

AREA READINGS: THE PROBLEM OF DIVINE HIDDENNESS

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BRIEF DESCRIPTION

“The Problem of Divine Hiddenness” is an infelicitous phrase for two reasons. First, while it suggests that God both exists and hides, this phrase actually refers to a strategy of arguing that various forms of nonbelief in God constitute evidence for God’s nonexistence. Second, it suggests that there is only one problem for theistic belief here, while in fact this phrase refers to a family of arguments for atheism. This area reading exam will examine the literature that surrounds contemporary arguments from nonbelief to atheism. The most important of these are defended by J. L. Schellenberg. Schellenberg claims, in various ways, that a loving God would ensure that there is no reasonable or inculpable nonbelief in his existence, since this belief is required for human beings to enter into a relationship with God, and since (according to theism) having such a relationship with creatures is a great good, and indeed is one of God’s most important goals. But, Schellenberg argues, since such nonbelief occurs among those capable of belief in God, theism should be rejected. After reading some important presentations of Schellenberg’s argument, we will consider some of the main objections to it that have appeared in the literature.

READINGS

Schellenberg’s Presentation of the Argument

1. J.L. Schellenberg (1993) *Divine Hiddenness and Human Reason*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, pp. 1-43. [Introduction, Chapter 1]
2. J.L. Schellenberg (1993) *Divine Hiddenness and Human Reason*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, pp. 44-95. [Chapters 2, 3, and 4]
3. Schellenberg, J. L. (2007) *The Wisdom To Doubt: A Justification of Religious Skepticism*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press. [Chapter 9, Sections 1 and 2 (pp.195-206); and all of Chapter 10]

Response 1: There is No Reasonable/Inculpable/Nonresistant Nonbelief

4. Henry, Douglas V. (2001) “Does Reasonable Nonbelief Exist?” *Faith and Philosophy* 18: 75–92.
5. Schellenberg, J. L. (2004) “‘Breaking Down the Walls That Divide’: Virtue and Warrant, Belief and Nonbelief.” *Faith and Philosophy* 21: 195–213.

Response 2: Belief is Not Necessary for the Possibility of a Relationship with God

6. Poston, Ted, and Dougherty, Trent. (2007) “Divine Hiddenness and the Nature of Belief.” *Religious Studies* 43: 183–198.
7. Schellenberg, J. L. (2007a) “On not Unnecessarily Darkening the Glass: A Reply to Poston and Dougherty.” *Religious Studies* 43: 199–204.
8. Cullison, Andrew. (2010) “Two Solutions to the Problem of Divine Hiddenness.” *American Philosophical Quarterly* 47: 119–134.

Response 3: God Hides in Order to Preserve Morally Significant Human Freedom

9. Swinburne, Richard (2004) *The Existence of God* [2nd Ed]. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 267-71.
10. Swinburne, Richard. (1998) *Providence and the Problem of Evil*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp.203-210.
11. Schellenberg, J. L. (1993) *Divine Hiddenness and Human Reason*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, Chapter 5, pp.116-130.

Response 4: God Hides So that Humans Can Come to Knowledge of God on Their Own

12. Swinburne, Richard (2004) *The Existence of God* [2nd Ed]. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp.271-2.
13. Schellenberg, J.L. (1993) *Divine Hiddenness and Human Reason*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 191-9.
14. Swinburne, Richard. (1998) *Providence and the Problem of Evil*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 210–212 and 257-8.
15. Schellenberg, J. L. (2007) *The Wisdom To Doubt: A Justification of Religious Skepticism*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, pp. 210–213.
16. Dumsday, Travis. (2010) “Divine Hiddenness and the Responsibility Argument: Assessing Schellenberg’s Argument against Theism.” *Philosophia Christi* 12: 357–371.

Response 5: God Hides for the Sake of a Later, Better Relationship

17. Howard-Snyder, Daniel. (1996) “The Argument from Divine Hiddenness.” *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 26: 433–453.
18. Schellenberg, J. L. (1996) “Response to Howard-Snyder.” *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 26: 455–462.

Response 6: The Appeal to Unknown Justifications for Divine Hiddenness

19. Bergmann, Michael. (2009) “Skeptical Theism and the Problem of Evil.” In *The Oxford Handbook to Philosophical Theology*. Edited by Thomas P. Flint and Michael C. Rea, 374–399. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
20. McBrayer, Justin P., and Swenson, Philip (2012). “Scepticism about the Argument from Divine Hiddenness.” *Religious Studies* 48: 129–150.

Response 7: The Molinist Response

21. Flint, Thomas (1998) *Divine Providence: The Molinist Account*. Cornell: Cornell University Press. Chapters 1 and 2.
22. Craig, William Lane (1989) “‘No Other Name’: A Middle Knowledge Perspective on the Exclusivity of Salvation through Christ.” *Faith and Philosophy* 6:172-188
23. Hunt, David (1991) “Middle Knowledge and the Soteriological Problem of Evil.” *Religious Studies* 27: 3-26.
24. Craig, William Lane (1995) “Middle Knowledge and Christian Exclusivism.” *Sophia* 34: 120-139.
25. Perszyk, Ken (2013) “Recent Work on Molinism.” *Philosophy Compass* 8: 755-770.
26. Thune, Michael. (2006) “A Molinist-Style Response to Schellenberg.” *Southwest Philosophy Review* 22: 33-41.
27. McBrayer, Justin. (2006) “On ‘A Molinist-Style Response to Schellenberg,’ by Michael Thune.” *Southwest Philosophy Review* 22: 71-77.
28. Schellenberg, J. L. (2007) *The Wisdom To Doubt: A Justification of Religious Skepticism*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, pp 218-226. (“The Free-Will Defense against the Problem of Divine Hiddenness”).

WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS

- (1) First, briefly set out Schellenberg's argument for atheism. Then, carefully explain the first three responses to it (Responses 1, 2, and 3, above), and indicate how Schellenberg responds to each one.
- (2) Carefully explain the next three responses to Schellenberg's argument for atheism (Responses, 4, 5, and 6 above).
- (3) Set out the key features of Molinism that are relevant to a response to the argument from divine hiddenness. Then, carefully explain Michael Thune's Molinist response, Justin McBrayer's reply, and Schellenberg's response to such a move. Where appropriate, compare and contrast this discussion with the Craig-Hunt debate about the application of Molinism to Christian exclusivism.

Each essay should be approximately 10-15 pages in length (3,000-5,000 words). The primary goal of these essays is to explicate the arguments of the relevant authors. This involves charitably and precisely stating each author's core argument(s), and drawing appropriate connections between the various authors. Key concepts and terms should be defined precisely, and quotations and citations should be used appropriately. Roughly equal attention should be given to each response. Each essay should begin with a brief introduction. Each essay should have a concluding paragraph which either identifies some issues for further consideration, or which poses some questions for further thought, or both. You are neither required nor encouraged to evaluate the arguments of these authors in these short papers. For more advice on writing expository papers, see my handouts entitled "Notes on Reading and Writing Philosophy" and "Expectations Concerning Academic Writing".

GUIDANCE

It is very extremely important that you complete the Area Reading Exam requirement in a timely fashion; students who don't have great difficulty succeeding in this MA program. To this end, here are some suggestions:

- Prepare careful typewritten notes on each paper that you read. I strongly encourage you to restrict yourself to 1-2 pages of notes on each paper. There is real intellectual work involved in preparing such a set of summary notes. Think of them as class handouts for an undergraduate class you might teach, and so try to make sure that they would be intelligible to someone completely new to the area.
- Set yourself strict deadlines for how many papers you will prepare notes for per week, and stick to them.
- After you have prepared notes on papers for one or two sections of the list, you are welcome (but not required) to schedule a meeting with me to discuss these papers and your own expository paper.
- Don't do all the readings first before turning to the writing; start writing your first expository paper even while you are reading and preparing notes on the articles for the second paper.
- You are welcome (but not required) to submit one draft of each expository paper, and I will provide feedback in a timely fashion.
- Part of the point of the ARE requirement is to gain competence in an area of philosophy within which you may subsequently write an MRP. AREs are therefore broad, while MRPs are inevitably much more narrow. As you move through the ARE requirement, think about possible (narrow, specific, highly focused) MRP topics that might emerge from your readings. The survey pieces listed above are good guides to which readings you might subsequently do in order to prepare for the MRP. You are always welcome to discuss possible MRP topics with me as you go along.