

JEFF JORDAN

THE ARGUMENT FROM DIVINE HIDDENNESS
AND CHRISTIAN LOVE

One of the innovations of the early Christian church was its proclamation that God loved humans.¹ The deities worshipped by the pagans were said to favor particular humans, but a love of all humans was not characteristic of those enshrined within the pantheon of Olympus. According to Christianity, God's love extends beyond the boundaries of ethnicity, tribe and place, to the Gentile as well as the Jew. In short, God loves every human. No human deserves God's love, as God loves without regard to merit by freely loving all. Indeed, according to the Christian gospel, God's love is self-giving and sacrificial as exemplified by the death of Christ. As John, the fourth evangelist famously put it "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son."

If God loves every human, as Christians believe, one might think that it follows that God would then seek an explicit personal relationship with every human just as a lover seeks union with his beloved. Building off this thought, one might think that God would provide ample evidence for establishing a personal relationship with him, as a belief in existence is a precondition for any personal relationship. This suggests that no one would lack sufficient evidence to believe, at least if one is reasonable. Arguably, however, there are reasonable nonbelievers—those not culpable for their lack of theistic belief. So, God has not been as forthcoming with the evidence as we would expect. The fact that there are reasonable nonbelievers is itself, one might think, good reason

JEFF JORDAN, University of Delaware, Department of Philosophy; correspondence address: University of Delaware, Newark, DE 19716, USA; e-mail: jjjordan@udel.edu; ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3701-9966>.

¹ Larry HURTADO, *Why on Earth Did Anyone Become a Christian in the First Three Centuries?* (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 2016), 124–26.

to hold that God does not exist. Considerations like these provide the foundation upon which a prominent version of the argument from divine hiddenness is built:

1. If there is a God, he is perfectly loving. And,
2. if a perfectly loving God exists, reasonable nonbelief would not occur.

But,

3. reasonable nonbelief occurs. So,
4. no perfectly loving God exists. Therefore,
5. there is no God.²

In what follows, I argue that the conceptual resources of Christianity—a proper understanding of the Christian view of divine love—topples this version of the argument from divine hiddenness, as a proper understanding of the divine love undercuts premise (2). We will seek our understanding of divine love not via scripture or church tradition but by way of philosophical reasoning. We will explore three models of divine love while assuming the Christian claim that God loves all humans if God exists. We will see that the only model of divine love to survive critical scrutiny is incompatible with a proposition necessary for the argument from divine hiddenness. The first premise of that argument implies that God loves perfectly if God exists. Let us begin by exploring the idea of divine perfect love.

WHAT IS A PERFECT LOVE?

As we explore the idea of divine love from a Christian perspective, we should initially ask about the nature of love itself. While one may love a sports team, a country, or a book, what is it to love a person? Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274), one of the great thinkers of the Christian tradition, understood love as a uniting and binding force:

² This is the version of the argument from divine hiddenness presented by J. L. Schellenberg in his 1993 book, *Divine Hiddenness and Human Reason* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993). More recently, Schellenberg has revised his argument in his 2015 book, *The Hiddenness Argument: Philosophy's New Challenge to Belief in God* (Oxford: OUP, 2015). The 2015 version of the argument is more complex than the 1993 version but suffers from the same defect discussed in this paper. For more detail on the divine hiddenness argument, see my “Divine Hiddenness and Perfect Love,” *The European Journal for the Philosophy of Religion* 9, no. 1 (2017): 187–202; and see Schellenberg’s reply in the same issue.

To love a person is to wish that person good. Hence, inasmuch as we love ourselves, we wish ourselves good; and so far as possible, union with the good.... And by the fact that anyone loves another, he wills good to that other. Thus he puts the other, as it were, in the place of himself; and regards the good done to him as done to himself. So far love is a binding force, since it aggregates another to ourselves, and refers his good to our own.³

Listening to Aquinas, we will take love as involving a lover willing or desiring good for her beloved. What is it to desire good for another? Foregoing a Thomistic exegesis, we will understand a lover desiring good for his beloved as the lover having a disinterested or selfless concern for the beloved. A selfless concern we may understand in contemporary terms as desiring that the interests of one's beloved are advanced, not for one's own sake, but for the sake of the beloved. Indeed, we should think of this as not just desiring that those interests are advanced but also as seeking to advance those interests when feasible. A selfless concern for another implies that the other's good provides the lover with a reason to promote or advance that good.⁴ Lovers have a reason to advance or promote the interests of their beloveds. Of course, since lovers desire good for their beloveds, love does not require promoting or advancing interests that are harmful, destructive, or immoral. Could one love another yet lack any concern for person? Clearly not. Could one have concern for another in a self-interested or even selfish way? Yes, one could. But if one is concerned for another only insofar as that impacts oneself then, clearly, one has no deep love for that person as no one can love another deeply while having only a selfish concern for that person. Could one have concern for another and yet not desire that any of that person's interests be advanced? It is hard to see how, since it makes little sense to say that one desires good for Jones, and yet has no reason to seek that good for Jones or does not care if any of Jones' interests obtain.

When applied to God loving all humans, this understanding of love as a lover selflessly willing and seeking good for her beloved is what we might

³ *Summa Theologica*, I q. 20 a. 1; see also *Summa Theologica*, I q. 20 a. 3.

⁴ Does love imply willing good for one's beloved, or does it imply willing what is best for one's beloved? As the latter involves a maximal concern for one's beloved, it may seem appropriate. Yet it may be that what is best for a person is such that only one could receive what is best, while two or more may receive what is good but in a quantity less than maximal. Being the sole object of her parents' attention and resources may be best for a child, but that is not something that two or more children of any two parents may share. Imagine that a parent has two children, one very gifted, while the other needs special remedial services. Either the parent can move to a location providing better social services that would benefit the child needing special remedial services or move to a location offering uncommon but superior educational programs for the gifted. It is one or the other, but not both.

call benevolence. While benevolence is a kind of love, it is not a deep love. There are deep loves and there are shallow ones, as love comes in degrees. A love deeper than benevolence involves more than willing and seeking the good for those one deeply loves.

Since benevolence is not enough, what more is there to a deep love? Turning again to Aquinas, we see that Aquinas thought that love involved a desire for union with the beloved. Lovers desire an intimacy or closeness of company, care, and purpose with their beloveds. Aquinas says that the lover puts the beloved “in the place of himself.” How should we understand putting one’s beloved in place of oneself? We might understand this in contemporary terms as a deep love is one in which the lover entangles her own interests with those of her beloved. An interest is something a person cares about or should care about. Entanglement consists of either identification or prioritization. Identification with an interest is taking that interest as one’s own. With identification, a lover adopts some or all the interests of her beloved. With prioritization, one ranks some or all the interests of the beloved above his own. When one prioritizes her beloved’s interests, she subordinates her own. Both identification and prioritization involve care, since the lover cares about the beloved, she cares about his interests. If you love someone and you know that she cares about something, then her caring gives you a reason to care about that thing also. A deep love involves a union or sharing of interests and caring involves bringing about what one cares about, or at least, seeking to do so. Entanglement with an interest, whether via identification or prioritization, involves caring about what one’s beloved cares about because the beloved cares about it, or should care about it, and seeking to advance those interests whenever feasible. Whether via identification or prioritization, entanglement is a way of effecting a union with one’s beloved. While it makes no difference to the argument that follows, for simplicity’s sake, we focus on entanglement as identification in what follows.

How then should we understand the relevant sense of love? Love consists of two conditions: for all persons L and B, L loves B if and only if:

- L1: L seeks to advance, promote or bring about the well-being of B; and
- L2: L entangles his own interests with those of B.

The first condition we might call the Concern Condition. The second is the Entanglement Condition. Together (L1) and (L2) provide us with the relevant analysis of love between persons.⁵

⁵ This analysis is influenced in part by H. G. FRANKFURT, *The Reasons for Love* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004).

Different persons, of course, have different interests some of which are incompatible. Two interests are incompatible just in case bringing about one requires that the other is not brought about. More precisely, for any two interests R and R^* , R and R^* are incompatible just in case in any possible world in which R obtains, R^* does not; and any possible world in which R^* obtains, R does not. Could one love another without caring about what that other cares about? Perhaps. However, if one loved another but cared little about what the beloved cared about, then, clearly, one has no deep love for the person, as a deep love involves caring about what one's beloved cares about or should care about.

Of course, identity with the beloved's interests is not indiscriminate, as a lover identifies with nothing incompatible with her beloved's well-being. Lovers desire good for their beloveds, so love does not require identifying with interests harmful, destructive, or immoral. There may also be great goods the achievement of which require not identifying with interests that are otherwise unobjectionable. We have seen that love comes in degrees and, arguably, the deeper one loves another, the greater the concern one has for the person and, correlatively, the more interests of the beloved that one takes as his own. The Entanglement Condition and the Concern Condition provide a twofold proportional measure for the depth or intensity of love, as entanglement and concern increase, so too does the depth or degree of love.⁶ A deep love implies a great care or concern for the beloved and an extensive entanglement with the beloved's interests. A maximal love we will understand as a love that is deep as possible.

Not all of one's interests are equal. Some interests are a person's best interests. A best interest is what a person should care about—whether she knows those are her best interests, and whether she even cares about those interests. Best interests are those one would acknowledge if one were fully rational and fully informed. Being healthy is a common best interest.⁷ There are other interests had by persons that are not their best interests as full information and full rationality would not necessitate their acknowledgment. A person might

⁶ One might wonder if humans can love God if entanglement with the interests of the beloved are required for love. That is, how could a human know the interests of God? One answer to this question reminds us of the importance of scripture or revelation (divine self-disclosure). Arguably, one way a human could learn of divine interests is via a disclosure by God. Also, recall that entanglement implies either identification or prioritization, though we are focusing on the former.

⁷ Is there a ranking among a person's best interests? Can a person's best interests differ from that of another person? Can one's best interests change, or is the list of one's best interests invariant across one's life?

care that a certain sports team win this week even though that interest is not among one's best interests. These less than the best interests we might call a person's "mere interests." Mere interests are real interests but are not among one's best interests. People have mere interests and best interests.

Is equality a necessary companion to universality? That is, given God's love for all; must God love each person to the same deep degree? Should we take a perfect love as characterized by a maximal concern and identification with all and for all? If we do understand a perfect love this way, then, a perfect divine love entails divine impartiality—God would deeply love every human to the deepest degree possible. A perfect love, with this understanding, would be an impartial love in which God loves every human to the deepest degree possible.⁸ This is our first model of divine love. According to this model, God loves every human to the maximal degree possible.⁹ We will call this the Maximality Model. Divine love is universal, equal, impartial and as deep as possible, according to the Maximality Model.¹⁰

The thought that God's love is maximal is natural. Listening again to Thomas Aquinas, however, we hear a dissenting voice as Aquinas held that God "loves some things more than others. For since God's love is the cause of goodness in things... no one thing would be better than another, if God did not will greater good for one than for another."¹¹ Indeed, according to Aquinas, "God's loving one thing more than another is nothing else than His willing for that thing a greater good."¹² Aquinas's argument, concisely put, is that some things are better than other things, with the degree of goodness a thing has due to God's willing it that value. God's willing some things a greater good implies, according to Aquinas, that God loves those things more. The Maximality Model of God's love, then, is false if Aquinas is correct. Aquinas's view suggests that

⁸ It is a common claim of Christians that God is perfectly good, and by that, they mean not just that God loves, but that God is morally just. A perfect love, then, would require calibration to a degree compatible with other properties essential to divine perfection.

⁹ Some philosophers distinguish between the supreme degree of love and an optimal degree of love. The latter is that deepest degree relative to all other loves one might have, or that deepest degree of love appropriate for what is loved. The former means to love as deeply as possible in an absolute sense. The first model we explore (the Maximality Model) takes maximal degree in the absolute sense. The second model we explore (the Equality Model) assumes the relative or optimal sense of the divine love.

¹⁰ Marilyn MCCORD ADAMS, for example, arguably employs the Maximality model in her book, *Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999), 29-31.

¹¹ *Summa Theologica*, I q. 20 a. 3. Centuries before Thomas, Paul held that God loved some humans more than others. See his *Epistle to the Romans*, chap. 9. Indeed, Paul's use of the text from *Malachi* may suggest that God's love is not universal. I ignore that complication here.

¹² *Summa Theologica*, I q. 20 a. 4. It is clear in this fourth article, and in the third, that Aquinas is arguing that God can love one human more than he loves another.

a perfect divine love varies, as God loves some humans more than he loves others.¹³ This embrace of partiality is startling as it runs counter to our contemporary egalitarian sentiments. So, we need to ask, is a perfect love a maximal love?

A PERFECT LOVE IS NOT A MAXIMAL LOVE

A maximal divine love would be impartially extended to all and as intense or as deep as possible. Is a maximal love possible? Consider a comment by J. S. Mill (1806-1873) about human differences:

Human beings are not like sheep; and even sheep are not undistinguishably alike. A man cannot get a coat or a pair of boots to fit him, unless they are either made to his measure, or he has a whole warehouseful to choose from: and is it easier to fit him with a life than with a coat, or are human beings more like one another in their whole physical and spiritual conformation than in the shape of their feet?¹⁴

Different people have different interests; and, since love implies identifying, in part, with the interests of those one loves, then there will be an in-principle obstacle to maximally loving all people, as no rational agent can identify with, or take as his own, interests known to be incompatible. This incompatibility is not just a practical matter, or a matter of limited resources. So, if God were to love humans, and thereby identify with their interests, then even God could not identify with known incompatible interests.¹⁵ In other words, God cannot love or befriend every human in the deepest way. For example, consider the biblical story of Moses and the Pharaoh. The interests of Moses and Pharaoh were not just different but incompatible, as one sought the liberty of the Israelites, while the other sought to retain them in slavery. The *Exodus* story makes clear that God identified with the interests of Moses and not with those of Pharaoh. Consider another example. In the first chapter of *Acts*, the eleven remaining disciples of Jesus sought divine guidance which of two candidates should replace Judas as the twelfth disciple. Casting lots as a way of discerning the divine will, Matthias became the twelfth. Both candidates, Matthias and Justus, very likely cared deeply for the position, but only one could assume it.

¹³ Aquinas's view, however, implies that God's love is proportional to the degree of goodness of the beloved. This proportional bestowing of love does not fit well with the idea that God's love is without regard to merit or desert, as it is freely given.

¹⁴ See chap. 3, "Of Individuality, As One the Elements of Well-being" in Mill's 1859 book *On Liberty*.

¹⁵ Contra FRANKFURT, *The Reasons of Love*, 62-63.

Any zero-sum situation in which the winning of some requires that others lose, involving outcomes that people care about, generates an incompatibility between interests.

One might contend that it is far from obvious that every possible world is a world in which the interests of persons conflict; and perhaps this world is a world in which the interests of persons do not conflict. If this were such a world, then it would be a world in which God could maximally love all.

There is however strong reason to reject this contention. Consider this argument:

- i. For any possible world *W*, such that problems of justice arise in *W*, there are at least two parties which have conflicting interests in *W*. And
- ii. This is a world in which problems of justice arise. So,
- iii. This is a world in which at least two parties have conflicting interests.

The premises of this argument seem beyond reasonable dispute, and if the argument is sound then this objection fails. Of course, one might wonder why a perfect being would bring about a world in which problems of justice arise—why is premise (ii) true if this is a world brought about by God? To discuss this issue in any depth would take us far afield into a discussion of the problem of evil. One reason, stated all too quickly, is that a world in which real love is possible – where a lover entangles his own interests with those of his beloved even when those interest are significantly different or costly to identify with, or even incompatible with his own—will be a world in which problems of justice arise. A world with the possibility of real love will also be a world in which problems of justice arise.

Since different people have different interests, there is an in-principle obstacle to maximally loving all people. Might the distinction between best interests and mere interests provide a way to evade this result? Best interests are those interests that a person should care about, whether or not she knows they are her best interests, and whether she even in fact cares about those interests. Should we hold that the same best interests are common to all humans? It is far from clear that we should hold that the best interests of each are the best interests of all. While first-person reports are fallible, they do count, and it is easy to come up with examples of persons reporting what they take to be their best interests, that are also incompatible. For example, a devout Muslim might report caring most that the entire world is Dar-al-Islam. While a committed Christian might say her greatest care is that the divine will be done on earth as it is in heaven. A convinced naturalist might say the extinction of all supernatural views. It would be surprising to many Muslims, Christians, and Richard Dawkins,

if these three interests were compatible. Let us waive this concern, however, and suppose that everyone shares the same best interests. Might a maximal love require only an identification with best interests and not just mere interests? The point of invoking this distinction is to pare the stock of relevant interests persons have down to a compatible few. Yet, even with the distinction between best interests and mere interests in hand we find an obstacle still, as whatever compatibility this paring provides is achieved at the loss of plausibility.

If God loves individuals as regards their particularity and singularity, and not just as bearers of universal features, then advancing or identifying with a thinned set of best interests found among all hardly seems a sufficient fit, as neither our beloveds nor their cares are fungible. To treat something or someone as a fungible is to treat it as interchangeable with another. When you are hungry for a banana, any ripe one will do. Bananas are fungible. The love you have for your children, however, does not permit you to consider them interchangeable with other children, no matter how vexing they might be. If divine love relevantly resembles the love characteristic of the best of human parenting, then simply meeting only those interests of a beloved child interchangeable with those of any other child falls short of the mark. Human parenting at its best involves not just caring about the child's best interests, but also caring about the child's mere interests. It would be a severe father who tells his children, "I care nothing about what you care about, as I care only about your best interests." We would expect, then, like a loving human parent seeking to advance not only the best interests of a beloved child but also at least some of the child's mere interests, God would seek the same. A deep love, in short, does not treat its beloved as a fungible. A deep love cannot be concerned only with its beloved's best interests.

One might object that perhaps we could treat the interests of others as fungible while at the same time not treating those individuals as fungibles, so perhaps God can love maximally even if God cannot identify with incompatible interests. Could God, for instance, love individuals as regards their particularity, while identifying only with those interests common to all persons? Not if we understand love as, in part, identifying with the beloved's interests. No one could identify only with those interests of Jones common to all others and yet love Jones as an individual. One could of course deny that love implies an identification by the lover with any interests unique to her beloved, as one could love another without knowing the particulars of the beloved: "I love my baby"—a newly pregnant woman might truthfully say, even though the pregnancy is but a month along.

Even if it is true that one could love without identifying with interests peculiar to one's beloved, it is clear that one could not deeply love without knowing and identifying with her interests, as a deep love implies an uncommon intimacy between lover and beloved. In short, love involves caring about one's the beloved's mere interests and not just with the beloved's best interests only, even though best interests are of greater import than mere interests. It is important to note that love focusing, at least in part, on the particularity and singularity of individuals explains why a universal and impartial love, with no variance, cannot be the deepest kind of love. The deepest love involves a kind of exclusivity and does not devalue the beloved by treating her, in effect, as a fungible.

One might seek to circumvent the foregoing by asserting that humans surely identify fully with their own interests; yet some of an individual's interests require a trade-off in light of the individual's inability to realize them all, or realize them fully, in the actual world. So, even if God could not realize everyone's interests, it does not follow that God cannot identify with everyone's interests. Just as a human cannot fully realize all of her interests and yet she can fully identify with all of them, so too with God. At least, so one might object.

This objection however equivocates on the idea of fully identifying with an interest. In one sense, it is true humans fully identify with each of their own interests, since those are their interests and not someone else's. That sense however is hardly relevant. In the relevant sense, it is not true that every human fully identifies with each of his or her best interests, let alone with all of their interests. One should care about one's health, for instance, but there are smokers. Given the wide phenomena of self-destructive actions and self-hatred, it is clear enough that many humans do not fully identify with each of their interests.

A variant of this objection would hold that one could fully identify, in the relevant sense, with each of several conflicting interests. For example, one could fully identify with the interests of being a conscientious scholar, and of being a loving parent; but there are times when those interests conflict. Even so, one might argue, deciding on this occasion to play with one's children rather than reading a philosophy paper does not mean that one no longer fully identifies with both interests. And if that is so, then God's inability to realize everyone's interests seems no more a challenge to God's ability to fully identify with everyone's interests than the fact that a human cannot concurrently realize all of her interests and yet she can fully identify with all of them; or again, so one might object.

The problem with this objection is that it mistakes not being able to realize interests on certain occasions, with those interests being incompatible. The

failure to realize certain interests on this occasion or that may be due to practical limitations such as insufficient time or resources or knowledge and not due to a logical limit. Practical limitations however do not generate logical incompatibilities. Recall that two interests are incompatible just in case attempts to bring about one impedes bringing about the other. It is clear enough that realizing the interest of being a loving parent does not require that one not be a conscientious scholar.

Why cannot a rational agent knowingly identify with incompatible interests? Persons can have unachievable ideals, so why not incompatible interests? Recall that identifying with an interest provides a reason to advance that interest. It would be an odd notion of “rational” if it tolerated one adopting, knowingly, incompatible reasons for one’s actions—knowingly making it the case that one has reasons to advance α , and reasons to impede α . Odd also that one knowingly adopts a set of interests that one knows cannot obtain. While there may be a place for unachievable ideals, adopting known incompatible interests would involve knowingly adopting reasons to advance something, while also knowingly adopting reasons to frustrate that advancement. That sort of self-sabotage seems far from rational.

With the foregoing, we have good reason to reject the view that God maximally loves every human, as no one in principle can fully identify with every human’s interests. Our first model of divine love—God’s love is maximal and impartial and universal—is therefore flawed. Is the failure of the Maximality model sufficient to justify embracing Thomas’ view that the divine love is variable? Perhaps not, as a second model of God’s love is possible.

A PERFECT LOVE IS NOT AN EQUAL LOVE

Perhaps instead of seeing God’s love as maximal, we might take God’s love as universal in scope and uniform in intensity with no variation, but less than maximal. That is, God loves every human to the same degree, but that degree is less than maximal. If God’s love is less than maximal, the problem of identifying with incompatible interests does not arise. With this understanding, a perfect love is an equal love. God equally loves every human but loves no human in the deepest or maximal way. This is our second model of divine love: God loves all humans equally and significantly, but none maximally. While not maximal, God’s love, one might say, is optimal. We might call this the Equality Model. It jettisons maximality, while retaining equality, universality, and impartiality.

Here is a simple illustration of the Equality Model that shows that it avoids the fungibility problem that plagued the Maximality Model. Let the integers, 1–8, represent interests had by humans; with 1 and 2 representing best interests shared by all, and any integer above two representing an interest unique to an individual. Finally, let any odd prime represent an interest incompatible with some interest had by another. Suppose there are three individuals, X, Y & Z:

<u>X</u>	<u>Y</u>	<u>Z</u>
1	1	1
2	2	2
3	4	5
6	7	8

Does this provide a model in which equality and universality are possible which avoids fungibility? One could identify with the best interests had by each; and one could identify with the same number of different but compatible mere interests of the three individuals, so one could identify in total with three interests of each of X and Y and Z. Clearly, there is no fungibility. Notice however that this model does not allow a maximal love of any and assumes that the best interests of each are the best interests of all.

A serious objection to the Equality Model is that equality is not enough, as a failure to love in a deep way would be a defect incompatible with perfection, since if God is to love in the deepest way, God must love some in a maximal way. Clearly, *maximally loving no one* would be a defect for a human. Just as lacking deep relationships would be intrinsically bad for a human, the same holds for God. If God is perfect, then God could not love every human to the same significant but sub-maximal way, as perfection could not require a property the possession of which would lead to a life defective in significant respects. If this argument succeeds, then the second model fails.

One might respond however that even if God loves no human maximally, God could still love maximally as the divine persons could love each other maximally. That is, given the Christian doctrine of the Trinity, God could love maximally without loving any human. Setting aside the doctrine of the Incarnation, the idea that God's maximal love is only among the persons of the Trinity generates a problem. The problem is that this Trinitarian-only view colors the divine love in a narcissistic shade. Anyone who loves himself only, or loves himself more than he loves all others, is guilty of narcissism. Clearly enough, narcissism is a moral defect. Why? Narcissistic love is a self-centered love that is neither selfless, nor disinterested; and so is not willing to sacrifice its own interests in order to advance the interests of another. Narcissistic love,

rather, is willing to sacrifice the interests of others to advance its own. Keeping in mind that Christians are monotheists, the love shared within the Trinity is a self-love. Self-love, of course, is not identical with narcissistic love, and the maximal love shared among the persons of the Trinity could not be narcissistic.¹⁶ A maximal love of another or others, then, is required if the divine love is not narcissistic. If we recall that the incarnation and the *Imago Dei* involved humankind, then there is reason to think that humankind is the proper focus of a maximal divine love. That is, there is reason to think that if God is to love another maximally, then God would maximally love some human or other, which means a divine love willing to sacrifice its own interests for those of others. As we saw, however, it is not possible that God maximally love every person, so God maximally loves some, which counters the Equality model. As with the Maximality model, the Equality model wilts under scrutiny.

A PERFECT LOVE IS A PARTIAL LOVE

So far, the argument has been that God cannot maximally love all, as significant differences between persons make it in-principle impossible to love every person to the deepest degree. In addition, a second model in which the divine love is equally and impartially (but not maximally) extended to all also fails if that means that God loves no human maximally. So how should we understand a perfect love? Is there a third model available that survives scrutiny?

If perfection requires that a being loves maximally and if the early church was correct that God loved every human, then there will be variability in the divine love, with humans loved by God to a significant but varying degree. That is, God loves some maximally and others sub-maximally. This is our third model of divine love: God loves every human but loves some more than others. An important consequence of this model is that if God loves some more than others, then we have reason for thinking that God would not seek the same for each person as lovers do not act impartially between those most loved and others who they love. So, any argument that implies that God, say as a loving parent, would ensure that every person would be treated the same by God (if God existed and loved perfectly) will be unsound given what we have argued so far. This model we will dub the “Variability” model. According to it, God

¹⁶ Recall that the “second greatest commandment” requires that you love your neighbor as you love yourself. This command does not prohibit self-love; it prohibits narcissistic self-love.

loves all humans; and yet the divine love is variable, as God loves some more than others. The Variability model does not tell us whom God loves more or less, just that God's love must be variable. If God loves some more than others, then that love will not impartially manifest or express itself. With variability, we should expect partiality, as no one treats her beloveds the same as she treats those she loves less. It is important to keep in mind that variability implies partiality as we move to examine the argument from divine hiddenness.¹⁷

THE ARGUMENT FROM DIVINE HIDDENNESS

We get a sense of the argument via a story about the Nobel laureate Bertrand Russell (1872–1970), who, when asked what he would say to God if he should die and find himself in the divine presence, replied he would say, “Not enough evidence God, not enough evidence.”¹⁸ On the other hand, the French philosopher and mathematician Blaise Pascal (1623–1662) thought there was enough evidence. At least enough to condemn those who do not believe, but not so much as to overwhelm one's free will and reason:

The prophecies, and even the miracles and proofs of our religion, are of such a nature that they cannot be described as absolutely convincing. But they are also of such a kind that one cannot say that it is unreasonable to believe them. Thus there is both evidence and obscurity to enlighten some and bewilder others. The evidence, however, is such that it surpasses, or at least equals, the evidence to the contrary. Therefore, since it is not reason that can persuade men not to follow it, only concupiscence and malice of heart can do so. Thus there is sufficient evidence to condemn, but insufficient to convince. Hence it appears that, as regards those who follow it, grace and not reason causes them to do so, and that, as regards those who shun it, concupiscence and not reason causes them to do so.¹⁹

Pascal held that too much evidence would overwhelm one's will and freedom, but he argued that there was enough evidence for a responsible belief, even if that evidence was not conclusive in its quantity or quality. The point, however, of the Argument from Divine Hiddenness is that there should

¹⁷ Is there any scriptural support for the third model? There is. For example, see *Deuteronomy* 7:7–8, and 10:14–15; the annunciation passage in the first chapter of *Luke*; and Paul's *Epistle to the Romans*, chap. 9.

¹⁸ John Searle recounts being present when Russell uttered his evidential complaint. See SEARLE'S *Mind, Language, and Society: Philosophy in the Real World* (New York: Basic Books, 1998): 36–37.

¹⁹ Blaise PASCAL, *Blaise: Thoughts on Religion and Other Subjects*, trans. John Warrington (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1960), 200.

be no controversy or debate whether there is enough evidence available for believing that God exists, if God were to exist. Recall, according to a prominent version of the argument:

1. If God exists, then God is perfectly loving. And,
2. If a perfectly loving God exists, reasonable nonbelief would not occur.

But,

3. Reasonable nonbelief occurs. So,
4. No perfectly loving God exists. Therefore,
5. There is no God.

This argument assumes that God loves every human (if God exists). Even so, the argument rests upon a shaky assumption—that God’s love must be invariable. God’s invariant love, the argument assumes in premise (2), means that God would always treat every human the same by ensuring that God at all times seeks a personal relationship with every person. The argument cannot tolerate variability in the divine love because the argument requires that no human would ever lack the evidence necessary for belief. The Argument from Divine Hiddenness requires either the Maximality Model or the Equality Model of divine love. We have seen, however, that neither of those models survives scrutiny.

If there is variation in the degree of divine love—if God loves some more than others—then our reasons for supposing that God would always seek the same for each person evaporate, as lovers do not act impartially between their dearests and others. If there is variability in the divine love, then, for all we know, relationships with those not so deeply loved could require that God not now be open to personal relationships with those deeply loved. Alternatively, if there is variation in the divine love, then, for all we know, relationships with those deeply loved could require that God not now be open to personal relationships with those not so deeply loved. The takeaway here is that, contra premise (2), we have no reason for thinking that a variable divine love requires that God would always be open to a personal relationship with every person. Since, for one thing, there may be, for all we know, great goods the accomplishment of which require that God does not now seek a personal relationship with every human. What possible goods could preclude God from now being open to a personal relationship with any who have not shut themselves off from such a relationship? While we are far from being able to itemize such goods, we can imagine some. For example, if God exists, it might be a great good for one to influence another to commit to the belief that God exists.

Being instrumental in bringing others to saving belief would be a great service to others and deepen one's own commitment. This conceivable good would be possible only if God has not been open to personal relationships with all until some, with whom God has a personal relationship, have had the opportunity to seek to bring others to saving belief.

The variability of the divine love casts serious doubt on the soundness of the divine hiddenness argument. Any version of the argument from divine hiddenness implying that perfect love requires invariability requires either the Maximality Model or the Equality Model, but founders with the Variability Model. With the ascendancy of the Variability Model, the argument from divine hiddenness sinks.

Is a God who loves some more than others too small? Without a maximal love for all, is God worthy of worship? It is important to remember that our argument has not been that God does not perfectly love, but rather that it is impossible for any being to love every other being in the deepest way possible. Perfect love, like perfect power and perfect knowledge, conforms to logic. If the "failure" of God to control the actions of those who enjoy significant freedom implies no diminishment of worship-worthiness, or, the "failure" of God to know an even prime greater than 2 implies no loss of worship-worthiness, then likewise the "failure" of God to love all maximally, and his "failure" to love all equally is just as benign. These "failures" are not genuine defects as they are compatible with perfection. Since no being can love all other beings in the deepest way, then, if God is to love in the deepest way, God must love some more than others. The failure to love in the deepest way would be a genuine defect incompatible with perfection and worship-worthiness.²⁰ Given these results, it follows that any version of the Argument from Divine Hiddenness employing either the Maximality Model of divine love or the Equality Model, as Schellenberg's does, is unsound, and presents no threat to Christian belief.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

AQUINAS, Thomas. *Summa Theologica*. Translated by English Dominican Fathers. New York: Benziger Brothers, 1947.

FRANKFURT, H. G. *The Reasons of Love*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004.

HURTADO, Larry. *Why on Earth Did Anyone Become a Christian in the First Three Centuries?* Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 2016.

²⁰ For further details see my "The Topography of Divine Love," *Faith & Philosophy* 29, no. 1 (2012): 53–69.

- JORDAN, Jeff. "Divine Hiddenness and Perfect Love." *The European Journal for the Philosophy of Religion* 9, no. 1 (2017): 187–202.
- JORDAN, Jeff. "The Topography of Divine Love." *Faith & Philosophy* 29, no. 1 (2012): 53–69.
- MCCORD ADAMS, Marilyn. *Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999.
- MILL, J. S. *On Liberty*. London: John Parker and Sons, 1859.
- PASCAL, Blaise. *Pensées: Thoughts on Religion and Other Subjects*. Translated by John Warrington, London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1960.
- SHELLENBERG, J. L. *Divine Hiddenness and Human Reason*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993.
- SHELLENBERG, J. L. 2015. *The Hiddenness Argument: Philosophy's New Challenge to Belief in God*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- SEARLE, John. *Mind, Language, and Society: Philosophy in the Real World*. New York: Basic Books, 1998.

THE ARGUMENT FROM DIVINE HIDDENNESS AND CHRISTIAN LOVE

Summary

In the paper it is argued that the conceptual resources of Christianity topple the hiddenness argument. According to the author, the variability of the divine love cast doubt on the soundness of Schellenberg's reasoning. If we understood a perfect love as a maximal and equal concern and identification with all and for all, then a divine love would entail divine impartiality, but because of conflicts of interest between human beings the perfect, divine love cannot be maximal.

Keywords: divine hiddenness; divine love; perfect love; maximality model.

ARGUMENT Z BOŻEGO UKRYCIA I CHRZEŚCIJAŃSKA MIŁOŚĆ

Streszczenie

W artykule argumentuje się, że konceptualne zasoby chrześcijaństwa obalają argument z ukryciu. Według autora zróżnicowanie Bożej miłości poddaje w wątpliwość słuszność rozumowania Schellenberga. Gdybyśmy rozumieli doskonałą miłość jako maksymalną i równą troskę oraz utożsamianie się ze wszystkimi i dla wszystkich, wtedy Boża miłość pociągałaby za sobą Bożą bezstronność, ale z powodu konfliktu interesów między ludźmi doskonała Boża miłość nie może być maksymalna.

Słowa kluczowe: Boże ukrycie; Boża miłość; miłość doskonała; model maksymalności.