of serious inquiry, there is good reason to think that the fact of God’s existence would be a *particularly* valuable piece of knowledge to have the responsibility for teaching

³⁰⁸ Credit for this example goes to Brian Leftow. I actually do not think it is that crazy to claim that (part of) the good from headaches is that it gives humans the opportunity to help each other by (for example) giving each other aspirin – and more significantly it gave humans in general the opportunity to use our problem-solving skills to *develop* pain-killers such as aspirin. Helping people and problem-solving are both legitimately good things. It might be crazy to claim that the *only* reason we have headaches is so that people can give us pain-killers. But that doesn’t mean it isn’t legitimately good that they did.

³⁰⁹ Travis Dumsday, “Divine Hiddenness and the Responsibility Argument: Assessing Schellenberg’s Argument Against Theism,” *Philosophia Christi* 12(2) (2010) 363-364.

³¹⁰ If God allows free will, then it is possible that He *can’t* necessarily accomplish all His aims on His own.

³¹¹ Strictly speaking this good may not require *nonresistant* nonbelief. Resistant nonbelief may do instead. However, the nature of helping a resistant nonbeliever to come to know God will inevitably be different from helping a nonresistant nonbeliever. Plausibly, helping a nonresistant nonbeliever will be a less frustrating exercise. Further, as discussed in chapter II, it’s plausible that God might prefer nonresistant nonbelief over resistant nonbelief, as the former reduces moral culpability.

to others. As Travis Dumsday argues, “To use an analogy, the wedding guest who feels the most pride is often the one who first introduced the bride and groom.”³¹² If the analogy is appropriate then, while it may be a great responsibility and privilege to help someone to come to know God *more*, it is plausibly an even greater responsibility and privilege to be the one who *introduces* a person to God in the first place. If what I have discussed in this section is right, then there is reason for thinking that more value comes from this good-type given nonresistant nonbelief than without it, and therefore this good-type can contribute to the many goods response.

3.4 Increased Longing/Desire

Finally, consider the good of the increased desire for God which can come about due to God’s hiddenness, which may ultimately result in an enhanced personal relationship with God once that longing is fulfilled. Schellenberg thinks this good can be standardly accommodated. He argues that this good *does not* require God to keep evidence sufficient for belief from anyone. He imagines, instead, God withdrawing His presence from a believer *within* a personal relationship, so that one who once *experienced* God’s presence goes through a period of time without any such experiences.³¹³ This period without experience of God does not need to result in one losing one’s belief, Schellenberg maintains. He asserts that the longing which results from God withdrawing His presence from one who knows Him will be *greater* than the longing which may result from God withholding evidence sufficient for belief from one who never knew Him.

In a brief response to this, I will partly concede to Schellenberg; the good of increased longing *does not* require nonresistant nonbelief – and it may not even require

³¹² Dumsday (2010) 366.

³¹³ As discussed in J.L. Schellenberg, “On Not Unnecessarily Darkening the Glass: A Reply to Poston and Dougherty,” *Religious Studies* 43(2) (2007) 203. See also Schellenberg (2007) 217.

God to withdraw His presence. Talking about increased longing as a good which comes from hiddenness seems to imply that one might become apathetic about or bored with God. Plausibly this would not happen – and Schellenberg is right that if it *might* happen, God's withdrawn *presence* could be enough to bring us back to God. But, as I discussed in chapter II, I think there is an idea *behind* talk about this good that has for the most part gone unrecognized. I will call this idea the *enhanced appreciation* of God. When one longs for or desires something, a temporary period of unfulfillment changes the way one *appreciates* the object of one's desire once it is finally fulfilled. When one knows what it is like for God to be absent, one appreciates God's presence not just *more*, but in a different way. One *recognizes* in ways that one otherwise wouldn't the *difference* God's presence makes. This recognition is not just propositional, but experiential.

This appreciation of God is plausibly enhanced in a unique way by nonresistant nonbelief. One who God hides from *within* the context of a relationship – who never slips into nonbelief – may be able to appreciate God in light of the absence of God's presence. But only the nonresistant nonbeliever knows what it feels like to live in a world seemingly utterly absent of God. Nonresistant nonbelievers come closer than any others to knowing what the world would be like without God. And when they finally come to know God, they alone can attest to the difference not just God's presence makes, but the difference His existence makes. Specifically, it is plausible that the meaning and hope God brings to the universe is appreciated in a unique way by those who have lived without belief in God.

Schellenberg would be right to suggest that enhanced appreciation of God can be achieved without nonresistant nonbelief. It can be achieved through God withdrawing His presence, but it can *also* fairly clearly be achieved through coming to know God *more*! Nevertheless, it seems to me that this good is qualitatively greater given nonresistant nonbelief. One's appreciation of God is enhanced in many different ways, and each

different *way* of appreciating God enhances in a unique way one's *overall* appreciation of God. So one may appreciate God in light of Him withdrawing His presence, and in light of many other relationship-compatible events. But one can appreciate God in all these ways and *yet still* add the appreciation that comes from being a nonresistant nonbeliever to this. If this is the case then one's overall appreciation of God is qualitatively greater given a temporary period of nonresistant nonbelief than without it. And if this is the case, this good can be incorporated into the many goods response.

3.5 Interim Conclusion

I have argued that these particular attempts at both standard and loose accommodation ultimately fail to demonstrate that the above goods cannot constitute at least *part* of a greater goods response to the hiddenness argument. So long as the value from each kind of good (or good-type) is *greater* given nonresistant nonbelief than it would otherwise be, these goods count in favour of a many goods response to the hiddenness argument. This being said, I have *not* argued that these goods in fact constitute part of a *successful* many goods response to the hiddenness argument. I suspect that demonstrating *that*, if it is possible, would take many more papers offering complete defenses of these goods individually,³¹⁴ and it also might require the identification of more goods from nonresistant nonbelief. Still, the defense of these goods from the threat of accommodation is an important conclusion to make. And it should also be clear that, while particular cases of accommodation must be considered on a case-by-case basis, there are some common considerations to make when offering a reply.

³¹⁴ Each good may have its own unique problems which are beyond the scope of a piece discussing greater goods responses *in general*.

4 General Accommodation

While particular cases of accommodation must be addressed case-by-case, Schellenberg attempts to offer arguments from general accommodation which address *all* goods, even unknown goods and goods which have not yet been proposed. If Schellenberg's arguments from general accommodation are successful, then no greater goods response can demonstrate that the hiddenness argument is unsound. The idea here is parallel to the problem of no greater goods. The problem of no greater goods attempts to demonstrate that no good or set of goods could justify God in allowing nonresistant nonbelief because the outweighing goods condition can never be met. The standard general accommodation strategy attempts to demonstrate that no good or set of goods could justify God in allowing nonresistant nonbelief by arguing that the *optimal means* condition can never be met.

The *loose* general accommodation strategy is a bit more complicated. It argues that, even if some goods G meet the optimal means condition, for each G there is a good of the same good-type, G*, which does not meet the optimal means condition. This gives us a reason for thinking it is much less likely than we might have otherwise thought that *any* set of goods could meet the *outweighing goods* condition. For even if there is a large set of goods which optimally requires nonresistant nonbelief, for each good G in that set, there is a similar good, G*, which does not optimally require nonresistant nonbelief. But, as we will see below, loose general accommodation does not demonstrate that greater goods responses fail *in principle*, so long as there are good-types which optimally require nonresistant nonbelief.

4.1 The Infinite Resourcefulness Argument

Schellenberg has offered two arguments which we can consider attempts at general accommodation. The first is the “infinite resourcefulness argument”.³¹⁵ It can be formulated as follows:

1. God (if He exists) is infinitely resourceful.
2. If God is infinitely resourceful, then, for any good or set of goods G, God can *optimally* find a way to get G (or a good of the same kind as G) *without* allowing nonresistant nonbelief.

Therefore,

3. For any good or set of goods G, God (if He exists) can optimally find a way to get G (or a good of the same kind as G) without allowing nonresistant nonbelief.

As written, this argument is a *loose* version of an argument for general accommodation. It states that God’s infinite resourcefulness implies that, for all goods or sets of goods G, *either* G does not optimally require nonresistant nonbelief, or there is a similar good G* which does not optimally require nonresistant nonbelief. I will refer to the argument, as stated, as the “loose” infinite resourcefulness argument. But if the content within the parentheses in 2 (and the second set of parentheses in 3) is removed, the argument that remains I will call the “standard” infinite resourcefulness argument. The two arguments will vary in plausibility and, where relevant, I will discuss each version separately.

First I will discuss premise 1, which is the same in both the standard and loose infinite resourcefulness arguments. That God (if He exists) is infinitely resourceful should be uncontroversial, though there may be disagreements about the precise *meaning* of “infinitely resourceful”. Schellenberg does not offer his preferred definition of “infinite resourcefulness”. It is not clear, for example, whether God’s infinite resourcefulness is wholly entailed by or co-referential with His omnipotence – or perhaps wholly entailed by or co-referential with the conjunction of His omnipotence and omniscience. But however

³¹⁵ See, for example, Schellenberg (2007) 211.

we understand infinite resourcefulness, most should agree that no amount of resourcefulness would allow God to create a square circle, or an object with a surface that is completely green and completely red at the same time. If one's definition of "infinite resourcefulness" entails that it allows one to do what is logically impossible, then premise 1 is unacceptable. But premise 1 is plausible as long as "infinite resourcefulness" is at least constrained by the logically possible.

4.1.1 The Standard Argument

The standard version³¹⁶ of premise 2 (standard-2) states that God, if infinitely resourceful, can optimally bring about any good without allowing nonresistant nonbelief. If this were true, then this would indeed entail that greater goods responses to the hiddenness argument are impossible, as (together with premise 1) this entails the standard version of 3 (standard-3). If God could optimally bring about any good *or set of goods* without allowing nonresistant nonbelief, then clearly God would not allow nonresistant nonbelief for the sake of even many greater goods. Standard-3 states that even this set of many goods would not optimally require nonresistant nonbelief. And so defenders of greater goods responses must reject standard-2.

Fortunately, for the greater goods responder, standard-2 is plausibly false. There simply are certain goods which optimally *require* nonresistant nonbelief, and there is no clear reason God's infinite resourcefulness could change that. Take the good of evangelism. This good requires that there are people who do not believe in God – that there are nonbelievers. One might argue that these nonbelievers need not be nonresistant, but it seems plausible that nonresistance is the *optimal* way to bring about this good for at least two reasons. First, if all nonbelievers were resistant, this would frustrate the task of

³¹⁶ Again, the standard version of premise 2 omits the content within the parentheses.

evangelism, as attempts to teach resistant nonbelievers about God would often lead to resistance. Second, it seems that God would (or at least *might*) prefer nonbelief to be nonresistant, when possible, since the increase in resistant nonbelief also increases human culpability, and God would (or at least might) prefer to minimize human culpability.

And so there is at least one good which optimally requires nonresistant nonbelief, which demonstrates that the standard reading of premise 2 is false. Similar considerations could be made about the other goods discussed in this chapter, as well as in chapter II, but for the purposes of demonstrating that the standard infinite resourcefulness argument is unsound, it is enough to demonstrate that there is one counterexample to the standard reading of premise 2. And so I turn to discuss whether the *loose* version of the infinite resourcefulness argument succeeds in demonstrating that greater goods responses to the hiddenness argument fail in principle.

4.1.2 The Loose Argument

As discussed above, the first premise in the standard and loose infinite resourcefulness arguments is the same, and so again it is acceptable assuming it is constrained by logical possibility. And so again, the soundness of the argument comes down to premise 2. The loose version of premise 2 (loose-2) states that, for all goods G, an infinitely resourceful God can optimally bring about either G or a relevantly *similar* good G*. The conclusion of the loose argument (loose-3) differs from the standard argument in a parallel way. It states simply that, for all goods G, if God exists then He can optimally bring about either G or a similar good G*.

Loose-3 is the first problem with the loose infinite resourcefulness argument; it does not entail that the optimal means condition can never be met. This is to be expected, given that loose accommodation strategies *never* demonstrate that some good G *itself* fails

to meet the optimal means condition. Loose accommodation strategies all instead attempt to argue that the similar good G* would provide a sufficient substitute to G, and so God would opt for G* since G* does not optimally require nonresistant nonbelief. But this strategy will only demonstrate that the relevant greater goods response fails if the existence of G* gives us good reason for thinking that G does not meet the *outweighing goods* condition. And as I argued above, even this will not demonstrate that G has *no* role to play in a response to the hiddenness argument, given my proposed “many goods” response. In cases of particular accommodation, I have argued, goods such as G can be incorporated into the many goods response so long as they are either *more valuable* than G* or are *compatible* with G*.³¹⁷ So long as one of these is true, there is more value from G and G*’s *good-type* given nonresistant nonbelief than without it, and so that good-type can contribute to the many goods response.

But what does loose-3 imply about greater goods responses *in general*? Ultimately, it *does not* on its own entail that the outweighing goods condition cannot be met. For even if *every* good G admits of a relationship-compatible G* of the same good-type, it might be that G is always (or often enough) compatible with G*. Or it might be that G is always (or often enough) greater than G*. Given that the other challenges to meeting the outweighing goods condition were dealt with last chapter, this means that there may still be more good given some nonresistant nonbelief than given none. And so this discussion demonstrates that loose-3 *does not on its own* entail that either the outweighing goods condition or the optimal means condition cannot be met. More work would have to be done to demonstrate that loose-3 gives us a reason for thinking that either the outweighing goods condition or optimal means condition cannot be met. Therefore, more work would have to be done to

³¹⁷ If G and G* are compatible, then God can get *both* G and G* by allowing nonresistant nonbelief, while He can only get G* without doing so. While there likely will not be enough value from G on its own to justify nonresistant nonbelief, it can nevertheless be incorporated into the many goods response.

demonstrate that loose-3 gives us a reason for thinking that responses to the hiddenness argument must fail in principle.

But loose-3 might still make us think that it is *more likely* that the outweighing goods condition cannot be met than we might have otherwise thought. So let's look at the support for loose-3. Since I have already found premise 1 to be acceptable, I turn to loose-2:

2. If God is infinitely resourceful, then, for any good G, God can optimally find a way to get G (or a good of the same kind as G) *without* allowing nonresistant nonbelief.

I will argue that loose-2 is false since it admits of counterexamples. But first, I will argue that there is a lack of support for loose-2.

Schellenberg has offered very little to suggest that God's infinite resourcefulness alone really would allow Him to optimally bring about a good of the same good-type as any good G, without having to allow nonresistant nonbelief. He offers a couple of examples of God's resourcefulness. First, God can withdraw His presence without withholding knowledge of His existence. Second, we can identify some cases in which God *can* provide similar goods which do not require nonresistant nonbelief.³¹⁸ But it would be a hasty generalization to infer from these examples that God's resourcefulness allows Him to optimally bring about a good of the same good-type as *any* good G, without nonresistant nonbelief. Furthermore, Schellenberg does not actually argue that these examples describe the *optimal* way for God to bring about these good-types. It requires more of an argument to show that infinite resourcefulness itself entails that, for every good G, God can *optimally* bring about a good of the same good-type as G without nonresistant nonbelief.

³¹⁸ Schellenberg (2007) 210-211.

One might insist that an argument for loose-2 is not necessary, as it enjoys *prima facie* plausibility; it is the critic's job to *demonstrate* that loose-2 is false. But this is a weaker position than Schellenberg wants to be in. He tries to argue that all greater goods responses fail *in principle* due to this (loose) general accommodation.³¹⁹ And if that is the case, we should not even have to take greater goods responses seriously. But if loose-2 is only *prima facie* plausible, without additional support, then we should still take greater goods responses seriously; they might provide us with counterexamples to loose-2!

And I argue that there *are* counterexamples to loose-2. While Schellenberg has frequently applied the accommodation strategy to proposed greater goods, he has not applied it to all proposed greater goods. If even one proposed greater good cannot be accommodated, either in a loose or standard sense, then this will demonstrate that loose-2 is false. Furthermore, as I hope was evident in the first half of this chapter, Schellenberg often tries to simply demonstrate that some proposed good (or a good of the same good-type) can be brought about by nonresistant nonbelief, but he *does not* demonstrate that such goods (or goods of the same good-types) can be *optimally* brought about by nonresistant nonbelief. But if some good (or good-type) is *greater* given nonresistant nonbelief, then that good (or good-type) still *optimally requires* nonresistant nonbelief.³²⁰

As I hoped to show in the first half of this chapter, *many* of the goods and good-types Schellenberg attempts to either standardly or loosely accommodate *optimally require* nonresistant nonbelief, since a greater amount of value is possible from that good (or good-type) given nonresistant nonbelief. Take the good of morally significant free will, which Schellenberg attempts to demonstrate can be loosely accommodated. He suggests that even

³¹⁹ The language of "loose general accommodation" is mine, not Schellenberg's. But he nevertheless insists that greater goods arguments must fail *in principle* because of this problem.

³²⁰ Again, it does not have to also meet the outweighing goods condition *on its own*. So long as some good or good-type G is *greater* given nonresistant nonbelief, it can be incorporated into the many goods response.

if morally significant free will requires nonresistant nonbelief, God could still allow us to choose what is right for the right reasons or for the wrong reasons without allowing nonresistant nonbelief. But I argued that, given nonresistant nonbelief, there is *more* good from that good-type. We have the opportunity to choose right for the right or wrong reasons *and* the opportunity to choose between right and wrong. Consider again evangelism, which Schellenberg thinks can be accommodated by giving some creatures the responsibility of teaching others truths of God's *nature*, besides His existence. But given nonresistant nonbelief creatures can teach others about God's nature *and* His existence. Given that I offered some reason for thinking that teaching about God's existence would be particularly valuable, there is also more good from this good-type given nonresistant nonbelief. If I am right in both of these cases (and the others I discussed) then these example provide counterexamples to loose-2.

If what I have argued in this section is correct, then there is good reason to doubt the plausibility of loose-2. First, it lacks support. Given the lack of support for loose-2, there is a corresponding lack of support for loose-3, beyond *perhaps* prima facie plausibility. Second it admits of counterexamples. This draws into question the support for loose-3. And so the loose infinite resourcefulness argument does not pose much of a threat to greater goods responses. And since I argued above that the standard infinite resourcefulness argument *also* does not pose much of a threat to greater goods responses, we can conclude that the infinite resourcefulness argument in general does not pose much of a threat to greater goods responses to the hiddenness argument.

4.2 The “All Goods in God” Argument:

The second argument Schellenberg offers in defense of a general accommodation strategy

I will call the “All Goods in God” argument. It can be formulated as follows.³²¹

4. If God exists, all goods are (in some way) *in* God.
5. If all goods are in God, then no goods optimally preclude a conscious personal relationship with God (for anyone, for any amount of time).

Therefore,

6. If God exists, then no goods optimally preclude a conscious personal relationship with God (for anyone, for any amount of time).

Schellenberg argues that, if God exists, then every creaturely good must in some way be *in* God.³²² If this is the case, he thinks that there would *have* to be a way for us to optimally achieve *any* good within the context of a personal relationship with God. This is because, as he argues, if all goods are in God then the best way to become acquainted with *any* goods is to become personally acquainted with God. And so, he concludes, there would be no goods that ever optimally require God to be closed to relationship with us.³²³ I will briefly discuss premise 4, ultimately accepting its plausibility. I then argue that premise 5 is false.

4.2.1 Must All Goods Be In God?

In his writing on hiddenness, Schellenberg does not offer much more than the above in his defence of the “all goods in God” argument, so I look to his discussion of his new “logical” problem of evil to try to flesh out some of the details. Schellenberg suggests that his claim that *all* goods are in God is perhaps a bit misleading. For certain token goods are not found in God (eg. the pleasure Schellenberg feels cycling in Manitoba prairies). And even certain *types* of goods do not seem to be found in God (eg. pleasurable bike-riding in

³²¹ See for example Schellenberg (2016) 29, and (2015) 47-48.

³²² Ibid.

³²³ Schellenberg (2015) 47.

general).³²⁴ So Schellenberg offers the following definition of “all good is in God”: “for every possible good, among the distinguishable good-types it tokens or instances is at least one instanced in God.”³²⁵

On first blush, this definition seems so broad that it’s trivial: for “good” *itself* is in God, and so of course every good is a member of at least one kind of good which is found in God. But perhaps Schellenberg’s notion of a “*distinguishable* good-type” is intended to preclude precisely this reading. While “good” itself may be considered a “good-type”, it’s plausible that Schellenberg intends to exclude it as a *distinguishable* good-type.

Distinguishable good-types are plausibly those which can be used to distinguish between various goods;³²⁶ but good itself *cannot* distinguish between any goods because *all* goods are members of that type. Distinguishable good-types plausibly include all those good-types that are even one degree less general than good itself, as well as those good-types which are *much* more specific than that. That is: while “beauty” and “love” are distinguishable good-types, so are “bike-riding” and “cave-diving”. Plausibly the former are incredibly general (as a vast number of instances of good can be considered instances of beauty or love) but they are almost certainly *less* general than goodness itself, since there are surely *some* goods (and plausibly *many*) which are either not instances of beauty or not instances of love.³²⁷ And so if *this* is the case, then it is no trivial claim to state that “for every possible good, among the distinguishable good-types it tokens or instances is at least one instanced in God.”³²⁸

³²⁴ From J.L. Schellenberg, “A New Logical Problem of Evil,” in Justin P. McBrayer and Daniel Howard-Snyder (eds.), *Blackwell Companion to the Problem of Evil* (Wiley Blackwell 2013) 37.

³²⁵ *Ibid.*, 37.

³²⁶ I came to this as a possible understanding of Schellenberg’s claim through discussion of the issue with Martin Ivan Smith.

³²⁷ If *all* goods are instances of both beauty and love, then “beauty” and “love” are co-referential with “good”. But this will *not* imply that Schellenberg’s claim that all goods are in God in this sense is trivial. For if all goods are instances of (eg.) love, then love is simply no longer a *distinguishable* good-type.

³²⁸ *Ibid.*

Moreover, this claim is not just non-trivial; it enjoys *prima facie* plausibility. For, when considering any good G, it is difficult to say that *none* of the distinguishable good-types which G instances is found in God. Pleasurable bike-riding is an instance of *pleasure*, and we can also find pleasure in God. Much artwork can be considered *beautiful*, and beauty is itself found in God. Loving relationships with other humans are instances of *love*, and love is most definitely found in God. While there may be something desirable about each of these particular examples which *cannot* be found in God,³²⁹ there is also something in each of them which *can* be found in God. And so, if “all goods are in God” is understood in this way, then, if God exists, it seems plausible to say that all goods are in God.³³⁰

4.2.2 Must all goods in God be relationship-compatible?

I will now address premise 5. Why think that it’s true that if all goods are in God then no good optimally precludes a conscious personal relationship with God (for anyone, for any amount of time)? There seems to be a hidden assumption which leads Schellenberg to take premise 5 for granted. He seems to assume that a personal relationship with God could not preclude any good that is in God. The idea is that, if a good is found *in* God, then surely the best way to come to know that good will be through *knowing God*, and in a personal sense.³³¹ I argue that premise 5 lacks support, and there are good reasons for thinking it is false.

³²⁹ While many Christians (for example) would report that their relationship with God is the most important relationship in their life, anecdotal evidence from single Christians I’ve known suggests that (in many cases) their relationship with God *does not* satisfy their desire for a romantic relationship with another human. This suggests that there is something good in romantic relationship with other humans which cannot be found in God (even though relationship with God is more important to them than romantic relationship with another human).

³³⁰ This is certainly no conclusive argument that all goods are in God in this sense, I merely want to point out that it enjoys *prima facie* plausibility. Importantly, it is also non-trivial.

³³¹ Schellenberg (2015) 47-48.

First the support for premise 5 can be undercut. At best the claim that the best way to know a good is through knowing God supports the claim that no good precludes a conscious personal relationship with God *for the person who experiences that good*. But some goods are *non-patient-centred*: they come about because of some person P's nonresistant nonbelief, and yet they benefit someone other than P. And so even though these goods *may* be experienced by some person S within a conscious personal relationship with God, they require that some *other* person P lacks (at least for a time) a conscious personal relationship with God. Even if the *best* way to come to know such goods is through knowing God, these goods nevertheless precludes *for someone* a personal relationship with God. Take the good of evangelism, which I discussed earlier in this chapter, which may be aptly described as the opportunity to introduce other people to God. I argued that this good-type optimally required nonresistant nonbelief. And since it requires nonbelief of *some* kind, it precludes (for someone, at least temporarily) a conscious personal relationship with God.

Second, there are overriding reasons for thinking 5 is false. Since premise 5 is a conditional, it is false if its antecedent is true but its consequent is false. Given Schellenberg's definition of what it means for a good to be "in" God, it's plausible that the antecedent of 5 is true (if God exists). And so in order to demonstrate that 5 is false we need only to identify a good which optimally precludes (for anyone, for any amount of time) conscious personal relationship with God. I already discussed several goods in my discussion of the infinite resourcefulness argument, *and* in my discussion of particular accommodation, which seem to optimally preclude personal relationship with God. And so, if what I said was correct, then there are counterexamples to premise 5.

4.2.3 Reasoning “From Above”:

But perhaps there’s something else going on behind premise 5. Plausibly, Schellenberg’s approach of reasoning “from above” is at play here. Recall the distinction Schellenberg uses between two approaches of assessing the hiddenness argument. The first approach is called reasoning “from below”. On this approach we look at what the world is like and (perhaps crudely) try to fit God into it. If we’re using this approach, we can reject premise 5 just by identifying a good that would optimally preclude for someone (at least temporarily) the possibility of a conscious personal relationship with God. So far, one might argue that this is the approach that I have been using.

But Schellenberg rejects reasoning from below in favour of what he calls reasoning “from above”.³³² On this approach, we first determine what *God* would be like if He existed, and that helps us to determine what the *world* would be like if God existed. Relevant to the present discussion, we might consider whether *what is actually accurately judged “good”* would be different if God existed. If we conceive of God as personal, reasoning from above recommends we determine what the world should look like if such a God existed. Schellenberg might argue that if all good is in God, and God is *personal*, then we should expect what turns out to be good to itself be correspondingly *personal*, whatever that might mean.³³³ To be clear, this means that what we would *accurately judge* to be good in a world created by a personal God might actually be different from what we *in fact* accurately judge to be good in our world. The fact that what we accurately judge to be good would differ if God existed might *itself* be a reason for doubting that a personal God exists. And so to reject premise 5 it may not be enough, if one is reasoning from above, to

³³² See J.L. Schellenberg, “Divine Hiddenness and Human Philosophy,” in Eleonore Stump and Adam Green (eds.), *Hidden Divinity and Religious Beliefs: New Perspectives* (Cambridge University Press, 2016) 23.

³³³ The idea is that goods we consider distinct to *persons* might be especially valuable, while goods not unique to persons (those which can be enjoyed by animals, for example) might be less valuable, and goods which are not enjoyed by persons at all (if such goods exist) might not be accurately judged as good at all, if a personal God existed.

determine that there *are* in fact goods which are optimally possible given nonresistant nonbelief. We must determine first whether such things would accurately be judged as “good” if a personal God existed. To be clear, Schellenberg does not *explicitly* make this argument. Though given that he advocates for “reasoning from above” generally, it is worth considering whether doing so might affect how we ought to analyze the preceding arguments.

So is it true that, if a personal God existed, then nothing which precluded conscious personal relationship with God would be accurately be judged as “good”? There are a few reasons for thinking the answer here is “not necessarily”. First, it isn’t uncontentious that what is actually accurately judged good *could* have been otherwise. If what is accurately judged good is consistent across all possible worlds then whether God exists will have no bearing on what counts as good. If what counts as good *is* consistent across all possible worlds, then to demonstrate that 5 is false we must only demonstrate that there are some things we *actually* accurately judge to be good which optimally preclude (at least temporarily) a conscious personal relationship with God. Since it is not clear whether what counts as good *can* differ across possible worlds, it is correspondingly unclear whether anything which optimally precludes a conscious personal relationship with God would not accurately be judged “good” if a personal God existed.

Second, Schellenberg seems to assume that if a personal God existed, then God’s *personhood* would have an overpowering influence on what is accurately judged to be good. This does not take into account God’s *other* potential characteristics. God’s justice, humility, creativity, and other (perhaps unknown) characteristics would plausibly *all* play a role in determining what counts as “good”, if *any* of them did.³³⁴ There may be

³³⁴ For arguments which suggest that God’s other characteristics might be relevant to the hiddenness literature, see Travis Dumsday, “Divine Hiddenness and Divine Humility,” *Sophia* 53(1) (2014) 51-65. See also Michael Rea, “Narrative, Liturgy, and the Hiddenness of God,” in Kevin Timpe and Eleonore Stump (eds.), *Metaphysics and God: Essay in Honor of Eleonore Stump* (New York: Routledge, 2009) 76-96.

unrecognized ways in which *these* elements of God’s character (and particularly the possibly unknown elements) might entail that there *could be* goods which were precluded by a personal relationship with God if a personal God existed. This suggests that it is not obvious that, if a personal God existed, then nothing which optimally precludes a conscious personal relationship with God would accurately be judged as good.

Third, even if we allow that what is actually accurately judged good might have been otherwise, *and* that personhood would play an overwhelming role in a personal God determining what counts as good, it is not obvious that perfect personhood would prioritize *interpersonal relationship* overwhelmingly above other values. If we consider the “perfect person”, it’s not clear that this person *must* place a high value on interpersonal relationship. Plausibly there would be some, but there are virtues of “personhood” that seem to be possible, and sometimes even greater, without interpersonal relationship. Independence, personal excellence, and privacy may be like this – though they do not *preclude* personal relationship. Humans as social animals place a high value on interpersonal relationships. But even amongst humans there are exceptions, such as hermits. Unless we determine that the hermit’s way of practicing personhood is less excellent qua “person”, we cannot say that interpersonal skill is the primary perfection of personhood. And moving away from humans, we notice that some non-human animals are *not* social, but solitary. There is no reason that a solitary species *could not* advance to the point at which we could call them “persons”.³³⁵ But if a species of naturally solitary persons existed, it is not obvious that they would be somehow deficient qua “persons” compared to the much more social human persons.

Fourth, some goods which are *closely tied* to both personhood and interpersonal relationship optimally require (at some point) nonresistant nonbelief. If personhood and

³³⁵ Imagine, if you prefer, an advanced alien species that is solitary.

the good of interpersonal relationship had a strong influence on what counted as good, there might be *more* reason to think that goods associated with *coming to know* God were particularly valuable. And so this suggests that a couple of the goods already proposed in the literature are even more valuable. This might include the good of coming to know God on our own (perhaps through serious inquiry), the good of helping others come to know God, and the good of the personal testimonies of former nonresistant nonbelievers coming to know God which I proposed in chapter II. If personhood played such a central role in determining what was good, we could plausibly still expect *these* to be goods. But each of them requires that there is (at some point) nonresistant nonbelief. This casts doubt on the claim that if a personal God existed then *nothing* which optimally precludes a personal relationship with God would accurately be judged as good.

The points above suggest that, even according to Schellenberg's approach of reasoning from above, there is doubt that only relationship-compatible goods would be accurately judged as good. But there may also be a reason for thinking that reasoning from above could *never* determine that what we accurately judge as good could have been different if God existed. The major problem is that in order to get a sense of what a perfect being *would* be like we have to use our *actual* knowledge of good-making properties. There is something problematic about coming up with the concept of a perfect being based on good-making properties in the actual world and then trying to argue that, if such a being existed, then what is accurately judged as good in the actual world might have been otherwise. For our knowledge of good-making properties is *itself* informed by what we accurately judge to be good.

One might argue that there is a non-self-defeating way that we could determine what a perfect person would be like by considering the goods in the actual world and still come to the conclusion that a world containing this perfect person would have different

goods. One might argue, for example, that we only need to focus on perfections *qua* “person” to determine what the perfect person would be like. But our concept of God is more than just the perfect person. We cannot forget about the other perfections. And our best philosophical tool for determining perfections is by looking at what is *actually accurately judged* good, and why. And so it strikes me as very strange to think that the approach of reasoning from above might determine that actual goods would not be accurately judged good if a personal God existed.

For the above reasons, premise 5 is not supported, and there may be reasons to reject it. All of the arguments we considered for thinking that all goods must be relationship-compatible if all goods are in God were ultimately rejected. And so our counterexamples to premise 5 suggest that 5 is false. And so, because we have reasons for thinking 5 is false, the “all goods in God” argument does not demonstrate that if God exists then every good can be found within the context of a personal relationship with God. And so we are left without support for 6, and therefore no successful general accommodation strategy.

Conclusion:

In this chapter I have addressed the accommodation strategy. In its standard form the accommodation strategy is employed against greater goods replies to the hiddenness argument in an attempt to demonstrate that they cannot meet the optimal means condition. The loose version of the accommodation strategy, by contrast, attempts to demonstrate of some relationship-incompatible good or set of goods G, that there is a relationship-compatible good G* of the same good-type, and that G* would be “similar enough” for God to forego bringing about G. Particular uses of the standard accommodation strategy address particular greater goods replies, and attempt to demonstrate that the goods

proposed in those replies fail to meet the optimal means condition, while particular uses of the loose accommodation strategy attempt to demonstrate of particular goods G that the similar-enough G* exists. I argued that, so long as the proposed good or good-type is somehow *more valuable* given nonresistant nonbelief, it can still contribute value towards a *many goods* response to the hiddenness argument. Particular uses of the accommodation strategy must be addressed on a case by case basis. I have briefly addressed a few of these cases. I also addressed Schellenberg's attempts to offer a *general* accommodation strategy; these are attempts to demonstrate that *no* goods could meet the optimal means condition (standard), or that *all goods* G admit of some relationship-compatible G* of the same good-type which is optimally possible without nonresistant nonbelief (loose). I analysed two arguments from Schellenberg towards this end: the infinite resourcefulness argument and the all goods in God argument. I argued that both of these arguments fail to establish that all greater goods responses fail.

Conclusion

In the preceding chapters I offered responses to some of the most pressing objections to the strategy of offering greater goods responses to the hiddenness argument. In chapter V I addressed what I called the problem of no greater goods. I argued that the outweighing goods condition can be met. I argued that what I called one's "life-set" of goods might, at some times, be more valuable *at that time* if one has no conscious personal relationship with God than if one *has* a conscious personal relationship with God. This is because the value of a *nonconscious* personal relationship with God combined with the value of *other goods* might outweigh (at that time) the value of a conscious personal relationship with God. Moreover, even if at all times the value of one's life set would be more valuable (at that time) if one has a conscious personal relationship with God than if one lacks such a relationship, I argued that what I called one's overall "life-value" might be greater if one has a *temporary* period without a conscious personal relationship with God. And it is also possible that a temporary period without a conscious personal relationship with God could add value to a *later* conscious personal relationship with God. All of this gives us some reason for thinking that the *outweighing goods* condition could be met: that is, that there may be some good or set of goods which outweighs the lost value from one's nonresistant nonbelief.

I argued in Chapter VI that the optimal means condition can be met. I replied to attempts by Schellenberg to argue that no goods would be precluded by a conscious personal relationship with God. I offered counterexamples to the claim that no goods can meet the optimal means condition. Several of the goods proposed in the literature, I argued, plausibly meet the optimal means condition. Towards that end, I defended these goods against attempts at *particular* accommodation.

It's important to point out that, with regards to these last two chapters, I have only demonstrated that, plausibly the outweighing goods condition can be met by some set of goods, and the optimal means condition can be plausibly met by some *other* set of goods. But I *have not* demonstrated that there is any good or set of goods which meets *both* the optimal means and outweighing goods conditions. If one can demonstrate that such a set of goods possibly exists, this would likely constitute a successful greater goods defense against the hiddenness argument. What I have demonstrated is much more modest, but nevertheless important. I have demonstrated that we cannot assume *in advance* that a set of goods which meets both conditions *could not* exist. Ultimately the problem of no greater goods and the general accommodation strategy are attempts to demonstrate that greater goods responses *must* fail in principle, because the necessary conditions for their success cannot be met; they are attempts to show that greater goods responses fail without even considering any particular greater goods responses! I have argued that these attempts fail. Pending better arguments to the contrary, we *do* have to look at particular greater goods responses to determine whether or not they fail. This is, of course, far from arguing that any particular response actually succeeds.

But this is merely where we are left given what I hope to have accomplished in the final two chapters. Previous chapters made *some* progress toward actually offering a defense – though I stop short of claiming that any successful defense has actually been given. Chapter II briefly introduced what I take to be the most promising strategy for offering a greater goods defense: the many goods response. In that chapter I discussed *very* briefly how various goods proposed in the literature might fit in to such a many goods response, and I also proposed a new good. While I defended several of these goods against particular accommodation in chapter VI, there is likely more work to be done toward defending each good as part of a many goods response. Not to mention, I have by no

means argued that the combined value of all these goods *in fact* meets the outweighing goods condition. But if what I have argued is correct, then this lays the *groundwork* for a more robust greater goods defense in the form of a many goods response.

Chapters III and IV defended the place of two different *varieties* of goods within a many goods response. I argued in chapter III that non-patient-centred goods can contribute to a response to the hiddenness argument. At least *theoretically*, it's plausible that they could justify God in allowing nonresistant nonbelief on their own (ie. if enough sufficiently valuable non-patient-centred goods meet the optimal means condition). If this is the case, then *a fortiori* non-patient-centred goods may plausibly form *part* of God's reason for allowing nonresistant nonbelief, in addition to patient-centred goods (again, at least theoretically). That is, these goods are acceptable as part of a many goods response. At the *very least*, I argued that non-patient-centred goods could plausibly break ties toward God allowing nonresistant nonbelief, and God might similarly consider non-patient-centred goods (to help Him decide) if He is ever faced with a patient-centred good which is *incommensurable* with someone's having a personal relationship with God.

I argued in chapter IV that, in offering a greater goods defense, it is acceptable to appeal to goods which involve *a certain extent* of incompatibilist free will. That is, such greater goods responses will not fail *by virtue of* the goods to which they appeal involving such incompatibilist free will. While it may be controversial that incompatibilist free will exists, that does not matter for a *defense*. All that matters for a defense is that such goods are *possible*. Furthermore, I argued that Schellenberg's "free will offense" does not demonstrate that God would not give us free will *to the degree* that it allows for the incompatibilist goods from nonresistant nonbelief which have been proposed in the literature. For, as I argued, there are plausibly a few other *valuable* goods which require *incompatibilist free will*. I also argued that there is some reason for thinking that personal

creatures *cannot* have a meaningful personal relationship with God *unless* they have a certain degree of incompatibilist free will. If what I argued in *this* chapter is correct, then the goods in the literature which involve incompatibilist free will are not (by virtue of involving such free will) precluded from being part of a many goods response.

To sum up: pending better arguments, we have no reason for thinking that *in principle* greater goods responses must fail to demonstrate that the hiddenness argument is unsound, and so in order to determine whether some *particular* attempt at a greater goods response fails, we must actually address *that particular greater goods response*. We cannot just wave it away *because* it's a greater goods response. Moreover, if any greater goods response is to be successful, it may plausibly be a *many goods* response which incorporates a variety of goods. With such responses, only the *set* of goods must meet the outweighing goods and optimal means conditions, and so the conditions for being incorporated into a many goods response are much looser than the conditions for demonstrating that the hiddenness argument is unsound. Finally, non-patient-centred and incompatibilist goods are not, by virtue of being non-patient-centred or incompatibilist, precluded from being incorporated into the many goods response.

So where does this leave us? Ultimately what is left is to determine whether there actually *is* some set of goods which meets the optimal means and outweighing goods conditions. There were several goods already proposed in the literature discussed in chapter II, and many more referenced in footnotes. But whether these can all *conclusively* be incorporated into a many goods response, and whether that resulting set is sufficiently valuable, is still to be determined. Moreover, there may still be many goods proposed in the literature in the future. I proposed just one new good, but as of this very year, new

goods have continued to be proposed in the literature.³³⁶ What this suggests to me is that we can reject Schellenberg's claim that, thanks to the hiddenness argument, we do not need to wait for more evidence to accept that theism is false and move on.³³⁷ Contrary to this it seems to me that it is *far* from certain that there will never be a successful greater goods defense against the hiddenness argument. We may, for all we know, eventually have one in the form of a many goods response.

To be clear, this is *not* an "appeal to future philosophy". First, I do not suggest that we *now* know that we will eventually have a successful greater goods response to the hiddenness argument. But second, given the many goods response, the "future philosophy" I anticipate *may* come is a *quantitative* advance from our current position, as opposed to a *qualitative* advance. That is, I am not suggesting that the future will yield *better* greater goods responses than we presently have. I am suggesting that the future may yield a *greater amount* of greater goods than we presently have. This is precisely what we will need for a successful many goods response, if we do not already have one with the present goods found in the literature.

³³⁶ I provide a very small (non-exhaustive) sample of new goods proposed in just 2016, 2017, and 2018 alone. Travis Dumsday (2018). Aaron Cobb, "The Silence of God and the Theological Virtue of Hope," *Res Philosophica* 94(1) (2017) 23-41. Tyler Paytas, "God's Awful Majesty Before Our Eyes: Kant's Moral Justification for Divine Hiddenness," *Kantian Review* 22(1) (2017) 133-157. Travis Dumsday (2016). Max Baker-Hytch, "Mutual Epistemic Dependence and the Demographic Divine Hiddenness Problem," *Religious Studies* 52(3) (2016) 375-394. Kevin Vandergriff (2016).

³³⁷ Schellenberg (2016) 32.

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