Introduction

An overview

In 1993, John Schellenberg published *Divine Hiddenness and Human Reason*[1] and thereby stimulated a lively discussion in the philosophical literature on what is now called "the problem of divine hiddenness." Schellenberg assumed three things which at the time seemed relatively uncontroversial: (1) there are many people who don't believe in God but who are not culpable for not believing in God; (2) if there were a God, he would want loving relations with people; and (3) loving relations between God and a human being are at least impeded if the human being does not believe God exists. From these apparently reasonable premises, Schellenberg built an argument for the conclusion that there is no God. There quickly arose an outpouring of philosophical literature on Schellenberg's argument, some of it supportive and some of it critical.[2] In response to this literature, Schellenberg refined his presentation of the argument in a way that made it clear how some of the earlier criticisms of it failed to do justice to the argument.[3] As his revised argument was generally understood, with many of the nuances omitted here for the sake of brevity, it came to something like this:

1. If God exists, then God is perfectly loving, desiring loving relationship with all created persons.
2. If God is perfectly loving, then God would ensure that all persons can participate in relationship with God unless they have excluded themselves through some kind of resistance.
3. There are nonresistant nonbelievers.

Therefore, God does not exist.

Many philosophers see an analogy between Schellenberg's problem of divine hiddenness and the problem of evil as well as between Schellenberg's argument for the non-existence of God and the argument from evil. The problem

[1] Schellenberg (1993).
[2] See, for example, Howard-Snyder and Moser (2002).
[3] Schellenberg (2007).

of divine hiddenness has consequently come to be seen as a major problem in current philosophy of religion.

This volume is an attempt to come to grips with this problem in a new, deep way.

The volume begins, reasonably enough, with Schellenberg's explanation of what he sees as the consequences of the problem and his own reflections on it. His essay then sets the stage for the essays that follow.

Part II, "God's Hiddenness: Overlooked Issues," broadens the parameters of the problem of divine hiddenness by bringing to bear on it issues in philosophy of language and additional considerations from the cognitive science of religion. The essays in this section help show additional implications of the problem.

In the next part, "God's Hiddenness: Faith and Skepticism," the essays take account of a great deal of current work on the problem of evil to present the two most basic reactions to the problem of divine hiddenness, the response of faith and the skeptical response that finds the conclusion of the argument from divine hiddenness compelling.

The three subsequent sections attempt to deal with the problem of divine hiddenness by exploring some of its presuppositions and background context.

In Part IV, "Reasons for Hiddenness and Unbelief," the essays avail themselves of recent trends in epistemology, philosophy of mind, philosophical psychology, and philosophy of religion itself to investigate Schellenberg's claim that if God exists, there would be no nonresistant nonbelievers. In one way or another, the essays in this section challenge Schellenberg's claim by suggesting reasons God might have for not being explicitly present to all human beings or by offering explanations of the nonbelief of human beings that do not assign to them either culpability or resistance to God.

In Part V, "God's Hiddenness and God's Nature in the Major Monotheisms," the essays ask whether Islam, Judaism, and some varieties of Christianity, including Eastern Christianity, in fact conceive of God in the way Schellenberg's argument takes for granted. Previous discussions of the problem of divine hiddenness have tended to assume a largely contemporary version of Christian belief. The sophisticated theology philosophically explored in these essays suggests that there are major strands of the major monotheisms that do not accept Schellenberg's characterization of God.

In the final section, "God's Hiddenness: Suffering and Union with God," the essays in effect turn the problem of divine hiddenness upside down. In differing ways, the essays in this section explore the resources of literature and of contemplative or mystical theology for arguing that God's hiddenness is actually a path for human beings to be united with God.

Taken together, all the essays present a deep and powerful reflection on the problem of divine hiddenness and its implications for religious belief.

Background and context

The idea that there is a cognitive gap between human beings and God is not new. One finds within various religions the ready acknowledgment that God's ways are not our ways, that God's ways are higher than our ways. The transcendence of God implies the existence of some sort of gap between creatures and their creator. Far from being something that calls God's existence into question, the unapproachability of God has in fact figured prominently in the worship of God. It is part of what makes God glorious. In particular, the goodness of God is on a scale that human beings simply cannot naturally take in. In Paul's letter to the Romans, for example, Paul extols "the depths of the riches of the knowledge and wisdom of God" as "unsearchable and beyond tracing out" (Rom. 11:33), and the psalmist can glory in a divine mind whose knowledge is "too wonderful for me" (Psalm 139:6).

Yet the psalms also contain haunting refrains like "Why, Lord, do you reject me and hide your face?" (Psalm 88:14) and "How long, oh Lord? Will you forget me forever?" (Psalm 13:1). And Schellenberg has been the most forceful proponent of an argument that the apparent hiddenness of God implies that there is no God.

Schellenberg's original point of departure is the idea that there are honest seekers of the truth who are atheists and agnostics, and there are also individuals who belong to cultures that lack the idea of a personal God altogether. One might think that this apparent fact fits awkwardly with the claim that God exists. A personal God who is unsurpassably great would also be unsurpassably loving since love is something it is better for a personal being to have. An unsurpassably loving God would make sure that anyone who at any time is capable of relating personally to God has it within his or her power to do so. So, if God exists, the only thing that would keep a person out of a personal relationship with God would be some kind of culpable failure to do a good thing which is in that person's power to do. It would appear that one does not have the power to relate to God if one does not yet believe that God exists. Thus, if a loving, personal God existed, God would make sure that no one non-culpably failed to believe in God's existence.

Schellenberg gave a revised formulation of his argument in *The Wisdom to Doubt*[4] where we see several key substitutions in the terms of the argument that draw out themes from Schellenberg's original discussion of the argument and make them explicit within the framing of the argument. He substituted language about resistance for language about culpability and changed talk of something being in one's power to talk of someone's being in a position to participate in a relationship. In this version of his argument, Schellenberg

[4] Schellenberg (2007).

put greater emphasis on the claim that if an unsurpassably great God exists, that God would value conscious, interactive relationship. A perfectly loving being would, presumably, value conscious, interactive relationship more than some kind of de re awareness of the existence of God. In his 2007 book, Schellenberg also made sure to focus our attention on various special cases that are especially challenging for the theist. These include people who have lost their faith, people who have sought after the truth their whole lives without coming to believe in God, people who have converted to nontheistic religions, and people who are nontheists because they were always isolated from theistic influence. Even if one could come up with a story that explains some of these cases, Schellenberg thought that it would be hard to come up with an explanation that covers all of them.

In addition to the essays that validate or develop Schellenberg's argument, some of the essays in this volume bring into focus two different critical ways of responding to Schellenberg's line of reasoning. One response focuses on the type of God for whose non-existence Schellenberg is arguing. One can challenge Schellenberg's argument by calling into question either the claim that God's perfection requires relationship or the kind of relationship God would be interested in. For instance, if one stresses the transcendence and ineffability of God, then one must hold lightly any comparison between God's love and human love. This is an important consideration because it is tempting to view God on the model of a loving human parent and then to evaluate God's apparent hiddenness on that model. But it might be that human parallels are inherently misleading. If God is transcendent, then our expectations of the way in which God's love would operate might be very inadequate if they take human love as their model.

A different response to Schellenberg's argument takes the opposite approach. It assumes that God is interested in loving relationships with human beings, but it supposes that closer attention to the nature of relationships undermines Schellenberg's argument. For example, Schellenberg's focus is on human belief that God exists. One might wonder, though, whether the belief that God exists is essential to relationship. If there is a kind of faith that does not require belief, one might think that a relationship can grow in the absence of belief. In fact, it could be a great-making feature of a relationship that it grew in a time of uncertainty.

Furthermore, it may be that greater attention to the nature of relationship reveals relational obstacles that would have to be overcome for desirable divine–human relationships that are not accounted for properly by Schellenberg's discussion. For instance, when someone has a hard time with present relationships because of residual psychological baggage from past relationships, must we say that the problems are culpable ones? Clearly not. A person might be resistant to relationship because of a traumatic experience, but if

the resistance is not rooted in one's reflectively endorsed desires and choices, then it may not be the sort of resistance that Schellenberg has in mind when he poses his argument. Another possible complication arises from the nature of love. If love is a matter of two people's enjoying each other just as they are, that is one thing. If love has a level of moral rectitude and self-sacrificial expression built into it, however, then it becomes more plausible that the average person is not entirely receptive to that kind of love.

In addition to these kinds of questions, the problem of divine hiddenness also raises issues about what we value. For example, in trying to identify the sorts of relationships an unsurpassably great God would value, we are in effect reflecting on the kinds of relationships we should value and promote. Is an impersonal benevolence towards others sufficient for human flourishing in relationship, or does human flourishing require something more, such as mutuality and transparency in one's loving relationships?

Finally the problem of hiddenness highlights rival conceptions of epistemic humility. On the one hand, as Schellenberg emphasizes in his essay in this volume, we are limited creatures who may be in the early stages of our history as a species. On this view, the path of epistemic humility seems to require at least entertaining the idea that we will outgrow our current religions as we continue to evolve. On the other hand, the transcendence of God might outstrip our cognitive capacities no matter how long we last as a species, and so the truth about God might have to be revealed to us by God, as the major monotheisms claim God has done. On this view, the path of epistemic humility seems to require learning from and submitting to a tradition or a text. The problem of divine hiddenness therefore also presupposes varying conceptions of the nature and proper expression of epistemic humility.

The essays in detail

In "Divine hiddenness and human philosophy," Schellenberg develops his latest version of the argument from divine hiddenness, taking account of the last twenty years of discussion in his presentation. He also integrates his discussion with reflections on the relevance of evolutionary deep time to religious issues. On his view, a realistic look at human limitations against the backdrop of deep time helps us assess the problem of divine hiddenness with a proper appreciation of what limited human philosophy could be expected to provide. And he concludes with reasons for hope in future progress as regards human comprehension of the truly ultimate in reality.

Meghan Sullivan begins with the fact of religious pluralism. One consequence of the hiddenness of God is that different religions conceive of God in different ways, leading to a pluralism in theology. Her essay investigates the implications of this pluralism for names of God. She asks whether, given

pluralism, we have reason to believe that the three Abrahamic faiths all have access to a functioning divine name word; and she considers reasons for supposing that we do not. This is a skeptical argument, of course; and her essay concludes by surveying responses to the skeptical argument and their costs.

Helen De Cruz focuses on work by cognitive scientists who have argued that religion is a cognitively natural phenomenon: religious beliefs arise spontaneously without explicit instruction, and belief in one or more gods is cross-culturally ubiquitous. She argues that more recent work in cognitive science of religion indicates that theism nevertheless requires some informal learning and that there is substantial individual variation in theistic belief, correlating with theory of mind, analytic skills, and other cognitive capacities. She attempts to show that cognitive science of religion can shed light on the question of reasonable, that is, nonresistant, nonbelief, and she examines the plausibility of responses to the problem of divine hiddenness (such as the epistemic distance theodicy) in the light of these findings in cognitive science of religion.

Paul Moser argues that questions about divine hiddenness can benefit from clarification of the nature of God's love. In his view, God's love should be understood as a kind self-sacrifice of a particular redemptive kind, so that God's revelation of himself to human beings needs to occur in a context of self-sacrifice. Consequently, divine revelation can be expected to be absent or hidden in any context where self-sacrifice is absent. For Moser, the implications for conceiving of God's love as self-sacrificial challenges human beings not just to think but also to act in profoundly redemptive ways. The result is, in his view, a new practical alternative to familiar ways of inquiring about God's presence and hiddenness.

By contrast, Evan Fales responds to this argument by Moser, and analogous arguments in the discussions of the problem of evil, by focusing on particular biblical texts, especially the book of Job. Fales argues that proper interpretation of such texts, taken to be revealed by Judaism and Christianity, show that the kind of arguments given to reconcile divine hiddenness and divine love cannot be sustained. For Fales, if there were a God, he would have to be called to account for his injustice, not only with regard to the suffering regularly discussed in connection with the problem of evil but also with regard to the suffering occasioned by divine hiddenness.

John Greco approaches the problem of divine hiddenness by considering explanations for unbelief. A common explanation, both in religious tradition and among contemporary theistic philosophers, is that unbelief signals a cognitive and/or moral flaw in the nonbeliever. In opposition to this line of thought, Greco considers recent advances in the epistemology of religion that should make theists skeptical of that diagnosis. On his view, contemporary religious epistemology tends to ground belief in God in a) religious experience, and b) testimony from the faithful. These recent approaches stress the epistemic

importance of social context and especially membership in a community. But then there is a readily available "no-fault" explanation for unbelief. To some extent, in fact, Greco's position makes unbelief expected.

Daniel Howard-Snyder challenges Schellenberg's account of what a loving God would do. By way of objection to Schellenberg's argument, Howard-Snyder argues that we should take the long view of particular relationships between God and individual human beings. It is tempting to think that, for God to be unsurpassably loving, at every time God must be open to being in a positively meaningful and reciprocal relationship with every created person capable of such relationship. Openness to relationship entails that one would never do anything by either commission or omission that would have the result that the other was prevented from participating in that relationship. And so it is tempting to suppose that every human being at every time should be able to participate in relationship with God just by trying. It may be tempting to think this, but Howard-Snyder thinks we should resist the temptation. Ordinary cases help us to see that love does not always demand openness of this sort, and a lack of openness can actually promote a better long-term relationship in certain circumstances.

Like Howard-Snyder, Adam Green draws our attention to diachronic elements of relationship with a special emphasis on the way in which prior states in a relationship help make possible a deeper connection achieved later. Green uses attachment theory and the psychology of shared attention to explore how a closer attention to the way in which we come to know and experience other human persons might help the theist address Schellenberg's argument. Green argues, first, that divine hiddenness is an experiential problem. He then makes the case that our deepest experiences of other persons in the natural realm involve a cultivated attunement to the other person. Acquiring such an attunement can be hindered, however, through our relational histories. Acquiring a bad model from one's prior experiences may not be culpable while nonetheless forming an obstacle to future relationship. An attachment paradigm helps to explain both (i) why it is that God might be more limited than one might initially suppose in the kinds of experiences that God can provide, and (ii) how it could be the case that one could have inculpable, nonresistant nonbelief in a world that contains a loving God desirous of relationship.

In the four essays that follow, the authors mine different traditions within the major monotheisms for insight into the problem of divine hiddenness with a special emphasis on the way in which the transcendence or ineffability of God changes the problem.

Jon McGinnis shows that the contemporary debate over divine hiddenness might be hard to fathom from a medieval Islamic perspective. McGinnis argues that one may go so far as to say that the problem of divine hiddenness would have been hidden from many medieval Muslim intellectuals. For example, the

idea of a personal relation with God would have struck some of these thinkers as ill conceived. God's perfection implies that, though he brings forth and sustains a good creation, God is not interested in the sort of reciprocal relationship that Schellenberg has in mind. For McGinnis, the perspective of these Muslim philosophers and theologians exposes certain implicit assumptions in the debate over divine hiddenness that one might otherwise fail to appreciate properly.

Jerome Gellman takes a Hasidic perspective on the problem of divine hiddenness. Gellman presents a Hasidic interpretation of the *aqedah*, in which God's permanent hiddenness is the central theme. According to this interpretation of the story, God tested Abraham in order to teach Abraham God's unfathomable transcendence. Gellman presents Hegel's attack on Judaism for having a God who is forever hidden and therefore beyond appeasement. And he shows that, by contrast, the Hasidic interpretation of the *aqedah* turns the tables on Hegel's contempt for Judaism by acclaiming God's essential hiddenness. When the angel abruptly stops Abraham from going through with the sacrifice, Abraham learns the importance of letting go attempts to comprehend God or to unite with God in this life. Gellman finishes by emphasizing the religious significance of the yearning for God that is at the heart of this approach.

N. N. Trakakis highlights the contribution of Eastern understandings of the nature of God, with their emphasis on God's ineffability. Trakakis argues that divine hiddenness underlines the distinctness of God from creatures. As Trakakis sees it, the hiddenness of God discloses the confused and defective nature of the anthropomorphic metaphysics of divinity that takes God to be literally a personal agent.

Finally, in this section, Michael Rea considers the problem of divine hiddenness from the perspective of Western Christian thought in the apophatic tradition. He argues that in the thought of apophatic theologians, the phenomenon of divine hiddenness seems to be regarded as a perfectly obvious consequence of divine transcendence. He explores the question whether attention to divine transcendence mitigates the problem of divine hiddenness, or whether the robust theology of divine transcendence that one commonly finds in the work of apophatic theologians instead underemphasizes those intuitions about divine perfection that render the problem acute.

The three essays in the final section of the volume use mystical and literary elements to bring home the existential dimension of hiddenness while helping us to think more deeply about the nature of the problem Schellenberg points to. Sarah Coakley argues that the problem of divine hiddenness represents a misplaced dilemma which needs to be re-construed. Using John of the Cross's account of the dark night of the soul, she distinguishes three different meanings of epistemic darkness in play in John's work. She argues that, according to John, the fear that God is hiding is actually a mistake of spiritual beginners,

as is the correlative desire that God become present in a satisfyingly obvious way. She concludes with a speculative reflection on the conditions under which an atheistic account of divine hiddenness might consider John of the Cross's alternative narrative as probative.

Yujin Nagasawa proposes a new response to the problem of divine hiddenness which utilizes recent work in the philosophy of mind while dialoguing with Shusaku Endo's novel *Silence*. Appealing to Jerry Foder's concept of epistemic boundedness and Colin McGinn's concept of cognitive closure, he argues that the hiddenness of God can be attributed to our significant epistemic or cognitive limitations in relation to the infinite nature of God. On Nagasawa's view, it is not possible for God to be manifested to human beings in such a way that God's existence is evident to all non-culpable or nonresistant people. On the basis of these considerations, Nagasawa tries to sketch an inclusivist or pluralist hypothesis regarding religious belief systems using the spiritual journey of the protagonist in *Silence* as a model.

And, finally, Ian Deweese-Boyd examines the way in which mysticism of a lyric kind can illumine the problem. Throughout his life, the English Jesuit poet Gerard Manley Hopkins struggled with desolation over what he saw as his spiritually, intellectually, and artistically unproductive life; and in these periods, he experienced God's absence in a particularly intense way. What Hopkins faced was the existential problem of suffering and hiddenness, a problem widely recognized to be left relatively untouched by conceptual explanations. Deweese-Boyd argues that Hopkins's poems themselves speak to such existential suffering and create a space in which those who suffer can meet God, even if only to contend with God. Hopkins's poems thus suggest a way to find God in the very experience of God's hiddenness, thereby making God present even in divine absence.

Adam Green
Eleonore Stump