

CHALLENGING THE 'HIDDEN' ASSUMPTION IN J. L. SCHELLENBERG'S
HIDDENNESS ARGUMENT: AN EXPLORATION INTO THE NATURE OF DIVINE LOVE

by

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“Challenging the ‘Hidden’ Assumption in J. L. Schellenberg’s Hiddenness
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Abstract

In recent years, J. L. Schellenberg has developed and defended a forceful argument for atheism. He argues that the existence of inculpable nonbelief, together with the (*a priori*) claim that this is not what we would expect if a perfectly loving God exists, provides probabilistic support for atheism. In response, most critics have focused on either denying the existence of inculpable nonbelief or offering reasons why it is compatible with the existence of a perfectly loving God. I propose a new strategy for responding to Schellenberg’s argument, however, which focuses on clarifying what perfect love entails. I claim that since Schellenberg employs perfect being theology in formulating his argument, he is thereby committed to the assumption that perfect love entails infinite love. I argue, however, that this assumption is unwarranted, and that if it can be shown that God’s love is possibly not infinite, then Schellenberg’s argument fails.

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1. Introduction

In recent years, J. L. Schellenberg (1993, 2003, 2005a, 2005b, and 2007b) has developed and defended a forceful argument against “the personal God of traditional theism” (2005a, p. 209) which has received considerable attention from philosophers of religion. He argues that the (alleged) existence of nonresistant nonbelief,¹ which he defines as “any instance of failure to believe in the existence of God that is not the result of culpable actions or omissions” (1993, p. 59), together with the (*a priori*) claim that this is not what we would expect if theism were true, provides probabilistic support for atheism. He considers his argument to be a special instance of the empirical problem of evil in that the existence of nonresistant nonbelief constitutes an evil that conflicts with God’s moral nature.²

I will begin this thesis by summarizing Schellenberg’s argument for atheism. In Chapter 2, I will briefly survey the most common categories of responses to his argument, as well as Schellenberg’s replies. I will then propose a new strategy for responding to Schellenberg’s argument that focuses on

¹ Schellenberg uses the terms reasonable nonbelief, inculpable nonbelief, and nonresistant nonbelief interchangeably, and I will do the same throughout.

² An argument is generally considered an instance of the empirical problem of evil if it involves the proposal that:

...certain events, actions, and states of affairs that we would all naturally view as negative or destructive and so as evil (e.g., wrong actions, physical pain, mental anguish) provide the basis for a strong [inductive] argument against the existence of an omnipotent, omniscient, and morally perfect God. (Schellenberg, 1993, p. 7)

Schellenberg believes that he can legitimately call his argument an instance of the empirical problem of evil, since he thinks that the existence of nonresistant nonbelief “comes into conflict with what theists are committed to saying about God’s moral nature” (1993, p. 7).

redefining perfect love, modelled after a similar, more general argument by Yujin Nagasawa (2008) that likewise proposes revisions to the traditional concept of an omniperfect³ God. To do this, in Chapters 3 and 4, I will turn to Michael Rea's (2009) and Jeff Jordan's (2012) respective challenges to some assumptions generally held about the nature of divine love. Although I will ultimately show that both of their arguments fail, I will employ certain important insights gleaned from their discussions in order to apply them to my own argument. Ultimately, I hope to show, in Chapter 5, that Schellenberg's assumptions about what the love of a perfect being would look like need to be reconsidered and developed further in order for his argument for atheism to be successful.

I. Schellenberg's Presentation of the Argument

Schellenberg argues for atheism from the fact that if God exists, he⁴ is, in some sense, hidden. By 'hidden', Schellenberg means that, if God exists, he "has intentionally withheld (or permitted to be obscured) strong evidence of his existence" (1993, p. 5). Schellenberg argues that the existence of individuals who fail to believe in God, and whose failure to believe occurs through no fault of their own, constitutes an evil that renders the existence of a perfectly loving

³ Nagasawa uses this term to encompass the most undisputed of God's attributes—omnipotence, omniscience, and omnibenevolence. Although he notes that other 'omni' attributes may be included in this set, he excludes non-degreed attributes such as immutability, simplicity, and unembodiment. I will use omniperfect to mean that God has each of his degreed, great-making properties to an infinite degree.

⁴ As is common practice, I use the pronoun 'he' to refer to God. This should not, however, be taken to imply that God has a gender.

God improbable. Indeed, he argues that “the weakness of our evidence for God is not a sign that God is hidden; it is a revelation that he does not exist” (1993, p. 1).

Schellenberg uses perfect being theology to generate the first premise of his argument. Perfect being theology is a method of reasoning about the nature of God by reflecting on the concept of perfection in order to determine what it entails. This tradition has been used for centuries as a method of reasoning about God’s attributes. One notable proponent was the medieval philosopher Anselm of Canterbury. Anselm’s central thesis—that God must be a being “than which nothing greater can be conceived” (Anselm, p. 13)⁵—is generally taken to mean that God must have all great-making properties, and have them to the maximal degree.⁶ A great-making property can be defined as “a property which is intrinsically good to have” (Jordan, p. 56), and perfect being theologians have generally taken ‘maximal’ to mean ‘infinite’ since, if God exemplifies some property to a finite degree, then presumably one could conceive of a being exemplifying that property to a greater degree, in which case God would not be the greatest conceivable being. Although Schellenberg does not explicitly state that he endorses the method of perfect being theology, he clearly employs it throughout his work. For example, he refers to God’s love

⁵ When Anselm refers to the ‘greatest conceivable being,’ he is generally taken to mean the ‘greatest logically possible being.’ I also intend any reference to conceivability to be taken to mean ‘logical possibility’ throughout.

⁶ Anselmian theism is typically equated with perfect being theology since they hold the same central thesis about an omniperfect God, and employ the same general method of reasoning about him (Nagasawa, p. 577). I will consider the two terms to be synonymous throughout.

as necessarily perfect, since “any being who lacked it would be a being whose greatness *could* be surpassed, and therefore not God” (1993, p. 11). Moreover, he makes clear that discussion about a ‘perfect’ being follows from the fact that:

...we are in some sense dealing with an elaboration of ultimism...a particular view of the nature of the ultimate emphasizing certain omni-properties naturally associated with the perfection of personal being—God has *all* power, *all* knowledge, *all* goodness, *all* creative responsibility, and so on. (2007b, p. 195)

Schellenberg argues that any coherent and complete conception of God must include his being personal, and that, as a perfect being, God must have all the properties normally accepted as inhering in all personal beings, but to the maximal degree. Indeed, essential to the perfect being theologian’s concept of God is that he is unsurpassable in all great-making properties, including whatever ones are essential for personhood. Since love is a property widely agreed-upon as being not only essential but, in fact, the most noble of all personal properties, Schellenberg concludes that God must necessarily be perfect in love. Most theologians and philosophers of religion agree regarding the necessity of including perfect love in any adequate conception of God, and so Schellenberg takes himself to have given sufficient support for his first premise:

(S1) If God exists, then he is perfectly loving. (1993, p. 83)

Schellenberg does not make explicit what he believes is implied by ‘perfect’ love; as mentioned, perfect being theologians assume that the great-making properties are instantiated to an infinite degree, yet Schellenberg never explicitly says that by perfect love he means infinite love—only that it must be “ultimate” (1993, p. 10), “unsurpassable” (1993, p. 21), or, in certain contexts, “unlimited” (1993, p. 26). He does, however, explore at great length what exactly it means for God to perfectly love human beings.

Schellenberg considers God’s love to be, “at a minimum, self-giving, unconditionally accepting, relationship-seeking love” (1993, p. 11). Further, he considers the connection between God’s perfect love and the pursuit of personal relationship to be absolutely crucial to his argument, and so he spends considerable time clarifying this connection and developing its implications (1993, pp. 17-41).

According to Schellenberg, if God is loving, then he desires our well-being. Indeed, if God creates personal beings, he would seek to engage in personal relationship⁷ with them not merely for its own sake, but also because of the value that the beings would gain from relationship with him (1993, pp. 21-22). Schellenberg argues that nothing could be of greater value to us—nothing would better increase our well-being—than being in direct relationship with the greatest of all valued things, God himself. If God seeks our well-being,

⁷ Schellenberg’s understanding of personal relationship is expressed in developmental terms: “it would admit of change, growth, progression, regression. It might be shallow or deep, depending on the response of the human term of the relation” (Schellenberg, 1993, p. 28).

then, since relationship with him would immeasurably increase our well-being, he would certainly seek relationship with us (1993, p. 18). According to Schellenberg, the best way to conceptualize relationship with God is by analogy with a parent-child relationship, since Schellenberg believes that “the best in human love” (2005a, p. 203) is parental love. Throughout his work, Schellenberg appeals to the way a ‘good parent’ would express her love towards her children:

The perfectly loving parent, for example, from the time the child can first respond to her at all until death separates them, will, insofar as she can help it, see to it that nothing *she* does ever puts relationship with herself out of reach for her child. (2005a, p. 203)⁸

A necessary requirement⁹ of reciprocal relationship, however, is that a person believe that God exists—indeed, S cannot have personal relationship with P if S does not think that P exists.¹⁰ This leads Schellenberg to assert that

⁸ Helen De Cruz (2015) has suggested that Schellenberg’s deliberations on how a perfectly loving God would treat his children arbitrarily privileges modern, Western parenting ideals (p. 10). De Cruz claims that the Western ideal of a responsive, sensitive parent whose parenting style can be thought of in terms of duties towards her child is a relatively recent, Western concept, and should not necessarily be privileged in our deliberations about divine love. According to De Cruz, Schellenberg would have to show what reasons we have to think that God holds to this particular parenting ideal; until such a defense is given, assuming what God’s parenting style is and making conclusions about how he should treat his children seems unjustified.

⁹ Some have argued that belief is *not* a necessary requirement for relationship. For a detailed presentation of this strategy, see Ted Poston and Trent Dougherty (2007, pp. 183–198).

¹⁰ Schellenberg defines belief as “a disposition to feel it true that *p*” (1993, p. 30n24), holding that weak (as opposed to firm) belief is enough for his argument to stand since any amount of belief, by definition, entails that S feels that *p* is *true*. He defines belief in God as “*some degree or other* of a disposition to feel it true that *G*” (1993, p. 33), where *G* is belief in God’s existence.

a loving God who seeks relationship with us would surely provide indisputable evidence of his existence (1993, p. 33). Schellenberg calls the state of affairs in which God's existence is placed beyond reasonable doubt a "strong epistemic situation with regard to theism" (1993, p. 39). In this state of affairs, humans would always be culpable for nonbelief in God, because God would have ensured that at all times in which we are capable of being in relationship with him,¹¹ there is sufficient evidence that renders his existence probable to the degree that reasonable nonbelief does not occur (1993, p. 35). Schellenberg argues that a loving God not only *would* actualize this state of affairs, but that he *could* do so. He provides two reasons for this claim: 1) the actual world provides evidence that, at least to some degree, supports God's existence; and 2) the state of the evidence in the actual world could have been otherwise than it is. According to Schellenberg, these points, taken together, provide support for the claim that God could actualize a strong epistemic situation with respect to his existence; if there is some actual evidence available and the world could have been otherwise, then there is a possible world in which the evidence could be even stronger such that it would provide a higher degree of support (1993, p. 46f). So, Schellenberg believes that he has provided sufficient support for the claim that, if a perfectly loving God exists, then he would (and could) actualize

¹¹ Schellenberg says that to be capable of personal relationship with God at a time, one must be "in possession at that time of the cognitive and affective equipment required to hold religious beliefs and exhibit such attitudes as trust, gratefulness, obedience, and worship" (1993, p. 24). This description, he argues, includes the majority of humans at least at some time in their lives, for "even individuals who have cognitive and affective powers that are still developing (children) or impaired (the mentally handicapped) may surely sometimes be said to have a capacity, however limited, for belief in God" (Schellenberg, 1993, p. 24n16).

a world in which his existence was placed beyond reasonable doubt. Hence, he arrives at his second premise:

(S2) If a perfectly loving God exists, then nonresistant nonbelief does not occur. (1993, p. 83)

From here, Schellenberg moves on to support his third premise—the claim that nonresistant nonbelief does actually occur. Indeed, he believes that it is “clear enough” (1993, p. 59) that both unreflective and reflective instances of inculpable nonbelief occur. By *unreflective* nonbelievers, Schellenberg means “individuals—primarily from non-Western cultures—who have never so much as entertained the proposition ‘God exists’ (G), let alone considered the question of its truth or falsity” (1993, p. 58), while *reflective* nonbelievers are “individuals who disbelieve or are in doubt about (G) as a result of reflection on its content and some attempt to discover whether it is true or false” (1993, p. 58f).

Despite the fact that he thinks it evident that both types of inculpable nonbelief are exemplified, he nevertheless defends the occurrence of reflective nonbelief by attempting to show specifically that doubt with respect to God’s existence is sometimes inculpable. He defines ‘doubt’ as “uncertainty about the truth of some proposition (typically) generated by the belief that epistemic parity obtains between that proposition and its denial” (1993, p. 60). Through an examination of Richard Swinburne’s (1981, pp. 45-54) characterization of epistemic rationality, Schellenberg draws out what ‘inculpable doubt’ might entail: S is inculpable for doubt when S has not voluntarily neglected to

properly investigate the issue. Schellenberg then believes he is in a position to define ‘inculpable religious doubt’: S believes that parity exists between the belief that God exists (G) and denial of said belief (not-G), and S has not knowingly neglected to follow proper investigative procedures (1993, p. 64), where parity between G and not-G occurs when (1) S believes that he is not epistemically justified in preferring one over the other, and when, (2) were we to watch S’s investigation, we would likely judge that it was properly and adequately conducted (1993, p. 65). He argues that, in judging S’s investigation, we may assume that condition (1) is met if S reports this state of mind to us while having shown himself in other epistemic matters to be an honest seeker of the truth. Since Schellenberg recognizes the possibility of self-deception, however, he notes that some doubt about condition (2) may ultimately prevail. Nevertheless, he argues that “it seems equally clear that in certain circumstances a judgment in favor of the subject would be appropriate” (1993, p. 65). According to Schellenberg, ‘certain circumstances’ include instances where S exhibits a combination of something like the following qualities: honesty, a love of truth, rational self-control, diligence, etc., and when “careful attention to the matter seems to him to leave him with no other option” (1993, p. 66). Thus, if he does end up reluctantly concluding that parity obtains, we can conclude that he is neither deceiving himself nor is epistemically culpable in some other way.

In further defense of his third premise, Schellenberg argues that inculpable doubt receives extra support when the issue is controversial and

there is disagreement among experts (1993, p. 68). A critical thinker would recognize that, where widespread agreement among experts has not been achieved, there is likely something to commend both sides. And so, Schellenberg claims that his investigation of inculpable doubt supports the conclusion that thorough investigation of God's existence leads, in some cases, to nonbelief.

Thus, Schellenberg believes he has established his third premise:

(S3) Nonresistant nonbelief does actually occur. (1993, p. 83)

From (S3), it follows that,

(S4) God is not perfectly loving. (1993, p. 83)

Finally, (S1) taken together with (S4) leads to the conclusion that,

(S5) God does not exist. (1993, p. 83)

For ease of reference, here is the whole argument formally stated:

(S1) If God exists, then he is perfectly loving.

(S2) If a perfectly loving God exists, then nonresistant nonbelief does not occur.

(S3) Nonresistant nonbelief does actually occur.

(S4) God is not perfectly loving.

(S5) God does not exist. (1993, p. 83)

Schellenberg's argument is valid and he makes clear that he thinks that the argument's soundness depends on (S2). There have been attempts to challenge (S3) as well, however, and in the following chapter, I will begin by surveying these responses, as well as Schellenberg's replies. I will then set out the most common responses to (S2), and Schellenberg's general response to all of them—

his 'accommodationist strategy'. I will then propose a new strategy for responding to Schellenberg's argument that focuses on (S1) in an attempt to undercut this strategy.

2. Challenging the Argument

Most responses to Schellenberg's argument from hiddenness have focused on (S2). In Section II of this chapter, I will discuss these. First, however, I will set out the arguments against (S3) advanced by Douglas Henry (2001) and Robert Lehe (2004), along with Schellenberg's reply (2005c) to these arguments.

I. Challenging (S3) - There is No Reasonable/Inculpable/Nonresistant Nonbelief

Henry argues that Schellenberg's defense of (S3) is mainly that 1) it seems obvious that there are some individuals who earnestly and honestly seek God but cannot find evidence sufficient for belief in him, and 2) many theologians and most of his contemporaries concede its truth (p. 77). Henry and Lehe both point out, however, that the Bible clearly denies (S3) in passages such as Romans 1:19-20, Proverbs 8:17, and Jeremiah 29:13.¹² For (S3) to be plausible, it must be the case that at least some who fail to believe do so of no fault, intellectual or spiritual, of their own.

i. Henry

As noted above, Schellenberg believes that there are nonbelievers who have thoroughly investigated whether God exists, according to the standards set out

¹² ESV, Rom 1:19-20: "For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse."

ESV, Prov 8:17: "I love those who love me, and those who seek me diligently find me."

ESV, Jer 29:13: "You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart."

by Swinburne (above), and who are inculpable for their nonbelief. Henry argues, however, that in order to support this claim, Schellenberg needs to provide an example of at least one nonbeliever in the history of the world who did his due diligence and came up lacking. Such an example, Henry argues, is harder to find than one might expect, given what is required for a proper investigation, and given what is required for judging the adequacy of an investigation (p. 79). Henry thinks that the number of reasonable nonbelievers is likely to be small, since meaningful investigation into the existence of God generally being “the exception rather than the rule” (p. 80). He points out that although many recognize that they have unexamined beliefs, few are willing to invest the hard work, time, and education necessary to adequately examine their collection of beliefs. What’s more, confirming that adequate investigation has taken place is an extremely difficult task, and the bigger problem of how to accurately judge whether a person’s investigation was sufficiently thorough severely weakens Schellenberg’s support for the claim that reasonable nonbelief occurs. Although, as shown above, Schellenberg does provide a criterion for how we might be able to judge someone’s investigation, Henry notes that all of the qualities (and combinations thereof) that S must exhibit in order for her investigation to be judged as adequate can be “both deceptively and self-deceptively instantiated, i.e., not instantiated at all” (p. 81). Further, although the degree to which each of these qualities must be present is unspecified, it seems safe to suggest that it must be fairly high, further reducing the number of people falling into the class of reasonable nonbelievers.

Still further, these very qualities make the likelihood of this kind of person choosing a parity belief extremely small; a person possessing these qualities, it seems fair to assert, would never consider the matter settled (p. 81). Therefore, Henry believes that he has shown that (S3) is improbable, since he thinks that no person can be shown to have satisfied the conditions Schellenberg sets forth for nonresistant nonbelievers.

ii. Lehe

Unlike Henry, Lehe grants Schellenberg's claim that an investigation may justifiably be deemed intellectually adequate. He argues, however, that even if someone conducts this investigation, has a desire for truth, and is in a position of earnestly seeking a loving God who offers salvation, he may still, out of moral/spiritual deficiency, be resistant to a God who demands obedience, commitment, and spiritual transformation. Lehe argues that Schellenberg seems to believe that inculpable nonbelief is arrived at through investigation from a merely intellectual criterion of adequacy, when in fact:

...the very possibility that one's lack of sufficient evidence to affirm God's existence, despite intellectual diligence, may be due to one's own spiritual and moral deficiencies,¹³ should make one reluctant to insist upon one's own inculpability and argue for atheism on the basis of it. (p. 170)

¹³ Paul Moser (2002) takes up this theme in earnest, referring to the idea that one's own spiritual and moral deficiencies may impede belief in God despite intellectual diligence as 'cognitive idolatry'.

Lehe claims that, while Schellenberg has argued that there do exist morally virtuous nonbelievers, it does not follow that their lack of belief is not due to spiritual deficiency. Indeed, Lehe argues, according to Christian doctrine, no one is virtuous enough to avoid the kinds of spiritual deficiencies that render us resistant to *belief in* God. Lehe notes that one might be justified in claiming that his nonbelief is inculpable if he were *certain* he was free from bias or self-deception with regards to religious commitment; however, the more intellectually honest the person is, the less likely he is to claim freedom from such bias or self-deception:

Those who come closest to inculpability would be the least likely to claim it. Therefore, it is difficult for the nonbeliever to be justified in asserting her own epistemic inculpability and especially difficult to be sufficiently confident of it to infer that there is no God. (Lehe, p. 170)

Lehe concludes that since Schellenberg fails to sufficiently account for the possibility of moral/spiritual deficiencies and the force of their influence on an investigation into the existence of God, (S3) is not adequately defended and so Schellenberg's argument for hiddenness fails.¹⁴

¹⁴ In fact, far from being an argument for atheism, Lehe thinks that divine hiddenness:

...is indeed exactly what we should expect to find about God if what the Christian tradition says of God is true. Within the resources of that tradition we can find reasons why God would not make his existence more obvious than it is and reasons for denying that anyone is completely inculpable in failing to find sufficient evidence to believe that God exists. (p. 173)

iii. Schellenberg's Reply to Henry and Lehe

Schellenberg (2005c) replies to both Henry and Lehe by first alleging that a moment's consideration of certain instances of nonbelief—the non-Western individual who has never, culpably or otherwise, even had the opportunity to consider the theistic idea in question, for example—suffices to show not only that their arguments against (S3) are unsuccessful, but also that (S3) is true. He argues that even if Henry's and Lehe's arguments are correct, they have no bearing on general nonbelief—only on a very specific form of reflective doubt. This, he says, is enough to show that, insofar as they attempt to undermine support for (S3), they are unsuccessful (2005c, p. 331).

Second, Schellenberg argues that the manner in which Henry and Lehe employ the concept of self-deception as applied to a doubter's honest investigation allows for involuntary self-deception. He argues that both Henry and Lehe seem to believe that we cannot reasonably claim to know that even an honest doubter who has conducted rigorous investigation concerning theistic belief is not operating under self-deception. However, Schellenberg argues that, even if that is so, such involuntary and undetectable self-deception would not be the fault of the doubter, and so she would not be culpable. Says Schellenberg:

...for if an individual at no point makes an intentional contribution (which entails awareness of what is done) to her neglectful state, how is it something *she* has done, and how can she be blamed for it?" (2005c, p. 332)

Third, Schellenberg claims that Henry and Lehe have misunderstood the grounds for his understanding of ‘reasonable’ and ‘unreasonable’ as being derived from an “independently motivated internalist epistemology” (2005c, p. 331). Schellenberg corrects this alleged error by noting that his understanding of reasonableness is rooted in reflection upon God’s perfect love. Schellenberg clarifies that if God is perfectly loving, then all who are not resistant to the belief that he exists will find themselves with causally sufficient evidence for belief. If there is even one instance of failure to believe in God that is not due to active resistance to causally sufficient evidence for belief, then it follows, Schellenberg argues, that nonbelief in any form that is inculpable—unreflective, reflective, doubt, or disbelief—is deeply problematic for those who affirm that a perfectly loving God exists. Schellenberg contends that both Henry and Lehe fail to appreciate his understanding of reasonableness, resulting in their focusing merely on doubt and the suffering that comes from it.

Schellenberg’s replies are strong, and indeed, most contributors to this literature grant Schellenberg’s (S3). Let us now turn to arguments against (S2).

II. Challenging (S2) - Hiddenness is Justified by Greater Goods

Schellenberg has made clear that the success or failure of his argument hinges on (S2), noting that showing the plausibility¹⁵ of (S2)’s denial would be

¹⁵ Schellenberg defines plausible as follows: “‘p is plausible’ = df. ‘p is such that there is at least as much reason to suppose it true as to suppose it false’” (1993, p. 84).

sufficient to successfully defeat his argument (1993, p. 84). He provides a criterion for establishing the plausibility of (S2)'s denial:

[(S2)] is false if and 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 reasonable nonbelief, for the sake of which God would be willing to sacrifice the good of belief and all it entails. (1993, p. 85f)

Many opponents argue that divine hiddenness *is* justified by some 'greater good(s)'—some state of affairs that God (allegedly) rightly prioritizes over the good of preventing nonresistant nonbelief. In this section, I present three greater goods responses to the hiddenness argument, and, although Schellenberg does address each of these responses independently,¹⁶ I will show that he thinks he can resist all greater goods responses by appealing to the combination of God's perfect love and infinite resources.

i. God Hides in Order to Preserve Morally Significant Human Freedom

According to Swinburne (1998), God hides so that we can freely choose to do good. He argues that if God were not hidden, then our desire for approval (by good people and God) along with our expectation that life does not end at bodily death, coupled with the expectation that God will not reward evildoers with a good afterlife, will compromise the freedom of our moral choices. We

¹⁶ Since they are not relevant to my overall goal, I will neither survey nor evaluate Schellenberg's specific replies to each of these greater goods responses. For Schellenberg's specific responses to each, see (1993, pp. 116–130, 191–199), (2007b, pp. 210–213), and (1996, pp. 455–462).

would always choose the good because we would know that doing so is always in our best interest. Swinburne puts it this way:

...we will be in the situation of the child in the nursery who knows that mother is looking in at the door, and for whom, in view of the child's desire for mother's approval, the temptation to wrongdoing is simply overborne. We need 'epistemic distance' in order to have free choice between good and evil. (1998, p. 206)¹⁷

ii. God Hides So that Humans Can Come to Knowledge of God on Their Own

The Responsibility Argument

Swinburne (2004) also defends what has come to be called the Responsibility Argument as a response to Schellenberg's hiddenness argument. Swinburne argues that one good that comes from nonresistant nonbelief is that religious believers can freely accept the responsibility to cooperate with God in bringing nonbelievers into relationship with him.¹⁸ Swinburne considers this to be a good for two reasons. First, the believer has the privilege of helping the nonbeliever come to theistic belief through relaying his own religious experiences and guiding the nonbeliever's investigation. Second, the nonbeliever is able to commit more seriously to the good once he discovers that

¹⁷ John Hick (1970, 1983a, 1983b, and 1989) develops this idea in several works.

¹⁸ Travis Dumsday (2010, pp. 363-367) reformulates the Responsibility Argument to say that God does not put the responsibility on us, but rather that he cooperates with us in friendship, allowing us to achieve the good of friendship with God while also accomplishing his goals. In this sense, God does not sacrifice the highest good for humanity in lieu of some lesser good, but shares the responsibility and cooperates with us to bestow it.

God exists, rather than if God's presence had been obvious¹⁹ (Swinburne, 2004, p. 271). Of course, these benefits could not be achieved in a world in which God's existence was perfectly evident to all (inculpable) individuals. If this line of reasoning is correct, then Swinburne has discovered a great good for the sake of which God hides.

Freedom to Discover God

According to Swinburne (1998), belief given by God of his existence not only removes our ability to choose between good and evil, but also removes our ability to freely investigate the question of God's existence (for there would be no such question if his existence was beyond doubt). Our ability to freely act for ourselves is a good, and so freely acting in such a way as to attempt to discover the truth about God's existence would be a great good. Greater still, argues Swinburne, is finding the answer; but in order to come to knowledge, one must first be ignorant of it. Swinburne states: "in this situation of ignorance there will be the possibility of seeking and obtaining not merely theoretical knowledge but the deep friendship with God which is such a good thing" (1998, p. 210f). Therefore, God hides so that the great good of coming into relationship with him through our own discovery that he exists is made possible. Swinburne also argues that cooperation among humans to seek a good increases its goodness; if this is the case, it stands to reason that there

¹⁹ It would, of course, follow that religious believers must have theistic belief whether by experience or argument so that they can be in a position to help nonbelievers. Also, nonresistant nonbelief must occur so as to provide the believer with the good of helping them to believe (Swinburne, 2004, p. 271).

should be many people over time who reasonably don't believe so that the great good of working together to find God can be realized.

iii. God Hides for the Sake of a Later, Better Relationship

Daniel Howard-Snyder (1996) begins by looking at the ways in which nonresistant nonbelievers might respond to God once they have discovered that he exists. He asks this question to frame his project:

For each of the possible responses to God, why might He refrain, for a time, from entering into a personal relationship with an inculpable nonbeliever who is disposed to respond in that way upon coming to theistic belief? (1996, p. 440)

He first considers the person strongly disposed to reject a relationship with God through no fault of her own, suggesting that God might, for a time, refrain from making his existence known to her. After all, she would reject God if she finds out that he exists, and rejecting him would not be good for her. Thus he leaves her in her nonbelief for a time, since, as Howard-Snyder suggests, "God's failure to supply reasonable grounds for [her] to believe that He exists would be an act of mercy, a gracious response to one in such an unfortunate state" (1996, p. 441).²⁰

Next, he considers the nonresistant nonbeliever who is disposed to react indifferently to knowledge of God's existence, neither rejecting nor embracing relationship with him. For Howard-Snyder, the same reason given for the ill-

²⁰ Dumsday (2012) develops this in further detail.

disposed above can be given for this class of nonresistant nonbeliever (1996, p. 442).

Finally, he considers the nonresistant nonbeliever who is strongly disposed to react well to knowledge of God's existence. God might refrain even in this case from making his existence known to her, since, although she may be strongly disposed to respond lovingly toward God once she believes he exists, this may be a worse state of affairs than one in which she had examined her disposition in the face of other contrary dispositions and decided to act on that disposition to love God. The explicit affirmation of her disposition allows it to move from something possibly unexamined, perhaps even involuntary, to one that she can "own" for herself. This is something we might expect a loving God to want from those he loves—that they come to love him of their own accord—and a *prima facie* reason for believing that God would permit a nonresistant nonbeliever to inculpably fail to believe for a time that he exists (1996, p. 443).

Howard-Snyder suggests that since we know of no other considerations that would compromise what we expect God's perfect love to be like if he allowed nonresistant nonbelief for the sake of those goods, we can think of *prima facie* reasons for God to allow, for a time, nonresistant nonbelief in those who are disposed to reject him, those who are indifferent to him, and even those who are disposed to accept him. Therefore, he concludes that we should doubt the truth of the claim that God has no good reason for allowing inculpable nonbelief.

As I have shown, many opponents of the hiddenness argument have proposed various greater goods for the sake of which God hides. Although Schellenberg does address most of these responses independently in the literature, their relative successfulness is a matter of on-going discussion. Be that as it may, Schellenberg believes that he has also devised a strategy that can defeat all greater goods responses. I now set out this strategy.

iv. Schellenberg's Accommodationist Strategy

In response to all greater goods responses, Schellenberg puts forward his 'accommodationist strategy' which, he believes, shows "how goods emphasized by the critic can be accommodated within divine-human relationship, and so would not be viewed by a loving God as providing reasons for leaving us without it" (2005b, p. 287). Schellenberg states that if the most fundamental spiritual reality is a personal, perfectly loving God, then all spiritual growth and maturity must be derived from personal relationship with God. And, if this personal God really is inexhaustible in all great-making properties (as he surely must be to be God), then personal relationship with God would be the greatest good any human could ever have (1993, p.18). Schellenberg then claims that a perfectly loving God could not possibly prefer to actualize any other good if it meant withholding the greatest of all possible goods. Further, given God's infinite resources, he could 'accommodate' all the goods that are defended as being sufficient to justify God's hiddenness; they can be facilitated *within* personal relationship with God:

Infinite resourcefulness, as even we finite beings can see, would provide many ways for a perfectly loving God to make divine-human relationship a genuine possibility at all times without failing to meet the dominant concern of any of the reasons for God to remain withdrawn that have been advanced, or seem likely to be advanced. (2005b, 288)

For example, let us apply the accommodationist strategy to the greater good of 'Freedom to Discover God' explained above (Section 2.II.ii). Swinburne (1998) believes that the pursuit of the truth whether God exists is of great value, and is something that could not be experienced were God to place his existence beyond reasonable doubt. Under the accommodationist strategy, however, Schellenberg points out that God is infinite, and new truths about God can be sought and found forever, even after making the basic truth of his existence obvious. In fact, Schellenberg argues, starting out with the knowledge that God does exist makes the pursuit of more knowledge about him all the more enriching:

...there would appear to be a rather large number of intellectual attainments (and indeed no end to their number) at least as great as that of discovering that God exists which it must be open to us to pursue even if we have achieved knowledge of that proposition. Indeed, these particular attainments are possible only if we have discovered that God exists. (2005b, p. 292)

Schellenberg believes that, although this argument might need to be tailored to each greater good, the overall strategy successfully handles any greater goods defenses. He warns that some contemporary philosophers place too high a value on responsibility, freedom, and other proposed greater goods, and argues that they should instead maintain a balanced view of those goods along with the expectation that an unsurpassably great, personal, and perfectly loving God would surely realize those goods along with sufficient evidence of his existence and his loving nature. He concludes that since a perfectly loving God has no good reason to withhold himself from those who don't currently enjoy personal relationship with him, critics who employ a greater goods argument must show that, whatever the good, it must be the case that God could not realize that good while also engaging in personal relationship with all human beings capable of and not resistant to it. He claims, however, that the prospect of finding such a good is not bright, since "an omnipotent God could (and a perfectly loving God would) bring it about without permitting the occurrence of reasonable nonbelief" (1993, p. 85n3). Instead, Schellenberg recommends that critics "think 'outside the circle' and... seek criticisms much more subtle and sophisticated—and more attentive to the actual structure and content of that argument—than any we have seen to date" (2005b, p. 302). My intention in what follows is to follow Schellenberg's recommendation and consider a different approach, focusing on (S1) instead of (S2) or (S3), as outlined in the following section.

III. A New (Borrowed) Approach

I have shown thus far that Schellenberg's argument rests heavily on the claim that God is 'perfectly loving'. He is correct to say that this assumption is widely-held, and this is evidenced by the fact that, as I have shown, critics generally accept (S1) and choose to attack either (S2) or (S3). The general structure of Schellenberg's argument mirrors a similar argument for atheism discussed by Nagasawa (2008). Nagasawa highlights the fact that perfect being theologians (whom he refers to as Anselmian theists) typically assert the OmniGod thesis: God is an omnipotent, omniscient, omnibenevolent being, or, 'omniprfect' (Nagasawa, p. 537). He shows that many critics have devised arguments for atheism by attempting to show that God cannot be either omnipotent, omniscient, omnibenevolent, or some combination of these divine attributes for some reason. Those who reply to these arguments, attempt to explain away these reasons. Nagasawa argues, however, that the original assumption—that God is omniprfect—should instead be reconsidered, and that if it could be weakened, then arguments which focus on reasons why an omniprfect being couldn't exist would be undercut (p. 582).

Likewise, Schellenberg's argument gives a reason (the occurrence of non-resistant nonbelief) for believing that the claim that God is perfectly loving is false, and his critics, as I have shown, focus on explaining away that reason (by challenging either (S2) or (S3)). But, just as Nagasawa challenges the assumption that God is omniprfect, I believe that if the original assumption—that perfect love entails infinite love—underlying (S1) of Schellenberg's

argument were to be successfully challenged, it might be the case that Schellenberg's argument would fail. Or, at least, Schellenberg's accommodationist strategy, which relies on the assumption that God is infinitely loving, would be dismantled, and all greater goods arguments would need to be reconsidered on their own merit.

As discussed in Chapter 1, Schellenberg is imprecise about what he means by perfectly loving. Is God's love infinite? Unsurpassable? Ultimate? These are all questions that need to be answered in order to further our understanding of the nature of divine love, and to decide whether (S1), if interpreted differently, would still support Schellenberg's argument. In the following two chapters, I will turn to two recent discussions by Rea (2009) and Jordan (2012) about the nature of God's love. While their arguments both intend to target (S2), and, as I will show, both ultimately fail, the insights they provide will nevertheless serve to aid in clarifying the nature of divine love, and determining what implications, if any, there are for Schellenberg's argument.

3. Rea: Challenging What Divine Love Requires

Rea (2009) advances an argument that, he believes, shows that divine love is not—contra Schellenberg—incompatible with divine hiddenness. Instead of saying that God permits a bad thing—hiddenness—in order to allow some greater good for humans to obtain, Rea suggests that God’s hiddenness may itself be a great good—a divine good—that does not require justification, so long as God still provides some way for humans to find him. As I summarize and evaluate Rea’s response to the hiddenness argument, I will consider criticisms made by Ross Parker (2014) and modify Rea’s argument accordingly, since Parker’s proposed revisions make Rea’s argument clearer and bring his most important claims to the fore. I will then evaluate how, if at all, Rea’s insights into divine love can be brought to bear against the divine hiddenness argument.

I. Rea’s Argument

Before setting out his response, Rea provides his own formulation of the divine hiddenness argument.²¹ He begins with the following claim:

(P1) God has allowed himself to remain hidden from many people. (2009, p. 76)

In support of (P1), he takes for granted the following theses:

²¹ Instead of framing the debate as an argument for atheism, Rea turns it into a puzzle for theists. The only substantial difference is that Rea considers believers as well as nonbelievers in his response. Since, however, my concern is solely how Rea’s response bears on Schellenberg’s argument, and believers are not relevant to it, I will focus only on his attempt to solve the problem for nonbelievers.

INCONCLUSIVE EVIDENCE: For many people, the available a priori and empirical evidence in support of God's existence is inconclusive: one can be fully aware of it and at the same time rationally believe that God does not exist.

ABSENCE OF RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE: Many people—believers and unbelievers alike—have never had an experience that seems to them to be a direct experience or awareness of the love or presence of God; and those who do have such experiences have them rarely. (2009, p. 76)

Rea claims that (P1) appears to be inconsistent with the following thesis that is widely agreed-upon by all major theistic traditions:

DIVINE CONCERN: God strongly desires to promote the well-being of all of his rational creatures, both now and in the afterlife. (2009, p. 77)²²

The inconsistency seems to lie in the fact that, while most proponents of DIVINE CONCERN agree that belief in God is essential to the present and future well-being of humans, given (P1), it seems that God is doing far less than he could (assuming that he is omnipotent and omniscient) to promote rational theistic belief, and thus less than he could to promote the well-being of humans. Based

²² It is puzzling that Rea chooses to include the conjunct "in the afterlife" in this principle since the principle becomes harder to justify as a result. If Rea were to rephrase it as a disjunct, i.e. "either now or in the afterlife", all he would have to show is that God seeks to promote our well-being in this earthly life or in the afterlife, if not in both. Schellenberg would, however, likely reply that since perfect love involves the seeking of personal relationship at all times that humans are so capable, then God, if perfectly loving, must seek relationship with all capable humans in this earthly life (1993, p. 25). That, of course, would preclude the possibility that perfect love only requires that he seek our well-being in the afterlife.

on the foregoing considerations, Rea formulates the divine hiddenness argument as follows:

- (P1) God has allowed himself to remain hidden from many people.
- (P2) It would be bad for an omnipotent, omniscient God to remain hidden from anyone.
- (P3) God, being perfectly good, cannot do anything that is bad. (2009, p. 76)

Parker, however, suggests a clarification for (P1) and (P2). First, he makes explicit what Rea means by 'hidden': INCONCLUSIVE EVIDENCE and ABSENCE OF RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE are true (Parker, 2014, p. 120). Next, he makes clear that, as stated, Rea's definition of divine hiddenness is inadequate; for God to be hidden from an individual, INCONCLUSIVE EVIDENCE and ABSENCE OF RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE must *both* be instantiated in an individual simultaneously, not simply one or the other:

For many people, their available a priori and empirical evidence in support of God's existence is inconclusive (they can be fully aware of it and at the same time rationally believe that God does not exist), and they have never had an experience that seems to them to be a direct experience or awareness of the love or presence of God. (2014, p. 126)

To make this distinction clear, Parker uses "INCONCLUSIVE EVIDENCE & ABSENCE OF RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE" (2014, p. 126). I will use Parker's reformulation throughout:

(P1) God has allowed INCONCLUSIVE EVIDENCE & ABSENCE OF RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE.

(P2) It would be bad for an omnipotent, omniscient God to allow INCONCLUSIVE EVIDENCE & ABSENCE OF RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE.

(P3) God, being perfectly good, cannot do anything that is bad. (2014, p. 127)

Most responses to the problem of divine hiddenness have focused on offering reasons for the sake of which God hides—God-justifying goods that he rightly prioritizes over the well-being of humans. While in greater goods arguments, then, God’s revealing himself is a good which he withholds in order to allow some greater good to obtain (presumably justifying hiddenness), what Rea proposes is that God’s hiddenness requires no justification because it is *itself* a good. The problem of divine hiddenness, he argues, persists only “if we suppose that divine hiddenness does not promote any good the promotion of which would justify God in permitting what bad things come from divine hiddenness” (2009, p. 77). He notes that the majority of the literature on hiddenness has predictably focused on attempts to identify such God-justifying goods, and that the presumption has been that such goods are *human* goods, such as free will, character development, and/or spiritual maturity, or the prevention of greater human evil, as opposed to *divine* goods. Rea argues that this focus is at least partly motivated by the following general principle:

BENEFIT TO THE SUFFERER: God is justified in allowing undeserved suffering to come to an individual X for the sake of greater goods only if among those greater goods are goods that benefit X. (2009, p. 78)

Rea makes clear that if BENEFIT TO THE SUFFERER is true, then human goods have to feature among the goods that justify God's hiddenness. However, he proposes a response to the problem of divine hiddenness that, he claims, avoids BENEFIT TO THE SUFFERER—a response which suggests that God's hiddenness is the result of the expression of his personality which is, according to Rea, a divine good. Rea argues that this claim is consistent with the following thesis:

NO HUMAN GOOD: It is not the case that God permits INCONCLUSIVE EVIDENCE [&] ABSENCE OF RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE in order to secure human goods. (2009, p. 78)

Rea points out that NO HUMAN GOOD is consistent with (P1) if God hides to promote some greater good(s), and yet, it is also consistent with the claim that God's hiddenness actually promotes human goods, even if those goods are not 'greater' or God-justifying goods. According to Rea, NO HUMAN GOOD rules out the idea that whatever human goods are promoted by divine hiddenness, they are the goods for the sake of which God hides. So, he argues that even if NO HUMAN GOOD is true, divine hiddenness is not incompatible with DIVINE CONCERN. His argument involves three central claims. In what follows, I will lay out his defense of each in turn, as well as Parker's suggestions for strengthening them.

i. Rea's First Central Claim

Rea begins by challenging the following biconditional which, he thinks, is largely taken for granted in the literature on divine hiddenness:

God is hidden \leftrightarrow God permits INCONCLUSIVE EVIDENCE [&] ABSENCE OF RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE to obtain. (2009, p. 78)

It is generally accepted in the literature that if God permits INCONCLUSIVE EVIDENCE & ABSENCE OF RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE, then he is hidden since, if God did not permit INCONCLUSIVE EVIDENCE, then evidence for God would be beyond reasonable doubt and God would not be hidden; likewise, if ABSENCE OF RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE were false, then most humans would have private evidence for God's existence, and so he would not be hidden. Rea argues, however, that the reverse is not true: INCONCLUSIVE EVIDENCE & ABSENCE OF RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE can obtain without God being considered hidden. He attempts to show this by way of example. Suppose, he says, that Jones parked a car in your driveway, in plain sight, but your eyes are closed, so you cannot see it. Suppose further that Jones knew that your eyes would be closed such that you would not see the car. At no point in this scenario, says Rea, should we be tempted to suggest that the car is *hidden* from you. Rea asks us to then suppose that there is something that all humans could do to 'open their eyes', so to speak, such that we would begin to perceive evidence and experiences sufficient for belief in God. If most humans, as a matter of fact, have not 'opened their eyes' in this way, then even if INCONCLUSIVE EVIDENCE & ABSENCE OF RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE is true (indeed, true in virtue of being permitted by

God), it doesn't seem that there is any reason to say that God is hidden (2009, p. 78).²³

So Rea suggests that God may not be 'hidden' in the sense that he is not intentionally concealing himself from humans so that they cannot reasonably be expected to find him, but rather that God is '*silent*' (2009, p. 80). God, Rea argues, is clearly not making a special effort to make certain that most humans are presented with evidence sufficient for belief; and yet, it does not follow that God is totally silent since INCONCLUSIVE EVIDENCE & ABSENCE OF RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE is compatible with God making himself known through special revelation.²⁴ Thus, Rea's first claim:

(R1) INCONCLUSIVE EVIDENCE & ABSENCE OF RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE are better thought of as constituting divine *silence* rather than divine *hiddenness*.
(2009, p. 80)

We may nevertheless be inclined to wonder how this can be compatible with divine love. Schellenberg would surely object that reflection on the fact that God is perfectly loving should cause us to think that God's bias for divine-human relationship, coupled with his deep desire to promote our well-being, would ensure that *no capable person for any length of time* would ever find

²³ Rea seems to be opening up space here for someone to deny that there is inculpable nonbelief, assuming that the (analogical) closed eyes are culpably closed. As we have seen, however, through our survey of Henry (2001) and Lehe (2004), such attempts have been less than successful.

²⁴ Of course, we have reason to believe that divine silence indicates lack of DIVINE CONCERN if God has not, in fact, provided some way for humans to access him despite his silence. I will later show, however, that Rea believes he shows that God *has* provided ways for humans to experience his presence in the midst of his silence.

themselves in doubt about God's existence. Indeed, in this respect, he refers to God's love as being "unlimited" (1993, p. 26), and believes we ought to "see how natural it is to affirm that all capable creatures would at all times have available to them *some* form of conscious awareness of God, if there were a God" (2007b, p. 201).

Rea, however, does not believe that God's love is compromised. He argues that God's silence may simply be an outworking of the divine personality; that is, expression of God's personality may be an intrinsic good which he rightly prioritizes over his bias for divine-human relationship. Perhaps, suggests Rea, "God might have a genuine, robust personality, and that it might be *deeply good* for God to live out his own personality" (2009, p. 86). If we grant that it is deeply good for God to live out his personality and that he is a complex person with complicated motives, then "even straightforward utilitarian calculations *might* rule in favor of God's persisting in silence despite the suffering that it causes (provided God is behaving compassionately toward his creatures in other ways, and so on)" (2009, p. 86). So Rea argues that if divine silence results from God's personality, then it might plausibly be considered intrinsically good or instrumentally good in virtue of God's expressing his perfectly good and beautiful divine personality (2009, p. 86). As such, he believes that divine silence would not only be compatible with, but expected of, a perfectly loving God.

At this point however, I would note that, although Rea claims that 'silence' needs no justification since it is either good in itself or instrumentally,

he does admit that God's hiddenness results in some human suffering. Thus it seems that justification for God's hiddenness is still required. This, however, means that Rea's argument is ultimately a greater goods argument since he is proposing a good (either hiddenness which is itself a good, or the good of expressing the divine personality which results in hiddenness) for the sake of which God hides. Parker picks up on this as well, and works it into his reformulation of (R1). Further, he believes that Rea's claim that God's expressing his personality is a great good is crucial to his argument, and yet, perplexingly, it does not explicitly feature among Rea's central claims. Parker thus discards (R1), offering this replacement:

(R1*) The good of divine acts which express God's personality justifies divine silence (making Rea's greater good account compatible with NO HUMAN GOOD). (2014, p. 121)

Parker notes that, although Rea intends to "defend a response to the problem of divine hiddenness that is consistent with [NO HUMAN GOOD]" (Parker, 2014, p. 132), he does not actually provide an argument in support of his God-justifying good or even suggest that his account is plausible. I will show in what follows, however, that although Rea doesn't consider his argument to need the same type of defense as a greater goods argument would, Rea does attempt at least to *address* the suffering that results from God's hiddenness—he simply does not consider God's silence to be a good which *justifies* it, as Parker suggests he ought.

Addressing Suffering from Hiddenness

In an attempt to address the suffering resulting from hiddenness, Rea cites Mother Theresa as an example of a believer who was greatly troubled by God's silence and so questioned his love for her (2009, p. 81). Indeed, Rea notes that many believers suffer in much the same way, feeling abandoned, unloved, and greatly despairing as a result of what seems to them to be a maddeningly silent God. How can a compassionate God, perfect in love, treat his creatures this way? Rea suggests that although it may be natural to question the compatibility of divine hiddenness and DIVINE CONCERN for this reason, further consideration should lead us to realize that we are missing a substantial amount of background information regarding how a divine person would interact with human persons. Just as human behavior can often be interpreted in many possible ways for various reasons, likewise, God's silence can be interpreted in many ways since:

...it depends on a particular interpretation of behavior that can in fact be interpreted in any of a number of different ways, depending upon what assumptions we make about the person's beliefs, desires, motives, dispositions, and overall personality. (2009, p. 82)

Since so much information is required in order to interpret human behavior, Rea suggests that it is absurd to think that we can, with any degree of reliability, interpret the behavior of God—a transcendent, divine person.

In response, Parker first argues that although we may need substantial information about a person in order to give a *specific* interpretation of her

behavior, we can reasonably make general interpretations of a person's actions based on partial information about her. Indeed, Parker claims, no matter how little one knows about a person, "actions that are hurtful or undermine another's well being are not loving, unless we have a reason to think that the action (though undermining my well being) is necessary for a good purpose" (2014, p. 129). So Parker argues that the proponent of the argument from divine hiddenness believes she can reasonably take God's silence to be more clearly incompatible with DIVINE CONCERN than Rea suggests.

Parker's claim regarding actions that "are hurtful" seems a bit hasty; an act can be loving even if the person being hurt doesn't understand that it is loving. This can be shown through a parental example: when I punish my child, she may feel hurt and experience suffering, but, regardless of her perceptions, it is still loving on my part since it promotes her well-being. Whether or not my child understands my reasoning does not render the action more or less loving. Thus, just because an action may be hurtful, this does not necessarily mean that it is not loving.²⁵ So, while I argue that the first disjunct of Parker's claim is false, the second—that actions which "undermine another's well being" are not loving—is quite right. Indeed, if one can show that God's hiddenness actually undermines our well-being, then there would be a strong

²⁵ This is similar to Rowe's Inference, which states: "Premise: All possible reasons examined for allowing E so far have turned out to be insufficient to justify God permitting them. Conclusion: There is no justification for E" (Dougherty, 2014, p. 4). This, however, is what has come to be called a 'Noseeum Inference', which fails because "absence of evidence is not always evidence of absence. Some entities are such that their presence is expected to be detected, others their presence is not expected to be detected" (Dougherty, 2014, p. 4).

case against DIVINE CONCERN. It seems, however, that no one, including Parker, has yet succeeded in showing this.

Second, Parker argues that while it is true that there is much we do not know about God, even Rea agrees that we do know something very important about God's personality—DIVINE CONCERN. Divine silence must be interpreted in light of the truth that, if God exists, he seeks to promote our well-being, and if divine silence does not appear to promote our well-being, we have some reason for thinking that it is not compatible with DIVINE CONCERN. Parker argues that since we have reason to think that divine silence is a bad state of affairs, the opponent of the hiddenness argument needs to provide a reason to think that it promotes a good which would justify God in allowing the suffering that results from it.²⁶

Beyond the idea that our suffering may be due to a misinterpretation of God's silence, Rea notes that it may also be a result of our own immaturity, epistemic or moral vices, or dysfunctional way of relating to others. In such cases—that is, cases of “unreasonable suffering”—Rea notes that, if so, it is *our* responsibility to change in some way in order to end the suffering rather than that of the person engaging in the behavior that is causing us to suffer (2009, p. 84). In fact, Rea suggests that in these cases, we can actually benefit from the other person's persisting in the painful behavior as it might, for example,

²⁶ Here, Parker appears to be shifting the burden of proof back to Rea. It is debatable whether the proponent of the hiddenness argument must show that God's hiddenness undermines our well-being, or if the opponent must provide some greater good which justifies it.

teach us how to relate to others in a more mature, less dysfunctional way. Further, if we are in fact unreasonably suffering because of God's silence, then even if there is no potential benefit, he is still justified in persisting in this behavior, for otherwise, we would have to deny that someone can be unreasonably pained by another's behavior, which, for Rea, seems obviously false (2009, p. 83). Therefore, Rea suggests that believers who suffer as a result of God's silence are suffering, not because DIVINE CONCERN is false, but because of their own immaturity or dysfunction, misunderstanding that his silence "might just be a reflection of God's personality, so to speak" (2009, p. 83).

Schellenberg may object that if human suffering resulting from God's silence is due to human moral/epistemic vices or deficiencies, then it is likely that at least some people who suffer in this way nevertheless do so inculpably. It seems plausible to suggest, he might say, that some people are not responsible for their deficiencies; that they are inherited or the result of conditioning by external forces over which they have no control. Indeed, Schellenberg argues that one of the benefits of God entering into explicit, reciprocal relationship with humans is help with human moral deficiencies:

It seems clear that explicit relationship with a perfectly loving God would have a certain moral influence and make available certain resources for dealing with the moral weakness endemic to humanity; and few would deny that, were we to become ethically stronger in this way, our well-being would be enhanced. (1993, p. 19)

Thus, it seems implausible to suggest that humans should be held responsible for misrelating to God as a result of moral deficiencies for which they may not be culpable.

I think this potential reply by Schellenberg seems fair, and indeed, Rea acknowledges that his claim prompts the crucial question of whether it is really plausible to suppose that all of the suffering that results from divine silence is caused by our own immaturity or dysfunction for which we are ultimately morally responsible to overcome. I have already discussed the fact (see Section 2.I.iii) that it is generally agreed that challenging the culpability of every non-resistant non-believer has been a heretofore unsuccessful strategy. In what follows, however, I will show that Rea attempts to sidestep this issue through the development of his second central claim.

ii. Rea's Second Central Claim

Rea notes that the question whether we are ultimately responsible for overcoming our own hiddenness-related suffering must be considered in light of the two assumptions we are granting for the sake of the view: 1) if God exists, then God is perfectly good, and, 2) if God exists, he is not silent for the sake of greater goods or the prevention of comparable or worse evils (2009, p. 87). From this, Rea lists the alternatives on hand: (a) his thesis is true, (b) God does not exist, or (c) some alternative thesis consistent with Rea's assumptions is true (2009, p. 87). Option (a) carries with it the supposition that all religious believers who suffer because of divine silence also suffer from cognitive and

emotional dysfunction.²⁷ Rea points out, however, that option (b) fares no better: If God does not exist, then Mother Theresa, for example, would have devoted her life to a figment of her imagination, driven by false, even hallucinatory religious experiences, and so the cognitive faculties sustaining her beliefs and experiences would have surely been unreliable. So the fact that option (a) posits widespread cognitive dysfunction for all who suffer in the face of divine silence is no reason for preferring (b) over (a). Neither is (c) to be preferred over Rea's view since there is currently no viable alternative that is consistent with his assumptions (2009, p. 87). So, Rea concludes that his view seems to be the most plausible explanation of why divine silence is compatible with DIVINE CONCERN, but that this is only so in virtue of the following claim being true:

DIVINE SELF-DISCLOSURE: God has provided some widely and readily accessible way of finding him and experiencing his presence despite his silence.

(2009, p. 88)

Rea notes that if DIVINE SELF-DISCLOSURE is false, then his view carries negligible weight, for God will have provided no way for us to experience his presence and it would be very hard indeed to argue that divine silence might be a result of God's desire to interact with humanity in other ways. It would, for

²⁷ Rea seems to be assuming a conjunction here such that option (a) entails that believers are dysfunctional both cognitively and emotionally. However, I think Rea could weaken the possibility of dysfunction to a disjunction such that believers are either cognitively or emotionally dysfunctional since only one needs to be the case to make his point. Not only this, it would also, presumably, have the effect of making affirmation of it more appealing. For the sake of his argument, I'll assume cognitive *or* emotional dysfunction here.

Rea, be likely impossible to reconcile God's silence with NO HUMAN GOOD and DIVINE CONCERN. Thus we come to Rea's second central claim:

(R2) Even if NO HUMAN GOOD is true, divine silence is compatible with DIVINE CONCERN so long as God has provided a way for rational creatures to find him and to experience his presence despite the silence. (2009, p. 78)²⁸

Acknowledging that the truth of DIVINE SELF-DISCLOSURE is necessary for God to be justified in hiding, Rea proceeds to argue that DIVINE SELF-DISCLOSURE is true despite divine silence.

iii. Rea's Third Central Claim

Rea first notes that the literature on divine hiddenness seems to take for granted that DIVINE SELF-DISCLOSURE is true only if either INCONCLUSIVE EVIDENCE or ABSENCE OF RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE is false. Rea suggests that another possibility is being ignored; namely, that God is mediating experiences of his presence through various widely accessible and readily available media. God may not be providing direct manifestations of himself to many people, but his mediated presence may be experienced in other, indirect ways. Thus, we have Rea's third central claim:

²⁸ Parker agrees with this requirement, and accordingly makes only terminological changes in his statement of Rea's second thesis:

(R2*) Even if God does not permit divine silence in order to secure human goods, divine silence is compatible with DIVINE CONCERN so long as DIVINE SELF-DISCLOSURE is true. (2014, p. 121)

(R3) There is some reason to think that biblical narratives and liturgical acts are vehicles by which we might find and experience the presence of God.

(Rea, 2009, p. 78)²⁹

Rea begins his argument for the viability of this possibility by first explaining what he means by ‘mediated experiences of the presence of God’, and then showing which media he thinks serve as plausible candidates through which these mediated experience can be had.

Rea explains that the difference between a mediated experience and a direct experience is similar to the difference between a Parfit-style quasi-memory and direct perception. According to Derek Parfit, quasi-memories—or, q-memories—are authentic memories about a person’s experience though not necessarily about experiences of the person who is actually having the q-memory (p. 15). As an example, Rea suggests that if a duplicate of himself were created, that duplicate would have q-memories of his life, but not genuine memories since, although the q-memories would seem like genuine memories for the duplicate, they would not be memories of *his* experiences. The important point here for Rea is that:

²⁹ Here is Parker’s version of Rea’s third thesis:

(R3*) DIVINE SELF-DISCLOSURE is true: Biblical narratives and liturgical acts are means by which we might find and experience the presence of God in the midst of divine silence. (Parker, 2014, p. 121)

Parker strengthens the modal force of (R3) by stating that the Biblical narratives and liturgical acts are means, not simply that we have some reason to think they may be, as Rea suggests (Rea, 2009, p. 78). Rea may very well intend to have the stronger force of Parker’s claim; if not though, Parker is weakening Rea’s argument by forcing it to depend on a more easily defeasible premise.

...q-memory provides a person with roughly the same sort of information about a thing as direct experience of it would provide, and it can do so even if the person has never in fact had a direct experience of the thing. (2009, p. 89)

To develop this idea further, Rea calls on Frank Jackson's famous 'Black-and-White Mary' thought experiment (Jackson, pp. 127-136). This thought experiment purports to show that a merely physical description of a property (like redness) cannot completely convey all the information that there is about that property (for instance, to a person like Mary who has only ever seen black and white); there is something more to learn from a first-person experience of that property (Mary's actually experiencing redness). Rea takes this for granted, noting that although some bit of information may not be communicable through a third-person description of redness, it seems clear that the relevant information can perhaps be acquired in a way other than a first-person experience of it. According to Rea, implanted q-memories are the most plausible candidate since:

...in q-memory of redness we get some even if not all of the very same non-propositional information about redness that we get through direct experience thereof. It is in precisely this sense that q-memory is a way of having mediated experiences. (2009, p. 89)

Rea moves on to consider plausible candidates through which these mediated experiences can be had.³⁰ If he can show that there are methods available to everyone, this is enough to support (R3).

Methods of Mediated Experience

In order to identify which sorts of media might plausibly be said to mediate the presence of God, Rea solicits the help of Eleonore Stump (2009 and 2015). In particular, he uses her notions of second-person accounts and second-person experiences which derive from her recent work of “extended literary-critical treatment of a variety of Biblical narratives” (Rea, 2009, p. 89).³¹ According to Stump, a second-person account is just a narrative that relays the content of a second-person experience, which is:

...a conscious experience of another conscious person *as* a person
[that] provide[s] a particular kind of non-propositional knowledge,
very much like whatever sort of knowledge Mary acquires upon
coming to experience redness for the first time. (Rea, 2009, p. 90)

Stump claims that second-person accounts are able to convey roughly the same knowledge as second-person experiences by “making that experience available to us through the narrative” (Rea, 2009, p. 90). Rea takes Stump to mean that second-person accounts not only provide propositional knowledge

³⁰ Since, as has been previously noted, Rea also considers God’s hiddenness a puzzle for theists, he separately provides methods available to the believer, nonbeliever, or both. Since every method available to nonbelievers is also available to believers, however, I believe laying out methods solely available to believers is unnecessary for my discussion.

³¹ Rea indicates that Stump’s work on this can be found especially in Stump (2015) and Stump (2009).

about the experience, but also relay the experience in a way analogous to the way q-memories do. Incorporating what he takes to be her view into his own, Rea suggests that second-person accounts mediate second-person experiences such that engaging with second-person biblical narratives—narratives of suffering human beings’ second-person experiences of God—provides us with mediated experiences of God: “if Stump is right, attention to Biblical narrative is one way of acquiring mediated experiences of the divine presence” (2009, p. 91). Rea clarifies that a second-person experience is a conscious awareness of another person *as a person* which, importantly, differentiates it from a third-person experience where one sees the other person as a mere object. He argues, therefore, that a certain kind of ‘seeing as’ is a necessary condition for experiencing another person as a person, and suggests that something similar should be expected for mediated experiences as well. Experiencing the mediated presence of another person, then, involves consciously regarding that person, not merely as an object, but as a person. So, Rea argues that whether the Biblical narratives mediate the presence of God will depend on whether the person engaging with them takes them to be reporting real experiences of God.

In response, Parker argues that it doesn’t seem that everyone who experiences divine silence is able to have mediated experiences of God through Scripture since some may not be in the necessary epistemic situation (2014, p. 134). He notes that Rea’s account seems to say that one can have a mediated experience of God through the biblical narrative only if one believes that the narratives report real experiences of God. But, Parker argues, if the

revised definition of divine silence as INCONCLUSIVE EVIDENCE & ABSENCE OF RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE is true, then those who experience divine silence neither have sufficient *a priori* or empirical evidence for justified belief in God, nor any direct experience of the presence of God. And, since people who experience divine silence do not have epistemic reasons to justify the belief that God exists, neither are they justified in believing that the biblical narratives report real experiences of God.³² According to Rea's own account, Parker claims, this would keep them from having mediated experiences of God through Scripture (2014, p. 135).

Rea is not entirely clear about the epistemic situation a person needs to be in when reading the biblical narrative, but he does seem to say that only those who see the biblical narratives as reporting real experiences of God can have mediated experiences of God (2009, p. 91). Parker's criticism that nonbelievers are not in the right epistemic position to have mediated experiences would seem to hold unless Rea weakens the epistemic force of his claim such that belief that God is a real person is not required when reading biblical narrative. Perhaps a nonbeliever need only entertain the possibility that

³² Parker also considers a possible response that says that even though a person may not have epistemic reasons for believing the biblical narratives are true, she could have pragmatic reasons to believe. However, Parker counters that most of the literature on belief agrees that belief is involuntary. As such, choosing to believe for pragmatic reasons despite having insufficient epistemic evidence seems "psychologically implausible" and inconsistent with belief being involuntary (Parker, 2014, p. 136). Parker argues that in order for someone to believe that the biblical narratives are true, one would have to either 1) convince oneself that they are true or 2) acquire evidence that they are true. Parker argues that (1) requires that one be irrational which doesn't seem like a thing a perfectly loving God would ask one to do and (2) would mean that one has acquired evidence sufficient for belief in God and so one would no longer experience divine silence.

God is a real person and that he may mediate his presence through Scripture.³³ If so, fewer conditions would have to be met in order for nonbelievers to be in an epistemic situation that would allow them to have mediated experiences of God, and this would plausibly strengthen Rea's case that DIVINE SELF-DISCLOSURE is true for all humans.

II. Concluding Remarks

In conclusion, I think that Rea's attempt to put forward an innovative strategy is admirable, and Parker's clarification and revisions to his argument do strengthen it. Unfortunately, however, as Parker reminds us, DIVINE CONCERN states that God desires to promote the well-being of *all* humans, but DIVINE SELF-DISCLOSURE states only that God has made available a way to experience him that is "widely and readily accessible" (2014, p. 137). According to Parker, this means that divine silence remains incompatible with DIVINE CONCERN even if DIVINE SELF-DISCLOSURE is true since God, in order to make divine silence compatible with DIVINE CONCERN, would have to provide *all* humans, including the many people who suffer from divine silence, access to mediated experiences

³³ This idea of entertaining the possibility of God's existence while not actually holding the belief is similar to Pascal's 'solution' for those who may want to 'wager' for God, but find themselves without belief. He instructs:

You would like to attain faith and do not know the way; you would like to cure yourself of unbelief and ask the remedy for it. Learn of those who have been bound like you, and who now stake all their possessions. These are people who know the way which you would follow, and who are cured of an ill of which you would be cured. Follow the way by which they began; by acting as if they believed, taking the holy water, having masses said, etc. Even this will naturally make you believe, and deaden your acuteness. "But this is what I am afraid of." And why? What have you to lose?... But to show you that this leads you there, it is this which will lessen the passions, which are your stumbling-blocks. (Pascal, p. 233)

of God. Although, as I have mentioned above, Rea provides a number of methods available for the believer to experience God's mediated presence, it seems implausible that every *nonbeliever* for whom divine silence is true has access to the mediated presence of God since their only medium seems to be the Christian scriptures. Parker notes that Schellenberg's paradigm cases of inculpable nonbelievers are primarily non-Western individuals who have never even considered the existence of God, let alone had access to biblical narrative. So Parker claims that even if some who experience divine silence can come to experience the mediated presence of God, it does not follow that divine silence is compatible with DIVINE CONCERN if even one person who experiences divine silence does not have access to the media which facilitate mediated experiences of God.

Thus, since Rea's argument depends upon the truth of DIVINE SELF-DISCLOSURE, and since the claim that all humans, including every nonbeliever, have access to the Christian Scriptures is clearly false, his argument fails. In order to successfully solve the divine hiddenness problem for the nonbeliever, Rea will at least need to broaden the scope of media available to nonbelievers in order to increase the plausibility of the claim that mediated experiences are 'readily and widely accessible' to all humans. For example, perhaps he could consider further media, such as prayer, singing, and hearing testimony. These appear to be media available to the nonbeliever as well as the believer. For example, a nonbeliever may reflect on the beauty of the natural world and entertain the possibility of the existence of (some) God, and, expecting that a

Creator of such power might plausibly be able to hear her, she calls out to it in prayer. Anthony Kenny (1979) supports this view:

There is no reason why someone who is in doubt about the existence of God should not pray for help and guidance on this topic as in other matters. Some find something comic in the idea of an agnostic praying to a God whose existence he doubts. It is surely no more unreasonable than the act of a man adrift in the ocean, trapped in a cave, or stranded on a mountainside, who cries for help though he may never be heard or fires a signal which may never be seen. (p. 129)

Rea would have to do more study on the nature of prayer and any other suggested plausible media to see if they may be viable options for the nonbeliever. Alternatively, he could concede that his argument really does boil down to a greater goods argument, and then attempt to defend why God's expression of his personality is a good worth hiding for; however, he would also then have to defend against Schellenberg's accommodationist strategy, and it is not clear that he would be able to do so successfully. In particular, Schellenberg could say that God has infinite resources at his disposal and so could actualize a state of affairs in which he can appropriately express his personality while also ensuring that all capable humans are provided with evidence sufficient for belief in him at all times.

i. Implications for Divine Love

What can we learn about divine love from this discussion? I think the most relevant and insightful point stems from Rea's idea that it may be a good thing for God to express his personality. Rea claims that an odd feature of modern philosophy of religion is that it seems to portray God as having a rather thin, empty personality, with the focus usually becoming how best *for others* it would be for an omniperfect God to behave. He argues, however, that God is supposed to be a person who is not only unsurpassable in love, but also in beauty such that he likely has a highly complex personality and motivational structure, and that it is unclear how a person who is supposed to be unsurpassable in beauty can remain so if the portrayal of God as "a cosmic, others-oriented utility-maximizing machine were correct" (2009, p. 86). Thus, according to Rea, God should not be viewed as a shallow being existing only to promote our good. He has many attributes besides being powerful, knowledgeable, and loving, and expressing those attributes is a good thing.

Thus, with respect to (S1), Rea might suggest that we consider not only what it means for God to be perfectly loving, but also how the expression of other divine attributes may affect the way his perfect love is expressed, and the way that expression of love is received and interpreted by humans. I will return to this claim below in Chapter 5, but first, I will turn to Jordan's (2012) response to the divine hiddenness problem. Jordan seeks to show that God's love need not be expressed in the same way toward everyone. Although I will ultimately show that his argument fails, I will extract and develop important insights into the nature of divine love for my own argument.

4. Jordan: Challenging the Degree of Divine Love

Another recent response in the hiddenness literature that focuses on the notion of divine love is due to Jordan (2012). Jordan develops and defends a novel response to the problem of divine hiddenness by challenging a widely-held assumption about divine love.

Jordan begins with the standard claim that if God exists, then God is a perfect being. Further, Jordan believes that proposition (L) is widely held by most philosophers and theologians:

(L) If God exists and is perfect, then God's love must be maximally extended and equally intense. (p. 53)

According to (L), God's love must be as wide as possible—extending to every human being—and as flat as possible—being of the same high degree for every human being³⁴—if God is perfect in love. This is because *loving every human equally* is generally considered to be a great-making property and, according to perfect being theology, since God is a perfect being, he would possess every property which contributes to his perfection, and have it to the maximal degree.³⁵ Jordan explains that the idea that a love of such depth and

³⁴ Parker suggests that this should be refined to clarify what is meant by “equally intense”. For Jordan's argument, what determines the intensity of God's love for each person is not relevant; rather, it is enough to say that L states that every human is loved to an equal degree by God. I do, however, expand on Parker's criticism on pp. 79-80.

³⁵ As noted in Chapter 1, that ‘maximal’ is to be understood as ‘infinite’ has been the assumption within perfect being theology. Jordan will attempt to challenge this assumption and, below, I will employ insights from Jordan to further challenge it.

impartiality would be great-making seems intuitive;³⁶ as such, (L) is often employed as an assumption in many arguments such as the problem of divine hiddenness and the empirical problem of evil. In order to undermine these arguments, Jordan proposes an argument against (L) stemming from an exploration of several principles from perfect being theology which, he claims, have been overlooked in the analysis of divine perfection, and which, he thinks, provide good reasons for denying (L).

Recall that Schellenberg supports (S2) with an analysis of the nature of divine love which suggests that such love would be expressed by a strong desire to promote the well-being of every human and a bias for relationship with every capable human such that God would put the truth of his existence beyond reasonable doubt (1993, p. 35). Jordan argues, however, that although God may love every human being, there is reason to think that God need not love everyone *equally* (p. 53). If Jordan is correct, then he believes Schellenberg would need to provide further support for (S2) since divine love would not require that God place his existence beyond reasonable doubt for *all* capable humans.

In what follows, I will lay out and evaluate Jordan's argument, employing insights, clarifications, and criticisms from both Parker (2013) and Thomas Talbott (2012). Though I will ultimately show that his argument fails, I will

³⁶ Although (L) has indeed been widely affirmed, Jordan notes that there have been dissenters. For example, Thomas Aquinas argues that a thing's goodness is ultimately determined by the degree to which God wills goodness for that thing. He suggests that God loves some things more than other things, or else any one thing would be equal in value to any other thing, which, presumably, is false (Jordan, p. 54).

nevertheless explore what insights about the nature of divine love can be gleaned from Jordan's analysis.

I. The Conceptual Features of Love

According to Jordan, God's love is defined by at least two necessary conceptual features: 1) it manifests disinterested concern for its object, and 2) it involves an appropriation of the interests of its object.³⁷ He initially notes that (1) constrains (2) by disallowing God's appropriation of interests that are not compatible with the object's well-being, and so it follows from these features that God's love would not require God's identification with human interests that are destructive or harmful. This constraint is consistent with the common idea that the lover desires to promote the well-being of the beloved.³⁸ Jordan, however, wavers in his interpretation of (2) throughout his argument. At times, he explains that the intensity of love the lover has for the beloved is determined by the amount of interests they share: "as one's identification with the interests of S increases, so too does one's depth of [love] toward S" (p. 62).³⁹ At other times, however, Jordan claims that the lover's love is not determined by the interests they share, but rather that he is compelled by the love he already has

³⁷ Jordan is here drawing on the work of Harry G. Frankfurt (pp. 79-80).

³⁸ Indeed, as we have already noted, Schellenberg endorses this as an essential feature of love (1993, p. 17).

³⁹ To make my point more explicitly, I here replace "friendship" with "love" since Jordan himself considers the two to be conceptually nearly identical. Says Jordan: "friendship in the sense relevant here, is characterized, like love, by two conceptually necessary features: (A) For all persons S and P, S is friends with P only if S has a disinterested concern for P. (B) For all persons S and P, the greater the concern S has for P, the more S takes as his own or identifies with the interests of P" (p. 62).

for her to appropriate her interests: “[love] has an exclusivist or partial aspect to it, as one will at times seek to advance the interests of one’s friends or family rather than the interests of others” (p. 62).

Ultimately, Jordan is quite unclear in his interpretation of (2), however, I argue that his latter definition is much more plausible since it is most consistent with parental love. As already noted, Schellenberg believes that God’s love can be conceptualized, at least analogically, in terms of the love a good parent has for her child. According to Talbott, a good parent would have the property *having maximally extended parental love* (PL)—loving every person that you freely choose to bring into being with equal intensity (p. 304). Good human parents, he argues, love all of the children they freely choose to create, and love them unconditionally. If some of the children develop interests that the parents believe will not promote their well-being, this will not affect the parents’ love for them, since the parents’ love is already and always will be maximally extended and equally intense in virtue of them being their children. Jordan has addressed this by saying that parents in fact have equal *regard* for their children, not equal *love* (pp. 66-67). Consider a case, however, in which a parent has two children: one rebellious, and one cooperative. As Talbott says, “Good parents do not disown a disobedient child, and neither do they love a rebellious teenager any less than they do a more cooperative one” (p. 306). A good parent would not love the rebellious child less—she would simply regard his actions unfavourably; likewise, she would not love the good child more

since her love is equally intense for both children—she would simply regard his actions more favourably. Parker agrees:

...to love each of one's children in their unique individuality does not require that the parent love her children with different degrees of intensity—a parent's love can and should be equally intense without being impartial." (2013, p. 453)

Thus, the interests of the children have no bearing on the level of intensity of the parent's love. If it is plausible that God possesses (PL), then God's love for humans—his children—is also not determined by the degree to which he approves of their interests.

Jordan anticipates a problem with this definition since, he believes, this type of impartial love would not be possible for God since human interests inevitably conflict. An example provided by Jordan is that of a parent who loves two children equally who both equally desire to go to a concert for which the parent only has one ticket—the parent in this situation cannot appropriate both of their interests, and so Jordan foresees a conflict for God attempting to appropriate the interests of humans he loves equally. This issue, however, can be resolved by giving a clearer definition of interests.

When Jordan refers to people's interests, he generally appears to mean their 'perceived interests'. Under this interpretation, however, it is possible, as discussed above, for a child to have an interest that his parent believes is harmful to him, in which case the parent would not appropriate it. Jordan tries to solve the problem by suggesting that perhaps God identifies with only the

best interests of each person, and that perhaps these do not ultimately conflict. He argues, however, that if we consider the possibility that God might be justified in allowing the suffering of one person so that a greater good might be brought about that is beneficial to someone other than the sufferer, then this shows that the best interests of all persons cannot always be realized.⁴⁰ For example, perhaps persons A and B are both unemployed, and one job opens up for which both are equally qualified. In this case, it is in both of their best interests to get the job, however, one will have to suffer in order for the other's best interests to be promoted. At least, argues Jordan, it shows that "it is far from obvious that God could befriend or love all persons even if he takes as his own only the best interests of persons" (p. 64).

Talbott argues, however, that if we take our "best interests" to be just those things that *actually* promote our well-being—our *real* interests—regardless of our perceptions, our interests would become aligned such that there could be no incompatible interests (p. 313). Given God's omniscience, he would know precisely what contributes to a person's well-being, and one person's well-being would not involve the diminishing of another's. Says Talbott: "it is the very nature of love...that it actually *creates* a common set of *real* interests" (p. 314). For this reason, Talbott believes he shows that, in the long term, there can be no partiality in love; he states: "For any two persons S

⁴⁰ This is a controversial claim. As noted above (p. 31), many believe that a necessary requirement of a successful greater goods defense is that it is consistent with the negation of this claim (what Rea calls BENEFIT TO THE SUFFERER, which says that God cannot allow someone to suffer for the sake of some good unless they in some way benefit from that good as well).

and S*, if S wills the best for S*, then no one (including God) can will less than the best for S* without also willing less than the best for S” (p. 315). Parker seems to agree with this idea:

Along with most of the Christian tradition, I see each person’s interest in his ultimate good as being fulfilled by a personal relationship with God. And I see no reason to think that God could not [seek to promote or advance] every person’s ultimate interest in having a loving relationship with God (even though some will not choose to desire or care about this interest for themselves and thus not have the salvific relationship which is their true good). (2013, p. 460)

Thus, if we take the notion of love to include the idea that it causes the lover to appropriate the *real* interests of the beloved—that is, to strongly desire to do whatever he believes would promote her well-being—Talbot and Parker believe they show that Jordan’s problem of incompatible interests would be resolved.

As I now lay out and consider Jordan’s argument against (L), to strengthen his argument, when he refers the conceptual features of love, I will take him to mean that love manifests disinterested concern for and appropriates the real interests of its object.

II. Jordan’s Argument

i. The Transvaluation Denial Principle

Recall (L):

(L) If God exists and is perfect, then God's love must be maximally extended and equally intense. (Jordan, p. 53)

Jordan claims that the typical defense of (L) claims if God is perfect, he must have every great-making property, and have it to the maximal degree (p. 53). Jordan begins his argument, however, by exploring the idea that not *all* the properties had by God must be great-making properties. He argues that God has properties, such as *not being the number nine*, which are certainly not great-making. Although it could be argued that such properties are mere 'Cambridge' properties (that is, they make no real difference in the object that possesses them), Jordan argues that God does possess 'real' properties that are not great-making. For example, he notes that God's exhibiting the property of omniscience implies that God has the property of *having at least five beliefs*, which is a real property but is clearly not great-making (p. 57).

I find Jordan's move here to be a bit hasty. There is a long philosophical tradition of conceiving of the world such that entities who can have beliefs are just metaphysically superior to those who cannot; they are higher on the 'ontological ladder', so to speak.⁴¹ If something like this is right, then it is not so clear, contra Jordan, that this property isn't in any way great-making. Jordan himself makes clear that great-making properties don't have to be exclusively superlative—they are simply "contrastive properties in that an individual's metaphysical status is greater with the property than without" (p.

⁴¹ Arthur O. Lovejoy (1936) traces the history of this idea.

56). At any rate, although this example seems questionable, I will grant the claim that God can have ‘real’ properties that are not great-making—that is, they could be neutral, neither enhancing nor diminishing a being’s metaphysical status.

Jordan proceeds⁴² by introducing the “Transvaluation Denial” principle, which will play a prominent role in his argument against (L):

(TD) For all properties F, if F is a deficiency when had by a human, then F cannot be a great-making property when had by God. (p. 58)

Before showing how Jordan intends to use (TD) for his argument, I will show how he defends it. He opts to support (TD) indirectly by considering and rejecting three putative counterexamples, the first being impassibility; in what follows, I will consider and critique each in turn.

Counterexample #1: Impassibility

One might argue that impassibility is a defect when possessed by a human, but great-making when possessed by God, contra (TD). Jordan responds, however, by saying that if impassibility means that God is not affected by anything outside himself and so lacks properties such as *being compassionate*, then it is hard to see how impassibility would be great-making, since lacking the property *being compassionate* is not great-making. Jordan allows, however, that impassibility may still be a property possessed by God in virtue of being

⁴² Jordan actually begins by introducing the primary thesis of perfect being theology (PT), even though it ends up playing no role in his argument. I will, however, expand on this thesis further and how it could be used to help his argument below, in Section 5.II.

entailed by other divine properties such as omnipotence or omniscience.⁴³ So, although it is not a great-making property, it would also not be a defect because of another putative principle of perfect being theology—the “Consequence” principle:

(CP) For all properties F & F', and individuals S, if F is a great-making property, and F' is an entailment of F, and S has F' solely in virtue of having F, then having F' cannot be worse-making (a defect) for S.
(Jordan, p. 59)

In other words, if a property is entailed by a great-making property and would not be possessed otherwise, then that property is not a defect, even if it is not great-making, since “defects cannot flow out of enhancements” (Jordan, p. 59). Thus, Jordan believes he shows that *impassibility* is, at least, neutral based on (CP), and as such, does not succeed as a counterexample to (TD). If we grant that (CP) is true, and I can think of no reason why we should not, then it seems Jordan successfully deals with the first counterexample.

Counterexample #2: Believing Oneself to be Divine

In the second counterexample that Jordan examines, we are asked to consider that the property *believing oneself to be divine* might be a defect in a human, but great-making in God. The proponent of this counterexample suggests that this property is entailed by another of God’s great-making properties, and that,

⁴³ Surprisingly, Jordan does not explain his reasoning for suggesting that *impassibility* is entailed by omniscience and/or omnipotence. Perhaps he thinks that since an omniscient and omnipotent being would, presumably, know every contingent fact and be in total control of every contingent state of affairs, it would not be affected by it.

according to another principle of perfect being theology—the ‘great-making closed under entailment’ principle (GCP)—this entails that it be a great-making property:

(GCP) If X is an entailment of Y, and Y is a great-making property, then X is itself a great-making property (Jordan, p. 60).

Jordan, however, denies (GCP), and uses (CP) to assert that *believing oneself to be divine* could in fact be neutral, since (CP) states that a property which is entailed by a great-making property cannot be worse-making, but says nothing about the possibility of its being neutral.

Jordan’s reasoning for denying (GCP), however, is based on one putative counterexample: the property *having at least five beliefs*. As I have already noted above (pp. 60-61), there is good reason to believe that this property could be great-making, and not neutral as Jordan suggests. Thus, he would need to provide a more plausible counterexample in order to justifiably deny (GCP). If we accept (GCP), then if *believing oneself to be divine* is entailed by a great-making property such as *being divine*, then it too must be great-making. Therefore, it seems like *believing oneself to be divine* remains an example of a property which is a defect when had by a human, but great-making when had by God, contrary to (TD).

Jordan, however, provides a second response to this counterexample. He notes that it is not God’s belief that he is divine that makes God great, but rather the properties he possesses that make that belief true, “since a belief is nothing other than a proposition that one holds” (p. 60). The original objection,

however, is about a property which involves having beliefs, and so this reply seems to miss the point. Jordan might suggest that we refine this property to be something like *having true beliefs about oneself*. If we did so, however, it seems like this property would no longer serve as an example of one which manifests differently for God and for humans—*having true beliefs about oneself* would be either neutral for God and neutral for humans or great-making for God and great-making for humans. Thus, refining the property in this way will serve to change the counterexample such that it would no longer be one. As such, Jordan is still missing an adequate response to this counterexample in his defense of (TD).

Counterexample #3: Being Unable to Sin

The third counterexample Jordan considers is the property *being unable to sin*. This property, it is alleged, is a great-making property possessed by God that would be a defect if possessed by a human since the only way a human could exhibit it would be to lack libertarian freedom.⁴⁴ Jordan responds to this in two ways. First, he argues that, since (GCP) is false, there is no reason to believe that *being unable to sin* is great-making even if it flows out of a great-making property such as *being morally perfect*. Second, Jordan claims that *being unable to sin* is not great-making in itself, for if a human possessed the property “because of a causal or psychological determinism, due to a power

⁴⁴ The emphasis on libertarian freedom will, of course, be controversial.

external to the agent” (p. 60), then possessing it would not enhance the possessor’s greatness.

Parker responds to Jordan by arguing that his analysis of *being unable to sin* is flawed. Parker suggests that *being unable to sin*, when applied to God, is more like *impeccability* or *being unable to sin because of necessary moral goodness* (2013, p. 452). Although *impeccability*, he claims, would likely still be a deficiency when had by a human, it would be great-making for God because, in the divine case, it cannot be brought about by external forces.

Parker’s response, however, seems to me to inadequately address Jordan’s counterexample. It is not at all obvious that *impeccability* would likely be a deficiency when had by a human. It is true that a morally impeccable human would miss the opportunity to develop a morally perfect character, and Parker’s response appears to be based on the idea that some properties (like *being able to sin*) appear defective on the surface, but are in fact “necessary condition[s] for the intrinsic human good of developing morally virtuous character” (2013, p. 452). Why think, however, that gradually developing a perfection such as impeccability is more valuable than just possessing it outright? For example, omniscience is widely considered to be great-making, even for a human; however, if a human were omniscient, she would miss the opportunity to learn, thereby making omniscience a defect on Parker’s reasoning. Given this example, it seems that Parker is not justified in simply assuming that *impeccability* would likely be a deficiency, and needs to provide further support for his claim in order for his criticism to go through.

Although there is good reason to think that Parker's criticism of Jordan's second response to the third counterexample fails, there are other reasons to reject both of Jordan's responses to this counterexample. First of all, he notes that since (GCP) is false, there is no reason to believe that *being unable to sin* is great-making. As I have already noted, however, Jordan's reason for denying (GCP) does not appear to be adequate, and so I do not see this as being an adequate response. Second, Jordan claims that *being unable to sin* is not great-making in itself, since it there could be a case where a human possessed the property in virtue of being constrained by external powers. In this case though, Jordan is not actually considering the property "in itself" as he claims. Instead, the property *being unable to sin* is actually being held in virtue of being entailed by another property—something like *being constrained by external powers*. Thus this response to the third counterexample also seems inadequate.

I have shown that, although Jordan's response to the first counterexample appears successful, we have good reason to think that his responses to the second and third counterexamples fail; as such, his support for (TD) is inadequate. Further, even if Jordan were to refine his responses to successfully deal with these counterexamples, I now suggest a fourth: immutability.

Counterexample #4: Immutability

Assuming that humans are imperfect,⁴⁵ immutability would be a defect when had by a human since it would impede change and thus prevent good character development. It would, however, be great-making when had by God since any change to an already perfect being would only decrease his metaphysical status. Therefore, immutability is a counterexample to (TD) because it is a defect when had by a human, but great-making when had by God.

Although Jordan concludes that the support for (TD) is strong, I believe that his responses to counterexamples are weak. Moreover, given the counterexample of ‘immutability’ I have proposed, it seems that there are good reasons to doubt (TD). Despite these reservations, however, I will grant (TD) for the sake of argument in what follows. I now turn to the remainder of Jordan’s argument.

ii. Is ‘Flat’ Love a Defect, Neutral, or Great-making?

Recall that (L) states: “If God exists and is perfect, then God’s love must be maximally extended and equally intense” (Jordan, p. 53). Jordan refers to maximally extended love—love that ranges over all humans—as ‘wide’ love, and equally intense love—love that is impartial and equal—as ‘flat’ love. He claims that if a human possessed love that was flat, then that property would be a

⁴⁵ Although the assumption that humans are imperfect is drawn primarily from the Christian tradition, it seems safe to assume that it would garner assent from most other traditions as well, both religious and philosophical.

defect, and thus, according to (TD), it could not be a great-making property for God. His reason is that flat love does not allow for the appropriately deep attachments—say, with children or a spouse—that enhance the life of the subject: “It is the affectionate relationships which are, so to speak, the peaks of life breaking up the flatness of deficiency” (p. 61).

Jordan considers two objections to his claim. First, he anticipates the objection that close relational attachment is not needed for richness of life, but rather that total detachment is to be desired, as some mystic philosophies claim. He argues, however, that even such mystics who advocate detachment from creaturely relationships do so for the sake of achieving a better, more fulfilling attachment to the divine: “The mystics, in other words, sought a love generally flat, with a steep and solitary peak directed toward God” (p. 61). So, Jordan argues, even these objectors should be inclined to agree that a completely flat love is a defective property.

Another objection he addresses is that wide love would be great-making, so even if it is flat love, it need not be worse-making since, presumably, it is better to love every person ‘flatly’ than to love only some, even if deeply. Jordan claims, however, that “an unrequited love may lack significant value” (p. 62). This seems like an odd claim for two reasons, however, and it is one that Jordan fails to support.

First, when a parent’s love is not reciprocated, does it lose value? It is hard to see why this would be the case. And if so, why would the value of any love, including wide love, be dependent on reciprocation? Since love is

considered to be great-making, it doesn't seem to follow that external forces such as not being reciprocated could cause it to be downgraded to neutral or defective status.

Second, in order to strengthen the potential objection, Jordan employs what he believes to be a more modest claim. Specifically, he extends the objection to employ wide friendship instead of love, since, he thinks, 1) friendship is easier to achieve widely and since 2) they share similar features. To see this, note the similarity between the necessary conceptual features of love⁴⁶ and the following conceptual features of friendship, according to Jordan:

- (A) For all persons S and P, S is friends with P only if S has a disinterested concern for P.
- (B) For all persons S and P, the greater the concern S has for P, the more S takes as his own or identifies with the interests of P. (p. 62)

It seems to me, however, that there is one crucial feature ignored by Jordan that friendship and love do not share—friendship must be reciprocated, while love need not be. To see this, consider a wife who chooses to divorce her husband and declares that she desires no further affiliation with him whatsoever. The man may report that he still loves his wife, and if he does so truthfully, would not be wrong in reporting this. However, if he reported that they were still friends, he *would* be wrong to do so since she has made it clear that she desires no relationship with him of any kind. Although the man may

⁴⁶ I have outlined these features on p.55.

consider his ex-wife a friend, it seems mistaken to say that he is, in fact, a friend to her, unless she regards him as such. For this reason, changing the objection to employ wide friendship instead of wide love does not seem to strengthen the objection as Jordan intends—indeed, wide friendship seems more difficult, if not practically impossible, to possess than wide love since it seems to require reciprocation. Still, Jordan believes he has shown that wide love does not allow for deep attachments, and concludes that flat love would be a deficiency in a person as it would rob the possessor of the great goods which are associated with deeper kinds of attachments (p. 63). Therefore, he concludes that the property *having flat love* would be a defect in a human and, given (TD), it would not be great-making if possessed by God:

So if God is perfect, then the divine love need not be as wide and flat as possible, as perfection could not require a property the possession of which would lead to a life defective in significant respects. Proposition (L), in other words, is false. (p. 64)

I will now outline and evaluate three responses set out by Talbott and Parker.

Response 1

Talbott attempts to sidestep Jordan's argument by showing that, necessarily, God's love is wide and flat, and that, accordingly, the question of whether flat love is a defect in a human is irrelevant. Recall that (PL) is the property *having parental love* which entails that a good parent will love every person that *she freely chooses to bring into being* with equal intensity (p. 56). According to Talbott, although humans can possess (PL) while failing to love every person

equally, given that God is morally perfect and has freely chosen to create every contingently existing person, God's possession of (PL) entails that he equally loves every human being. So, if (PL) is a great-making property, then Talbott believes Jordan's claim that flat love is a defect in a human is irrelevant because, if God has (PL), then his love will necessarily be wide and flat. Talbott sets out his argument as follows:

- (1) Necessarily, if God exemplifies (PL), then his love is maximally extended and equally intense.
- (2) Necessarily, if God exists and is morally perfect, then God exemplifies (PL).

Therefore,

- (L) Necessarily, if God exists and is morally perfect, then his love is maximally extended and equally intense. (p. 304)

According to Talbott, proponents of (L) need only claim that *being morally perfect* is great-making, with (PL) being an entailment of that great-making property. If God has *being morally perfect*, then he must have (PL), regardless of whether it is a great-making property.⁴⁷ According to Talbott, this renders Jordan's argument, which rests crucially on (TD), irrelevant, since (TD) has no bearing whatsoever on the truth of (L) (p. 305).

⁴⁷ Talbott also notes that many Christians consider the New Testament to provide ample support for the attribution of (PL) to God because of what it has to say about God's relationship to humanity.

Jordan might respond that Talbott's move seems a bit hasty. Talbott gives no support for the claim that (PL) is an entailment of *being morally perfect*, and such a claim does not seem so intuitive as to require no support. Perhaps Talbott thinks that love is a subset of, or in some sense equivalent to, morality such that (PL) is necessarily entailed for any morally perfect being. In that case, however, Jordan might protest that Talbott must provide support for this claim about the relationship between love and morality if his response to Jordan's argument is to be successful. Although Talbott's claim that (PL) would be entailed by having the property *being morally perfect* is not *prima facie* unintuitive, it definitely seems to require supporting argument for Talbott to be justified in using it to sidestep Jordan's argument. Until he provides this, I do not think this response is adequate, and so I don't think he has shown that God necessarily must have flat and wide love.

Response 2

A second response, advanced by Parker, begins by laying out Jordan's argument formally. According to Parker, after allegedly showing that:

(J1) Flat love is a defect in a human and so not great-making for God,

Jordan makes the following moves:

(J2) If the property of loving every person with equal maximal intensity cannot be a great-making property when had by God, it would be a deficiency (intrinsically bad) when had by God. (2013, p. 449)

Therefore,

(J3) The property of loving every person with equal maximal intensity would be a deficiency (intrinsically bad) when had by God. (2013, p. 449)

Therefore,

(J4) It is not the case that God's love must be maximally extended and maximally intense. (2013, p. 449)

Parker argues that there is a logical gap between (J1) and (J3) because we are not given any good reasons to think that (J2) is true. In fact, Parker believes that what Jordan says about (TD) makes a revision of (J2) necessary as Jordan believes there are two ways that a property when had by God can fail to be great-making: Either it is worse-making or it is neutral. Accordingly, Parker revises (J2) as:

(J2*) If the property of loving every person with an equal intensity cannot be a great-making property when had by God, it would either be (i) an intrinsically bad property when had by God, or (ii) a neutral property when had by God. (2013, p. 450)

Given this, Parker believes that (J3) should be revised as well:

(J3*) The property of loving every person with an equal intensity would not be a neutral property when had by God, so it would be intrinsically bad when had by God. (2013, p. 450)

Parker notes that Jordan provides no support for (J3*), nor does he provide any way of knowing which properties are worse-making and which are simply neutral. Further, Parker believes there are reasons for thinking that the property *[having] maximally intense love for all humans* is actually a neutral

property for God because it might plausibly be entailed by another of God's great-making properties, meaning that, according to Jordan's (CP), *[having] maximally intense love for all humans* cannot be worse-making. Parker notes that not only does Jordan not have support for (J3*), but that this would constitute a case against it. Thus he believes he has shown that Jordan's argument fails, even if (TD) and the claim that flat love is a deficiency for a human are granted, since the argument does not lead to a denial of (L) (Parker, 2013, p. 453).

I agree with Parker that Jordan doesn't show that flat love couldn't be neutral, and that he should be clearer about whether he thinks it is neutral or worse-making. It is not clear, however, that from failing to show this, it follows that Jordan's argument fails. According to (L), if God is perfect, then he must have flat love. The burden of proof here is on the proponent of (L) to show that he *must* have flat love. Jordan explains that the proof generally used for this claim is that, "one might think that a deep and impartial love would be great-making and a perfect being would possess every great-making property" (p. 54). To challenge (L), then, Jordan only needs to show that flat love is *not* great-making; he does not need to show that it is worse-making. It is true that if he were able to successfully show that it *is* worse-making, then (L) would be defeated. Showing simply that it is not great-making, however—that is, that it could be neutral or worse-making—does not mean that his argument fails. Showing that it is neutral or great-making does successfully shift the burden of proof back to proponents of (L), forcing them to show by some other method

that God *must* have flat love. Jordan only claims that his argument “provide(s) good reason to deny that the love of a perfect being *must* be maximally extended and equally intense” (p. 54, italics mine), and even if flat love were shown to be neutral, Jordan would still have successfully shown this. By requiring that Jordan show that flat love is worse-making, Parker is demanding more from Jordan’s argument than is required.

Response 3

A third response focuses on the fact that Jordan seems to believe that loving all humans equally would require impartiality—that is, “love that does not respond to the uniqueness of the beloved and is not conditioned by the unique relationship with the beloved” (Jordan, p. 453). Both Parker and Talbott note that it is not surprising, given human limitations, that we can only have deep attachments with a relatively small circle of persons; just as we do not have the capacity to be omniscient, we do not have the capacity to have deep attachments with everyone. Talbott goes on to argue that, although low-level flat love would be a deficiency, it does not follow that high-level (high enough to facilitate deep attachment) flat love would be a deficiency if it *could* be had by a human, any more than being omniscient would. On Jordan’s reasoning, argues Talbott, any of the divine perfections might constitute a deficiency when had by a human given the limitations of our earthly existence; it does not follow that we should not be striving to exemplify the divine perfections to an ever-

increasing degree.⁴⁸ Parker agrees, and uses an example to illustrate this point. Suppose that only four humans exist: a husband, wife, and their two sons. He argues that it is easy to imagine each individual loving the other three with equal intensity without having “an impoverished life” (2013, p. 454). So, if it is possible for humans to exemplify this property without defect, then it cannot be a straightforward deficiency for a human. Talbott likewise notes that deep attachments which enrich our lives don’t diminish other deep attachments we may have:

...being deeply attached to one child need not detract from being equally attached to another, and neither would a supremely perfect God’s deep attachment to one created person prevent an equally deep attachment to all other created persons as well. (p. 310f)

Because God is not limited in the ways that human beings are, it seems clear that he could have deep attachments with all humans and still love them all equally.

I agree with Parker’s and Talbott’s conclusion that flat love need not be a defect when had by a human, since, were we not limited, it would surely be a good thing to have deep (albeit equal) attachments with everyone. I offer the warning, however, that in this situation, comparing love to omniscience (as Talbott does) may not help his argument. While it may seem intuitive to some that loving a few people very deeply is preferable to loving everyone a little bit,

⁴⁸ For example, Talbott says that in the Christian tradition, Jesus himself commands us to love not only our neighbours and friends, but also our enemies, with his reason being that we too might be perfect like God is perfect. So, although (L) might be practically unachievable in this present life, we are nonetheless commanded by God, for whom it is great-making, to strive to exemplify it more and more throughout our lives (Talbott, p. 309).

the choice is less clear in the case of knowledge. It is not at all obvious whether it would be preferable to know a lot about a few topics instead of a little bit about every topic. Since it is unclear how we might adjudicate between these choices, I argue that using omniscience as a parallel to love in this situation does little, if anything, to support Talbott's reply to Jordan. Despite this criticism, however, I think Talbott's overall argument against Jordan's claim that flat love is a deficiency in a human is successful, and that Parker's example helps to make this point explicit.

Therefore, after granting all of Jordan's principles and claims for the sake of argument, even on this charitable reading, Jordan's argument appears to have failed.

III. Concluding Remarks

Although I deem Jordan's argument to have failed, I believe there is much that can be drawn from Jordan's discussion for application to my investigation into the nature of divine love. One of the key considerations in Jordan's argument is the 'flatness requirement' of (L): every human being is loved with equal intensity and requires "not just equality but also maximal intensity—every human is loved by God to the same significant degree" (Jordan, p. 445). While Parker, Talbott, and I have shown that Jordan fails to properly support his argument against (L), I think the flatness requirement can be clarified and developed. In doing so, our discussion might lead to a new way to challenge (L), and so also a key assumption about divine love which undergirds Schellenberg's argument. This is what I will attempt to do in what follows.

5. Challenging (S1)

As noted in Chapter 1, Schellenberg does not make explicit that he believes perfect love implies infinite love; however, as we have seen, he does employ the general method of perfect being theology (what he calls ultimism) to yield the claims that support his argument. Further, his accommodationist strategy relies on the assumption that God's 'infinite resources' and 'perfect love' would override any other considerations such that any good offered as a reason that would justify God's hiddenness would invariably be facilitated within divine-human relationship. If God's love is indeed infinite, then there is no problem for Schellenberg's argument; however, if it is not infinite, it may not be as clear that (S1) supports his argument.

In what follows, I will expand on Jordan's work, further developing the flatness requirement of (L). After showing that there may be some reason to think God's love may not be infinite, I will look to the work of Yujin Nagasawa (2008) and employ insights gleaned from Rea above as well as from Rea's more recent work (2015), moving toward the ultimate goal of ascertaining whether perfect love must entail infinite love. Finally, I will apply the findings of this analysis to Schellenberg's argument.

I. Refining (L)

Recall (L):

(L) If God exists and is perfect, then God's love must be maximally extended and equally intense. (Jordan, p. 53)

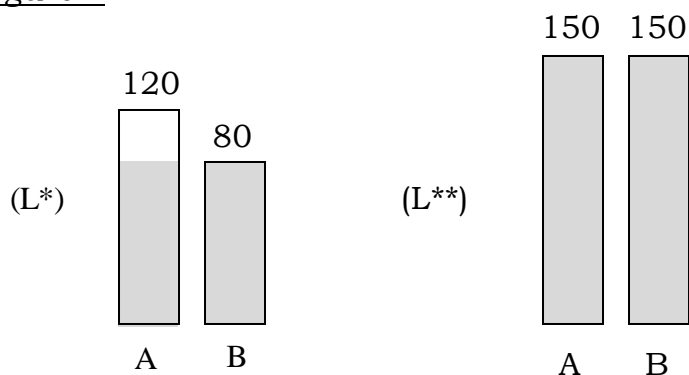
Parker clarifies that the flatness requirement of (L) can be interpreted in two different ways. The first is that God loves every human with the maximal intensity possible, *given that* he loves them equally. For example, though the most he could love person A is, say, 120 units, because he can only love person B with 80 units of intensity, he therefore can only love A with 80 as well. In other words, he only loves everyone as much as he loves the least of them since he is constrained by the requirement of equality. The second interpretation holds that God loves every human equally *and* with equal, maximal intensity. For example, suppose that the most God can love any person is 150 units—if so, he loves all humans to this degree. Parker reformulates (L) to make these two interpretations explicit:

(L*) If God is perfect, then God's love must extend to every human and be as intense as possible while remaining equal for each human; (2013, p. 445)

or,

(L**) If God is perfect, then God's love must extend to every human and be maximally intense for every human. (2013, p. 445)

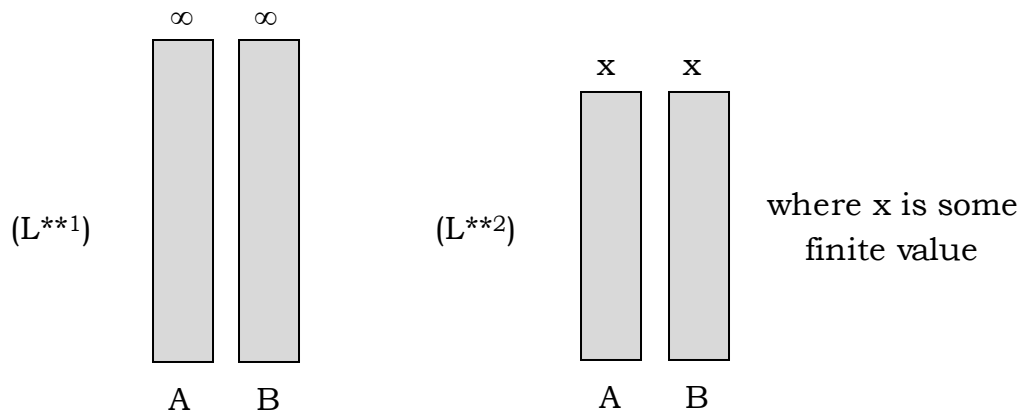
Figure 1



(L*) implies that God cares more about equality than about maximizing intensity of love; I can think of no reason, however, to think that this is true. Indeed, Parker and Jordan (Parker, 2013, 445n6) both consider (L**) to be the more plausible formulation of the flatness requirement, and since Parker sees these as being the only two possible formulations, he concludes that (L) should be replaced with (L**).

Although Parker uses (L**) as a more precise substitute for (L), I believe it can be refined even further, for I can think of two possible interpretations of ‘maximally intense’. The first is that if God’s love is unconditional for every person, and if his love is infinite, he can love every person infinitely. In other words, his love is flat, with infinity being the amount every human is loved (see (L**¹) in Figure 2). In this case then, to love with maximal intensity would be to love everyone with infinite love. Second, there could be something conditioning either how much God can love each person, or how much love he is able to give out overall, such that there is some finite, maximal amount that each person can be loved (see (L**²) in Figure 2). In this case then, to love each person with maximal intensity would be to love them this finite amount.

Figure 2



(L**2) initially sounds implausible because it implies that God's love is not infinite, but rather, that it is limited in some way, and perfect being theologians traditionally agree that God's love, if perfect, is infinite. According to Jordan, however, some essential components of perfect being theology have been overlooked in the hiddenness discussion, and, in what follows, I argue that consideration of these components may make (L**2) seem less implausible than it might appear at first blush. If so, then this will lend support to the claim that the assumption undergirding (S1) is unwarranted.

II. Calibration

Jordan defines perfect being theology as "reasoning about the concept of perfection [as a way of]... understanding the divine nature" (p. 55). Jordan explains that there are two key components of this approach—*attribution* and *calibration*—and that calibration is seemingly ignored by Schellenberg. The *attribution* component involves the process of determining the attributes which contribute to divine perfection, while the *calibration* component states that for

all the attributes a perfect being possesses, the degree to which it possesses each one may vary so that it is optimized rather than necessarily maximized (Jordan, p. 55).

Regarding attribution, the hiddenness discussion assumes love to be one of those attributes had by any perfect being, while calibration, Jordan claims, is usually glossed over in this debate, since God's love is generally considered to be infinite for every human. Jordan states that by combining these components along with the denial of the idea that every property had by God is great-making, a formal statement of the central idea of perfect being theology can be made:

(PT) For any property F, God has F if having F increases the positive metaphysical status of God; and, God has F to that degree which maximally contributes to the positive metaphysical status of God when conjoined with all the other properties God has. (p. 57)

Oddly, Jordan only briefly mentions these components and (PT) at the beginning of his discussion, and ultimately never employs them in his argument. I propose that this is an oversight on Jordan's part.

According to Jordan, calibration does not say that God's properties are all maximized to infinity, but rather that they are all *optimized*: "Given the calibration component, having a particular property to a degree less than maximal may enhance the being's greatness" (p. 55). Thus, given calibration, (L**2) is not an implausible interpretation of God's love and it may not, after all, be right to assume that God's love is infinite. Indeed, Jordan notes:

...as (PT) makes clear, it is possible that compossibility with other great-making properties may require possessing a great-making property to a degree less than maximal. In perfect being theology, the maximal may not always be the best. (p. 55)

In the next section, I will delve further into this idea, turning to a discussion of whether it is possible to challenge the long-held thesis that all of God's great-making attributes are possessed infinitely, or, in other words, that he is omniperfect.

III. Possibility/Plausibility of the Divine Attributes Not Being Infinite

As already noted, Anselmian theists argue that "God is the being than which no greater can be thought" (Nagasawa, p. 577). It is commonly assumed that, in order to fit this description, God must be omniperfect. Nagasawa, however, attempts to show that God may possibly fit the Anselmian thesis while not being omniperfect. According to Nagasawa, in doing perfect being theology, there are three approaches to analyzing a divine attribute: one can look at the attribute 1) in isolation, in order to determine whether it is internally coherent, 2) in relation to other attributes, in order to determine whether they are mutually consistent, and 3) in relation to the world, in order to determine whether it is inconsistent with any contingent fact (pp. 580-583). In building on the work of David Blumenfeld (1978), Nicholas Everitt (2010) draws on the same categories of attribute analysis:

The divine attributes thus present a number of intriguing philosophical problems: problems with finding self-consistent

accounts of each of the attributes, with ensuring that the accounts form a self-consistent set, and with reconciling the attributes with other seeming facts of human experience (divine omniscience and human freedom, divine goodness and widespread underserved suffering, etc.). (p. 86)

By using the first approach to look at the divine attributes, Nagasawa claims that it can be shown that it is possible that God's knowledge, power, and/or love may not be infinite; I will lay out this argument by Nagasawa, and will also use the second approach to show that it may even be *plausible* that some of God's attributes may not be infinite.

i. The Divine Attributes: Possibly Not Infinite

Using Nagasawa's First Approach

Nagasawa's first approach claims that the scope of some of God's attributes may need to be narrowed in order to maintain internal coherence. To show this, he devises three scenarios (pp. 588-590). In the first scenario, he argues that it is metaphysically possible that there is some proposition (*p*) which is unknowable by anyone. In this scenario, even though God does not know *p*, and so is not omniscient, he still fits the Anselmian description of being the greatest conceivable being in virtue of being more knowledgeable than any other being.⁴⁹ In the second scenario, some being (*X*) can know *p*, but God

⁴⁹ There is a question here whether a proposition that it is metaphysically impossible to know should count against omniscience.

cannot—still, God has all knowledge except that-*p*, and is thus overall the most knowledgeable of any being; as such, he still satisfies the Anselmian thesis. In the third scenario, Nagasawa imagines that X actually knows more than God, but still has considerably less power and love than God. In this scenario, even though God is not the greatest conceivable being with respect to one of his attributes,⁵⁰ Nagasawa claims that God's *overall* greatness is still higher than X's. Thus, Nagasawa believes that these scenarios show that it is possible that God need not be omniperfect in order to satisfy the Anselmian thesis.

If Nagasawa's foregoing discussion is correct, then it supports the modest claim that it is epistemically *possible* that God's power, knowledge, and/or love may not be infinite, contrary to what is often assumed. I will now consider the stronger claim that there is reason to think that one or more of God's attributes may *plausibly* be finite.

ii. Divine Attributes in General: Plausibly Not Infinite

Using Nagasawa's First Approach

When we apply Nagasawa's first approach by looking at the metaphysical possibility of each of God's properties, instead of just considering whether they are epistemically possible, it appears that some level of constraint is necessary in order to avoid incoherence. In order to show this, I turn to an analysis of omnipotence put forward by Kenny (1979).

⁵⁰ Schellenberg would surely dismiss this scenario since he assumes that, based on perfect being theology, God must have each of the divine attributes perfectly (1993, p. 10). Nagasawa, however, admits that this scenario is "radical" (p. 590), and his argument does not turn on it anyway.

There is a vast literature on the discussion of omnipotence, and an in-depth study of this attribute is certainly beyond the scope of this thesis; however, what is clear about omnipotence is that it is much harder to define than, for instance, omniscience. Kenny states:

A being X is omniscient iff, for all p , if p , then X knows that p . We cannot offer a simply parallel definition of omnipotence: X is omnipotent iff, for all p , if p , then X can bring it about that p . For this, though it would attribute considerable power to X , would not attribute to him power to do anything which has not already been done, or will not sometime be done. On the other hand, if we drop the if-clause, and say that X is omnipotent iff for all p , X can bring it about that p , then we attribute to X a power far beyond what has traditionally been ascribed to God. For, with the possible exception of Descartes, no theologian or philosopher has seriously maintained that God can bring it about that contradictories are true together. (p. 91)

Kenny goes on to consider a number of different possible definitions of omnipotence put forward by Alvin Plantinga, Peter Geach, and Swinburne, all in response to the question: “Can an omnipotent being make things which he cannot control?”⁵¹ (Mackie, p. 210). Ultimately, Kenny thinks a satisfactory answer only seems likely to be found by framing omnipotence in terms of

⁵¹ The replies to this question are in response to John Mackie’s (1955) formulation of it. This puzzle, however, has been debated for centuries.

having all *powers*. After discussing further iterations, Kenny concludes with the following definition of omnipotence:

Divine omnipotence, therefore, if it is to be a coherent notion, *must be something less than the complete omnipotence* which is the possession of all logically possible powers. It must be a narrower omnipotence, consisting in the possession of all logically possible powers which it is logically possible for a being with the attributes of God to possess. (p. 98, italics mine)

Kenny's analysis of omnipotence shows that 'absolute omnipotence,' although perhaps epistemically possible, is very different from what he calls 'divine omnipotence,' which is narrowed by metaphysical considerations. Thus, if his analysis is correct, he has shown that it is not just possible, but plausible that one of the divine attributes cannot be infinite while still being internally coherent.

Using Kenny's Discussion, Calibration, and Nagasawa's Second Approach

Along with showing that the scope of God's attributes may need to be narrowed to maintain internal coherence, Kenny's proposed definition of omnipotence—"...a narrower omnipotence, consisting in the possession of all logically possible powers *which it is logically possible for a being with the attributes of God to possess*" (p. 98, italics mine)—shows that God's other attributes may also constrain absolute omnipotence. According to Kenny, a coherent discussion of God must take the other divine attributes into account, which is precisely what

Nagasawa suggests we must do in his second approach. This suggestion is also in keeping with the calibration component of perfect being theology, which, as noted above, says that God's attributes are related and are balanced to achieve optimization.

Applying Nagasawa's second approach, then, let's consider the mutual consistency of some properties that seem to conflict with each other by nature—for instance, mercy and justice. Suppose that mercy essentially involves “not giving someone the punishment they deserve” while justice essentially entails “giving someone the punishment they deserve.” Clearly, although it may be epistemically possible for God to have infinite mercy and infinite justice, it does not seem metaphysically possible for these properties to be infinitely instantiated at the same time.⁵² So, although perfect being theologians have taken for granted that God's attributes are all maximized to infinity, metaphysically speaking, in order for the concept of God to be coherent, his properties must be *balanced*: “the degree to which the perfect being has the various attributes may vary, as a perfect being has an attribute to that degree which optimally contributes to perfection” (Jordan, p. 55).

Based on Kenny's refined definition of omnipotence, the calibration component from perfect being theology, and the example provided above, it

⁵² I'm assuming here that if God has a property to an infinite degree, then he cannot cease to instantiate it. If he were to cease for any length of time, he would have an overall lesser amount of that property than were he to have expressed it at that time as well. Therefore, two contradictory properties cannot be expressed infinitely. Recall Kenny's point that, “with the possible exception of Descartes, no theologian or philosopher has seriously maintained that God can bring it about that contradictories are true together” (p. 91).

appears that it is plausible that some of the divine attributes cannot be instantiated to an infinite degree. I will now apply the foregoing analysis specifically to divine love to see whether it can be shown that it is possibly, or even plausibly, not instantiated to an infinite degree.

IV. Application to Divine Love and Schellenberg's Argument

i. Divine Love: Possibly Not Infinite

Recall the first premise of Schellenberg's argument:

(S1) If God exists, then he is perfectly loving. (1993, p. 83)

If Nagasawa's argument (Section 5.III.i) against the necessity of an omniperfect God is successful, he has shown that it is possible that some of the divine attributes need not be infinite. Since love is one of the divine attributes, this conclusion shows that divine love is possibly not infinite. This possibility alone is enough to require that Schellenberg provide supporting argument for the assumption undergirding (S1) that perfect love entails infinite love.

Further, in the previous section (Section 5.III.ii), I believe I have shown that it is plausible that some of God's attributes are not infinite. I will now apply Nagasawa's first and second approaches specifically to divine love to see whether it is not just possibly, but *plausibly*, not infinite, which would further weaken support for Schellenberg's argument.

ii. Divine Love: Plausibly Not Infinite?

Schellenberg's method of conceptual analysis of the attribute of divine love seems to most closely follow Nagasawa's third approach. Schellenberg makes clear that a proper conceptual analysis will be done by *a priori* reasoning about the nature of love and how love would be exhibited if it were possessed by a perfect being (2007b, p. 197). Only after such conceptual analysis is complete should we bring our conclusions to bear on the external world to see if any contingent facts are inconsistent with the results of our analysis. Schellenberg explains:

...our job as philosophers, faced with the question of God's existence, is to fight free from the distractions of local and historical contingency, to let the voice of authority grow dim in our ears, and to think for ourselves about what a God and a God-created world would be like... We must be open to the possibility that the world would be *completely different* than it is if there were a God. For the properties we ascribe to God have implications, and these place constraints on what the *world* could be like if there were a being with those properties. (2007b, p. 197f)

Indeed, as we have seen, Schellenberg believes that this approach yields the conclusion that, if a perfectly loving God exists, the external world would indeed look very different than it does—i.e. nonresistant nonbelief would not occur (1993, p. 83).

Instead of limiting our analysis of divine love to something like Nagasawa's third approach, as Schellenberg does, I will now analyze it using Nagasawa's first and second approaches to see if it can be shown that, plausibly, divine love must be possessed finitely in order to be either internally coherent (first approach) or consistent with the other divine attributes (second approach).

Using Nagasawa's First Approach

In order to determine whether infinite love is internally coherent, we must consider whether there are any *prima facie* reasons for thinking that there is anything that God couldn't love, for if there is, then his love is in some way limited.⁵³ One might reasonably think that a good God couldn't love evil. Given this, it certainly seems that his love is constrained in this sense, and so cannot, metaphysically speaking, be considered infinite.

Schellenberg might respond, however, that his argument is only about God's love *for humans*, and so the question of whether there are things other than humans that he cannot love is irrelevant. Although I think that if it can be shown that there is *anything* God may not love, his love cannot be considered infinite (since it would be limited by the thing he doesn't love), I grant that if we apply God's love only to humans, there doesn't seem to be a reason for thinking

⁵³ Recall as an example, Kenny's analysis of omnipotence. Kenny considers whether there may be some things which God metaphysically cannot do. He comes up with such examples as logical contradictions and, for instance, 'building a table that Jones built' (p. 98).

that he could not love humans infinitely.⁵⁴ As such, I will grant that infinite love, when examined using Nagasawa's first approach and for the purposes of Schellenberg's argument, is found to be internally coherent.

I will now apply Nagasawa's second approach to the combination of infinite love with some of God's other attributes (namely, power and transcendence) to see whether it can be shown that any of these pairs are inconsistent.

Using Nagasawa's Second Approach

Infinite Power

First, I will see whether it can be shown that infinite power and infinite love may not be mutually consistent by way of example. Suppose that X has infinite love; X, then, cannot inflict gratuitous suffering on anyone, since inflicting gratuitous suffering on someone is incompatible with infinite love.⁵⁵ If he were to do so, he would thereby decrease his level of love.⁵⁶ So if X is to remain infinite in love, there is at least one thing that X cannot do. Thus, although I can conceive of a way that X could increase his power and overall greatness, he can only do so by decreasing his amount of love. This example shows that infinite love and infinite power are not mutually consistent, since there are some things that cannot be done unless some love is sacrificed, and vice

⁵⁴ Jordan's argument is intended to provide such a reason, however, I have shown that his argument fails.

⁵⁵ While the literature generally assumes that God can allow some evil, it is widely agreed that he cannot permit gratuitous evil (Kraay, p. 1).

⁵⁶ I am assuming here that God is omniscient, and so would know how to prevent gratuitous suffering—see pp. 96-97 for my explanation of why I make this assumption.

versa—in order to love more, one may need to sacrifice the ability to do certain actions.

This example does not sufficiently show, however, that divine love plausibly is not infinite. I claimed that God is unable to inflict gratuitous suffering without decreasing his love, but, surely no one would claim that God would ever inflict gratuitous suffering. This example, then, does not show that infinite power would constrain God's love, but rather that infinite love would constrain infinite power. In order to use infinite power as an example of an attribute which would constrain infinite love, one would need to provide an example of something that God *can* do (unlike inflict gratuitous suffering) but that conflicts with the expression of infinite love. I can think of no such example, and until one is provided, infinite power does not appear to be a satisfactory example of a property that would show the plausibility of divine love being finite.

Transcendence

The next attribute I will consider is transcendence. God has traditionally been assumed within the Christian tradition to be transcendent, where transcendence is often interchangeable with incomprehensibility or hiddenness (Rea, 2015, p. 6). There are varying degrees of transcendence; for instance, a strong theology of transcendence means that God is absolutely incomprehensible and that no human predicates can be applied to him, analogically or otherwise, whereas a more modest theology of transcendence allows for predicates such as “being just” or “being loving” to apply to God, at

least analogically (Rea, 2015, p. 5). Schellenberg makes clear that his argument requires that God not be absolutely transcendent; after all, it would be impossible to develop an argument against God's existence if one cannot even refer to God (Schellenberg, 1993, p. 46; Schellenberg, 2005a, p. 209). The Christian tradition, Rea claims, has generally agreed that God cannot be absolutely transcendent, for if God is a personal being as is also traditionally agreed-upon, he must not be wholly unknowable:

...the claim that God is *both* transcendent and personal enjoys overwhelming support from the Christian tradition, and is a crucial part of the theological framework endorsed by theologians as diverse as Gregory of Nyssa, Pseudo-Dionysius, Thomas Aquinas, Jonathan Edwards, Karl Barth, and many others. (2015, p. 6)

Schellenberg appears to rank love above the other divine attributes: "When we reflect on the nature of such love, all the power and knowledge in the world fade by comparison" (1993, p. 11). Rea also notes that Schellenberg downplays the importance of transcendence, and warns that this may be a vital mistake for his argument:

I think that Schellenberg is mistaken both in his views about the importance of divine transcendence generally in the Christian tradition and in his understanding of the potential bearing of even a modest doctrine of transcendence for the premises of his argument. (2015, p. 6)

Thus, according to Rea, Schellenberg seems to be demanding of a perfectly loving God something that may not be possible while maintaining a certain degree of transcendence. The epistemic distance God must keep from us may make it impossible for his love to be expressed and interpreted the way we might expect of a perfectly loving, fully immanent being. Even if it is the case that God is able to express infinite love toward us while remaining transcendent, this is not at all obvious, and so should not simply be assumed by Schellenberg. In fact, Rea points out that most systematic-theological and historical analyses have given precedence to transcendence over divine love:

The personal God of *traditional* Christianity has, for many of the most important and influential theologians throughout history, been the transcendent, simple, immutable, and *a se* God of classical theism. The idea that these are non-negotiable divine attributes has traditionally been seen to be one of the results of the method of perfect being theology, and it has exerted enormous influence both on the conceptions of divine love that are to be found in the tradition and also on the conceptions of what it might look like to enter into unitive, loving relationship with God. (p. 8)

If Rea is correct, then we have good reasons for thinking, at least, that the expression of God's love (even if infinite) may not cause the external world to look the way Schellenberg expects it should, since his other divine attributes, like transcendence, may influence the way in which we experience and

interpret his love. God's love, even if infinite, may still be attenuated by the necessary epistemic distance that results from God's transcendence.

Although my foregoing analysis has not shown definitively whether infinite love and some other of God's attributes are mutually inconsistent, I believe I have shown that the assumption that perfect love entails infinite love should no longer be made without more work in this area being done. Indeed, as I have already noted, all that is required to undermine support for (S1) is the modest claim that it is possible that God's love is not infinite, and I believe I have shown that much. In what follows, I will consider some objections to my analysis as well as lay out some implications for Schellenberg's argument if it is correct.

V. Objections

i. General Objections

I will now consider a possible objection to the calibration component of perfect being theology and two objections to the claim that God is possibly not infinitely loving.

Omniscience is Required for Calibration

Someone might respond that, if God's attributes are calibrated, omniscience is a property that would likewise have to be balanced, and since it is infinite, it can only decrease; if it were decreased, then God would no longer be omniscient, and this might affect his ability to perfectly calibrate all of his properties such that the end result will be optimized. I argue, however, that the

calibration component does not require that a divine attribute be calibrated to a finite amount unless it contradicts some other property. The objector, then, would have to show some attribute of God's that cannot be co-instantiated with omniscience in order to claim that omniscience must be tempered. I can think of no such property, and so until such an attribute is proposed, I see no reason why one cannot affirm both God's omniscience and also the calibration component. Thus, this response does not seem to be a successful objection.

Biblical Objection

Someone might object that there is biblical warrant for believing that God possesses infinite love. The following is arguably the most explicit verse in support of this:

The Lord is righteous in all his ways and kind in *all* his works.

(ESV, Ps 145:17, italics mine)

Out of context, this verse certainly seems like good support for God's possession of infinite love. When taken together with the verse that follows, however, it is clear that there are some limits on who receives the benefits of God's goodness:

The Lord is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth. He fulfills the desire of those who fear him; he also hears their cry and saves them. The Lord preserves all who love him, but all the wicked he will destroy. (ESV, Ps 145:18)

When the verse above is taken in context, I do not see a strong argument for God's infinite love. Further, after considering other verses frequently put

forward as evidence for infinite love, it is often the case that they only speak to God being very loving.⁵⁷ Everitt agrees: “It is not as if there is any overwhelming Biblical warrant for the traditional attributions” (p. 86). Thus the argument from biblical evidence does not appear to stand against the possibility of God’s love being finite.

Not Worthy of Worship

Someone might object that if God is not infinite in love, then he is not omniperfect, and if not, “then he does not possess the supreme degree of intrinsic excellence, and hence does not seem to be worthy of worship” (Nagasawa, p. 594). To this I would respond by questioning what makes one worthy of worship. Why think that for a being to be worthy of worship, it must be omniperfect? Everitt echoes this question: “Perhaps such a god needs to be powerful – but why omnipotent? Perhaps knowledgeable – but why omniscient? Perhaps good – but why perfectly so?” (p. 86). If God is not omniperfect but still fits the description of the greatest conceivable being, he would still be the *most* worthy of worship—his intrinsic excellence would still be supreme in that there would be none greater than he. Further, if an analysis shows that omniperfection is not metaphysically possible, then to claim that you are only willing to worship an omniperfect being is to claim that you will only worship something that does not exist (Nagasawa, p. 589). Thus, the objection that a

⁵⁷ Of course, I do not claim to have surveyed all the literature on this topic or all of the verses that may reference God’s omnibenevolence.

non-omnipotent God would be unworthy of worship seems arbitrary and potentially even incoherent.

ii. Specific Objections

Schellenberg may concede that God's love is not infinite, but respond that since God is an unsurpassable, perfect being (albeit maximally-perfect as opposed to omnipotent), his love would still be of such a high degree that his bias toward divine-human relationship and his desire to promote our well-being would not be superseded by other considerations.

In response, I first point out that, as we have seen, there have been numerous responses to Schellenberg's argument that advert to 'greater goods' which may, possibly, conflict with God's desire to put his existence beyond reasonable doubt—for instance, freewill, the sake of a later, better relationship, etc. Schellenberg has replied to most of these responses by appealing to God's infinite love and resources (his accommodationist strategy). If something like what I have been developing is correct, however, these greater goods responses may have renewed force against Schellenberg's argument, since he can no longer defeat them using his accommodationist strategy. Since I know of no accurate way of calculating the value of any of these possible greater goods, or the 'amount' of finite love God has, it is hard to see how we can know just how much love it would take to outweigh any or all of these greater goods. So, if God's love is not infinite, it is hard to know if it is indeed robust enough to accommodate all of the greater goods.

6. Conclusion

I have shown that God's love is possibly not infinite, and have also put forward an argument that works toward showing that it is plausibly not infinite. Even if we only grant the former, more modest claim that God's love is possibly finite, Schellenberg can no longer justifiably rely on the assumption that God's love is infinite without providing an argument in support of it. Since this assumption crucially undergirds (S1), and, as it stands, Schellenberg has provided no such argument in support of it, (S1) fails to enjoy adequate support. Although most of Schellenberg's opponents seem content to agree that *a priori* reasoning alone about the nature of God and of divine love suffices as the method for gathering evidence to support his argument, I have here suggested that more is needed.

Perhaps the most important points gleaned from my analyses of Rea and Jordan are that there are many divine attributes besides love that need to be considered, and that there are many principles and methods involved in doing perfect being theology that must, at least, all be taken into account.

Schellenberg does speak to this point by saying that God's attributes have implications for what the world could be like: "For the properties we ascribe to God have implications, and these place constraints on what the *world* could be like if there were a being with those properties" (1993, p. 198). When it comes to actually applying the methods, however, he does not fully embrace perfect being theology. I cannot claim to know whether this is because he simply doesn't know enough about perfect being theology to take it all into account, or if he is intentionally favouring certain principles from it while ignoring others

that do not suit his purposes. It is important to note, however, that when opponents of his argument have offered ideas from their own analyses, his responses almost invariably include exhortations to break free from tradition and to “let the voice of authority grow dim” (1993, p. 97). But, it may be that that voice is just as authoritative as his own—and perhaps more so—since it may be employing a fuller version of perfect being theology and taking into account prior analyses using not only that method, but also historical and systematic-theological analyses. Indeed, while Schellenberg’s rendition of the hiddenness argument is rather recent, the problem itself is not new, nor is the tradition—along with its methods, procedures, and deliberations—from which it arises. To be charitable, I will assume unintentional ignorance rather than willful neglect and suggest that Schellenberg better acquaint himself with, and begin to utilize the fullness of, perfect being theology, along with the historical and systematic-theological analyses that have accompanied it. Only then, I argue, will he be justified in using the fruits of a conceptual analysis grounded in perfect being theology as support for his argument.

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