

JEAN-BAPTISTE GUILLON

“YOU WOULD NOT SEEK ME IF YOU HAD NOT FOUND ME” —
ANOTHER PASCALIAN RESPONSE
TO THE PROBLEM OF DIVINE HIDDENNESS*

In general terms, the problem of divine hiddenness, as it was most clearly formulated in 1993 by Schellenberg,¹ is that, if a loving God existed, we would expect him to establish a relationship with all human beings who are not resistant—in other words, there should not be any nonresistant nonbelievers; but it seems that there are some nonresistant nonbelievers. Therefore a loving God does not exist.

Often, and probably for many contemporary readers, what gives this argument a special strength and urgency is that the second premise is not just general and impersonal (*some* people are nonresistant nonbelievers); rather, *they themselves* constitute evidence in favour of this premise. In other words, they themselves would like to believe in God and have a loving relationship with him, but they feel like what is missing is a loving God responding to their longing by providing the evidence and the relationship they are expecting.

JEAN-BAPTISTE GUILLON, Assistant Professor at the University of Navarra; address for correspondence: Universidad de Navarra, Departamento de Filosofía, 31009 Pamplona, Navarra, Spain; email: guillonjeanbaptiste@gmail.com; ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3868-4351>.

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¹J. L. SCHELLEBERG, *Divine Hiddenness and Human Reason* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993).

Michael Rea reminds us of this very central upshot of the problem of hiddenness by starting the first paragraphs of his book on the topic² by the story of a friend of his who, in a discussion about various faith struggles, “broke down in tears, saying ‘God is supposed to be my heavenly father. So why can’t he just whisper ‘I love you’ once in a while?’” Rea’s friend may or may not have turned this distress into an atheist argument along the lines of Schellenberg’s. But clearly many a reader of Schellenberg has found the argument all the more striking for having experienced *in themselves*, at one degree or another, this kind of distress.

This is what we may call the “first-person problem of divine hiddenness.”

To this kind of people—people who seek God, would like to find him, and suffer from what seems to be an absence of response on God’s part—Blaise Pascal responded with a condensed and intriguing formula which he attributes to Jesus himself, God incarnate, in dialogue with the soul of the God-seeker:

Take comfort; you would not seek me if you had not found me. (L 919, S 751)³

I will call this conditional the Pascalian Conditional of Hiddenness (PCH). In this paper, I will argue that the PCH offers a fundamental insight into Pascal’s own response to the problem of divine hiddenness. As far as I am aware, the PCH has not been studied yet by philosophers who have tried to reconstruct Pascal’s response to the problem. And my interpretation of the Pascalian response will indeed be significantly different from those already existing in the literature, in particular from Schellenberg’s own interpretation⁴ and from John Hick’s.⁵

The strategy I will reconstruct and develop here is not only original as an interpretation of Pascal’s thought. It also constitutes a new kind of response to the problem of divine hiddenness. The central intuition of this strategy, based on the PCH, is to say that anyone who expects God to be perfectly loving and desires a relationship with him is in fact already in such a relationship with

² Michael REA, *The Hiddenness of God* (Oxford: OUP, 2018).

³ All quotes from Pascal’s *Pensées* will be given in the translation of A. J. Krailsheimer (Blaise PASCAL, *Pensées* (London: Penguin Books, 1966)) and the references will be given according both to the numbering of Krailsheimer’s edition (which follows Lafuma’s edition, hence the letter L) and in Sellier’s edition (S).

⁴ SCHELLENBERG, *Divine Hiddenness*, chap. 4.

⁵ John HICK, *Faith and knowledge* (London: Macmillan, 1967), 141.

God. The seeking itself is a manifestation of the fact that God has already initiated a relationship. Formally speaking, this new response is original in that it does not specifically attack one of the premises of the argument, but rather it shows that the second premise (absence of relationship with God) is false *if* the arguer knows the first (God as perfectly loving) to be true.

My purpose here is modest: I will not claim that the PCH offers, all by itself, a *complete* defence against the objection of divine hiddenness. But I will argue that it constitutes *part of* a plausible theodicy of divine hiddenness (at least from a Christian perspective). I am using the word “theodicy of divine hiddenness” here (as opposed to a “defence”) as referring to the attempt at providing the *true and actual story* about divine hiddenness (while a “defence” would only offer a *possible or plausible story* that would be sufficient to block the atheist’s argument).⁶ If my Pascalian response is plausibly a (neglected) part of the *true* story about hiddenness (at least for Christians), then it is worth stating even if it is not a *complete* response to Schellenberg’s argument (and has to be complemented by other strategies already defended by other authors).

In the first section, I will present a formulation of the divine hiddenness argument which differs a little bit from Schellenberg’s classical formulation but which will be useful to set the stage for a clear presentation of the PCH strategy. In the second section, I will analyse Schellenberg’s interpretation of Pascal and I will show why the PCH quote makes probable an alternative interpretation. In the third section, I will develop the PCH strategy for itself, independently of Pascalian scholarship, and I will add to Pascal’s core intuition some elements that seem to me to be necessary in order to strengthen the strategy for the contemporary discussion. Finally, in the fourth section, I will discuss three ways in which my version of the PCH strategy is limited, and I will briefly speculate on how it could be plausibly extended or complemented to offer a complete response to the problem of divine hiddenness.

⁶ My use of the word “theodicy” does not mean to imply that I consider the problem of divine hiddenness as being an instance of the problem of evil.

1. THE DIVINE HIDDENNESS ARGUMENT AND THE CLASSICAL RESPONSES

Schellenberg's classical formulation of the divine hiddenness argument contains three premises:⁷

Schellenberg's classical formulation

(S1) If there is a God, he is perfectly loving.

(S2) If a perfectly loving God exists, then nonresistant nonbelief does not occur.⁸

(S3) Nonresistant nonbelief occurs.

Therefore

(~G) There is no God.

For the purposes of this paper, however, it will be helpful to develop a little bit Schellenberg's sub-arguments, and more specifically the sub-argument for proposition (S2). For (S2) is not really a *fundamental* premise for Schellenberg; rather, he argues for it in chapter 1 of his *Divine Hiddenness* with an argument that contains two more fundamental premises. In short, the argument for (S2) is that a perfectly loving God would seek a significant personal relationship with human beings, and that no significant personal relationship is possible if one does not believe in the mere existence of the other person.

As for the first idea, Schellenberg writes:

I am claiming that God, if loving, seeks *explicit, reciprocal* relationship with us. (p. 18)

To affirm this, Schellenberg takes his clue from Robert Adams' analysis of the concept of love, according to whom to love logically implies to seek a personal relationship. But Adams' analysis goes further than that: Adams shows that a loving person not only must seek a personal relationship with the beloved, but must seek this relationship *for its own sake* (as opposed to seeking this relationship *out of benevolence* because the relationship would benefit the beloved). Adams, quoted and approved by Schellenberg,⁹ writes:

The ideal of Christian love includes not only benevolence but also desire for certain kinds of personal relationship, for their own sake. Were that not so, it would be strange

⁷ SCHELLENBERG, *Divine Hiddenness*, 83.

⁸ I replace Schellenberg's original phrasing of "reasonable nonbelief" with the formulation of "nonresistant nonbelief", which he used later, in particular in his *The Wisdom to Doubt: A Justification of Religious Skepticism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2007).

⁹ SCHELLENBERG, *Divine Hiddenness*, 22.

to call it “love.” It is abuse of the word “love” to say that one *loves* a person, or any other object, if one does not care, except instrumentally, about one’s relation to that object.... God’s love for us is surely seen as involving a desire for certain relationships between God and us, for their own sakes and not merely as a good for us.¹⁰

If the concept of love, as Adams and Schellenberg agree, logically implies the desire for a (significant) personal relationship for its own sake, then surely a loving God necessarily seeks a personal relationship with all beings he loves, and a *perfectly* loving God arguably seeks a personal relationship with all persons he created. But then, if God *seeks* a relationship with all persons, then this relationship should occur every time the persons are also seeking a relationship with God, or even every time the persons are not *resisting* this divine proactive attitude. Therefore, it seems that Adams’ (and Schellenberg’s) analysis of the concept of love gives us reason to accept the following premise:

- (2) If a perfectly loving God exists, then nonresistant nonrelationship does not occur, where “nonrelationship” means “absence of a significant personal relationship with God.”

By “significant” I mean that the desire of love requires a certain level or threshold of personal relationship, even though (as Schellenberg himself explicitly admits¹¹) it need not require (at least not always) a maximal level or perfection of personal relationship. Schellenberg gives some more details about what is required to count as a *significant* personal relationship between humans and God. I will not enter here in all the details of Schellenberg’s account—we will come back to it in the discussion of the Pascalian strategy (in section 3, stage 1). But the crucial point for the structure of the argument is that according to Schellenberg there is at least one fundamental cognitive requisite to having a significant personal relationship: both persons must at the very least *believe* in each other’s existence.

Here is Schellenberg’s formulation of this second fundamental idea:

I cannot love God, be grateful to God, or contemplate God’s goodness unless I believe that there *is* a God.¹²

¹⁰ Robert M. ADAMS, *The Virtue of Faith and Other Essays in Philosophical Theory* (New York: OUP, 1987), 188–89.

¹¹ See below section 4.1.

¹² SCHELLENBERG, *Divine Hiddenness*, 30.

Even though Schellenberg is using here various more detailed kinds of relationships (love, gratefulness, contemplation) to arrive at the cognitive requisite of *belief* in God, we could formulate more generally his idea in the following way:

- (3) A significant personal relationship with God logically implies the belief that there is a God.

Or conversely:

- (3') Nonbelief (in God's existence) logically implies nonrelationship (with God).

It is clear that from (2) and (3)—or (3'), which is equivalent—we can derive:

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

Since (S2) is really a sub-conclusion from two more fundamental premises 2 and 3, we could substitute (S2) in the original argument with the two premises from which it is derived. We would obtain the following argument with four premises instead of three:

The four-premise formulation

- (1) If there is a God, he is perfectly loving.
- (2) If a perfectly loving God exists, then nonresistant nonrelationship does not occur.
- (3) A significant personal relationship with God logically implies the belief that there is a God.
- (4) Nonresistant nonbelief occurs.

Therefore

- (~G) There is no God.

If we present the argument in this way, we can see that Schellenberg's classical presentation is in fact one possible way of grouping the fundamental premises to simplify the argument. For Schellenberg, the clearest way of grouping premises is to group (2) and (3) and replace them with their sub-conclusion S2.

But for the purposes of our discussion of the PCH strategy, another grouping (and another sub-conclusion) will be helpful and clarifying: it is the grouping of premises 3 and 4. Let us take these premises together, especially in the following order:

- (4) Nonresistant nonbelief occurs.
- (3') Nonbelief (in God's existence) logically implies nonrelationship (with God).

From these two premises, there is an obvious sub-conclusion that follows, namely:

- (~R) Nonresistant nonrelationship occurs.

And we could therefore reformulate the hiddenness argument in the following way:

The nonrelationship formulation

- (1) If there is a God, he is perfectly loving.
- (2) If a perfectly loving God exists, then nonresistant nonrelationship does not occur.
- (~R) Nonresistant nonrelationship occurs.

Therefore

- (~G) There is no God.

This presentation of the argument is just a reorganization that Schellenberg could very well accept: in his discussion, he would just emphasize that he accepts proposition (~R) on the inferential evidence that there are nonresistant nonbelievers and that nonbelievers cannot (logically) be in a significant relationship with God. But this presentation of the argument also opens the possibility for other kinds of evidence in favour (~R), perhaps some evidence independent of cognitive considerations to do with “belief in God's existence.” This alternative possibility will be important in our later discussion of the PCH strategy.

We can use the four-premise formulation above in order to classify the various classical responses to the problem of divine hiddenness. All solutions defended today in the literature deny (or raise doubts about) one or another of these four premises.

Some philosophers deny (or raise doubts about) premise 1, saying that the proper philosophical concept of God does not imply the concept of love—or perhaps a concept of love as pure benevolence but not a concept of love as a desire for a personal relationship for its own sake. Sometimes, this response uses the Greek words *agape* and *eros* to emphasize that a traditional conception of God contains love as *agape* (pure benevolence) but not love as *eros*

(desire for a personal relationship as such). Defences along these lines also typically appeal to the idea that God is “transcendent” in such a way that our human concept of love (as eros, or desire) cannot apply to him.¹³

Other philosophers deny (or raise doubts about) premise 2, saying that God, even though he values and desires a relationship with each one of us, may have reasons to permit (at least temporarily) the absence of such a relationship (even in persons who are nonresistant), due to other considerations and other goods, the existence of which requires for God to permit some occurrences of nonresistant nonrelationship. Such goods might be for instance human freedom,¹⁴ a sense of inwardness in the person’s attitude,¹⁵ or religious diversity.¹⁶ Another way to challenge premise 2 is akin to “skeptical theism” and says that even if we cannot imagine or conceive God’s specific reasons for permitting nonresistant nonrelationship, that is not surprising because we should not *expect* to be able to understand or imagine God’s reasons. Therefore, the truth of premise 2 is inscrutable for us and cannot constitute the basis of a plausible argument.¹⁷

Another response is to deny (or raise doubts about) premise 3, saying that a significant relationship with God does not logically require a state of *belief* in his existence. In the literature, philosophers who deny this premise emphasize the fact that propositional states that are below the threshold of belief—such as accepting, assenting, assuming, trusting or hoping in God’s existence—could be sufficient to establish a significant personal relationship.¹⁸

Finally, there is the possibility of denying (or raising doubts about) premise 4, saying that nonresistant nonbelief does not in fact occur (or that it is not clear or not proved that it occurs). This strategy can take two different routes when confronted with a purported case of a nonresistant nonbeliever. One route is to say that this person is *in fact* a believer, even though she does not seem to be and does not know it. She is or might be an “implicit believer”

¹³ See for instance REA, *The Hiddenness of God*. For more references on strategies that reject our premise 1, see Daniel HOWARD-SNYDER and Adam GREEN, “Hiddenness of God,” in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2016), ed. Edward N. Zalta, sec. 4, in the responses against premises 4 and 5 in their presentation.

¹⁴ Richard SWINBURNE, *Providence and the Problem of Evil* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), chap. 11; SCHELLENBERG, *Divine Hiddenness*, chap. 5.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, chap. 6.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 181–84. For more references on strategies that reject our premise 2, see HOWARD-SNYDER and GREEN, “Hiddenness of God,” sec. 3.

¹⁷ For references, see *ibid.*, sec. 4, the paragraph on skeptical theism.

¹⁸ For references on these kinds of strategies, see *ibid.*, sec. 4, the responses against their premise 6.

or an “anonymous Christian.”¹⁹ The other route is to say that this person is *in fact* resistant, even though she does not seem to be and thinks she is not. That might be because all human beings have a *sensus divinitatis* which leads everyone who does not resist to this *sensus* to naturally believe in God’s existence. As St Paul writes: “Since the creation of the world His invisible *attributes* are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they [nonbelievers] are without excuse” (Rom. 1:20).

The PCH strategy that I will reconstruct and develop in the next sections is none of these classical responses. If we concentrate on the four-premise formulation, we will see that the PCH strategy can be considered as a new way of rejecting premise 3 (without appealing to any propositional attitudes such as acceptance, trust or hope). But that is not the more interesting dialectical feature of this strategy: the more interesting feature is how it responds to the nonrelationship formulation of the argument. For we have seen that when we focus on the nonrelationship formulation of the argument, it is not sufficient to block Schellenberg’s sub-argument in favour of the existence of nonresistant nonrelationship. This is so because one might believe that there are nonresistant people who lack a significant relationship with God ($\sim R$) *not* just because of the existence of propositional nonbelievers—that is, on the basis of premises 3 and 4—but more directly because one seems to lack any such significant relationship in the first place. Consequently, it is not sufficient to deny premise 3 in order to block the nonrelationship argument. And the PCH strategy has a very original way to block the nonrelationship argument. As we will see later, instead of rejecting any of the premises, the PCH argument says that for anyone who knows (1) to be true, ($\sim R$) is in fact false. Therefore (1) might be true, and so might ($\sim R$), but you may not know *both* at the same time in order to reason your way to the conclusion.

This dialectical structure of the PCH response will become clearer in the next sections.

2. INTERPRETING PASCAL’S RESPONSE TO THE PROBLEM OF DIVINE HIDDENNESS

Blaise Pascal is probably the first Christian thinker who gave the phenomenon of divine hiddenness a central role in his philosophy of religion.

¹⁹ Karl RAHNER, “Anonymous Christians,” *Theological Investigations* 6 (1969): 390–98.

For that reason, it is interesting, from the point of view of the history of philosophy, to interpret and understand correctly what he took to be the proper response to this problem. In the contemporary literature, there is no consensus as to how to reconstruct Pascal's response. Schellenberg identifies at least three possible interpretations of Pascal's thought: the Just Deserts Argument, the Moral Freedom Argument, which corresponds to John Hick's interpretation, and his own interpretation which contains what he calls the Presumption Argument and the Stimulus Argument.²⁰

The first two interpretations are typically supported by an analysis of the following excerpt:

God's will has been to redeem men and open the way of salvation to those who seek it, but men have shown themselves so unworthy that it is right for God to refuse to some, for their hardness of heart, what he grants to others by a mercy they have not earned.

If he had wished to overcome the obstinacy of the most hardened, he could have done so by revealing himself to them so plainly that they could not doubt the truth of his essence.... This is not the way he wished to appear when he came in mildness, because so many men had shown themselves unworthy of his clemency, that he wished to deprive them of the good they did not desire. It was therefore not right that he should appear in a manner manifestly divine and absolutely capable of convincing all men, but neither was it right that his coming should be so hidden that he could not be recognized by those who sincerely sought him. He wished to make himself perfectly recognizable to them. Thus wishing to appear openly to those who seek him with all their heart and hidden from those who shun him with all their heart, he has qualified our knowledge of him by giving signs which can be seen by those who seek him and not by those who do not. (L 149, cf. S 274)

If we focus on some formulations of this text, such as "it is right for God to refuse to some, for the hardness of their heart" or "it was ... not right that he should appear in a manner manifestly divine," we might be tempted to read this text along the lines of the Just Deserts Argument: Why is God hidden to human beings? Because they have deserved it by the hardness of their heart; they do not deserve (anymore) to see God manifestly. God would be accessible (and perhaps *is* accessible) only to those who deserve it. But as Schellenberg rightly notes, this interpretation "contravenes the Christian ethic,"²¹ or Christian theology, according to which God goes beyond mere justice and in his mercy gives grace to human beings who do *not* deserve it. To think that grace and relationship with God are offered only to those who

²⁰ SCHELLENBERG, *Hiddenness of God*, chap. 6.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 135.

deserve it would presuppose that it is *possible* for human beings (out of their own free will) to deserve God’s grace. This would be, from the point of view of orthodox Christianity, a form of the Pelagian heresy, and Pascal the Jansenist, the Augustinian, would be the last one to endorse such a heresy. Indeed, a more careful analysis of this same text suffices to see that if some are granted divine grace and divine lights, it is (as Pascal explicitly says) “by a mercy they have not earned.” So it is true that human beings have deserved divine hiddenness, but that is far from being the whole story since God (in his mercy) has decided to make himself accessible to some *even in spite* of their not deserving it. The Just Deserts Argument cannot be taken as constituting the whole of the Pascalian response. Indeed, in another excerpt to which we will come back later, Pascal explicitly says that “it is *not only right* but useful for us that God should be partly concealed and partly revealed” (L 446, S 690, my emphasis).

John Hick, studying this very same excerpt,²² interprets it in a different way. Hick considers this text as an instance of his Moral Freedom Argument, according to which a really *personal* relationship requires freedom on both parts, and there would not be freedom on the part of humans if God were not hidden. Here is Hick’s own formulation:

If man is to be personal, God must be *deus absconditus*. He must, so to speak, stand back, hiding himself behind his creation, and leaving to us the freedom to recognize or fail to recognize his dealings with us.²³

In Pascal’s terms, men must retain the possibility to “seek God with all their hearts” or to “shun him with all their hearts,” but they would not have this dual possibility if God had “[revealed] himself to them so plainly that they could not doubt the truth of his essence”; in that scenario, God would have “overcome the obstinacy of the most hardened” but then they would not have been free in their relationship to God. This is, at least, how Hick reads this excerpt.

But as Schellenberg rightly notes, this interpretation does not seem to be correct either. Because, according to Pascal, God *was* plainly manifested to human beings before the Fall, and yet Adam and Eve still had the possibility and the moral freedom to reject him. In other words, if God revealed himself plainly to human beings, this would suppress their *cognitive* freedom (their

²² HICK, *Faith and Knowledge*, 141.

²³ *Ibid.*, 135.

capacity to intellectually deny his existence) but it would not suppress their *moral* freedom (they could still, in all awareness, reject a loving relationship with him).

It is therefore legitimate to look for an alternative interpretation of Pascal's response to the problem of hiddenness, as Schellenberg does. And to do so, Schellenberg takes his clue from another series of excerpts of the *Pensées*, in particular the following:

If there were no obscurity man would not feel his corruption: if there were no light man could not hope for a cure. Thus it is not only right but useful for us that God should be partly concealed and partly revealed, since it is equally dangerous for man to know God without knowing his own wretchedness as to know his wretchedness without knowing God. (L 446, S 690)

In this excerpt, Pascal tells us that divine hiddenness is "useful for us" because a plain visibility of God's existence "without knowing [our] own wretchedness" would be "dangerous." It would be dangerous in the sense that, if our heart did not have this disposition (knowledge of our own wretchedness), plain visibility of God's existence would lead us to presumption and not to a loving relationship with God. This is what Schellenberg calls the Presumption Argument. The second half of Schellenberg's interpretation concerns a positive feature of hiddenness: not only does it negatively avoid a reaction of presumption, but for the person who does not have (as yet) the appropriate disposition of heart (knowledge of her own wretchedness) divine hiddenness can positively stimulate or develop this very disposition of heart, and therefore prepare the way for a future time when that person will be ready for a divine manifestation that will *not* cause in her a reaction of presumption. This is what Schellenberg calls the Stimulus Argument.

But there is another strong objection against this interpretation of Pascal's response, at least as a response to Schellenberg's own problem. Schellenberg's challenge is to understand why God is hidden to *nonresistant* nonbelievers. But the Presumption Argument and the Stimulus Argument only explain why God is hidden to nonbelievers who have a disposition for presumption, and need a stimulus to develop the opposite dispositions—in other words, these arguments only explain the hiddenness of God for *resistant* nonbelievers. What about nonresistant nonbelievers then? Or in Pascal's terminology: What about people who "seek God with all their heart" and yet do not find him? The excerpt quoted by Schellenberg does not seem to give a response here. Moreover, the excerpt L 149, quoted earlier, seems to suggest

that such people in fact do not exist at all, since God is “wishing to appear openly to those who seek him with all their heart.” So we might be tempted to interpret Pascal as saying that God is hidden *only* “from those who shun him with all their heart” but appears “openly” to all those who are nonresistant. Pascal, according to this reading, would not be someone who explains God’s reasons for permitting hiddenness (to nonresistant nonbelievers); his strategy would be to deny the very occurrence of hiddenness (to nonresistant nonbelievers). In our four-premise argument above, his strategy would be to reject premise 4, not premise 2.

Schellenberg is well aware of this objection according to which Pascal “considered it to be the case that all nonbelief is culpable,”²⁴ so that Pascal in fact would have denied the very existence of the phenomenon which Schellenberg calls “divine hiddenness.” But Schellenberg does not immediately grant this interpretation, and appeals instead to another series of texts which seem to indicate that Pascal did consider the situation of people who are seeking God with all their heart and yet do not find him. The most striking of these fragments is even expressed in the first person singular, which suggests that Pascal has a strong empathy for such a person, and perhaps even shared this experience in his own past life, as Schellenberg hypothesizes.

This is what I see and what troubles me. I look around in every direction and all I see is darkness. Nature has nothing to offer me that does not give rise to doubt and anxiety. If I saw no sign there of a Divinity I should decide on a negative solution: if I saw signs of a creator I should peacefully settle down in the faith. But, seeing too much to deny and not enough to affirm, I am in a pitiful state, where I have wished a hundred times over that, if there is a God supporting nature, she should unequivocally proclaim him, and that, if the signs in nature are deceptive, they should be completely erased. (L 429, S 682)²⁵

If we admit, with Schellenberg, that Pascal acknowledges the existence of people who seek God with all their heart and yet do not find him,²⁶ the

²⁴ SCHELLENBERG, *Hiddenness of God*, 141.

²⁵ For the other fragments in favour of saying that Pascal recognizes the existence (at least apparently) of people who really seek God and yet don’t find him, see *ibid.*, 141, which takes excerpts from (L 427, S 681).

²⁶ Should we admit this with Schellenberg? Agustín Echavarría suggested to me that another reading of these texts was at least as plausible: maybe the people to which Pascal is referring in such texts are in a situation of conflicting desires: on the one hand they seek God and desire a relationship with him, but at the same time they desire not to find him (and to that extent, they would not count as *nonresistant*). Situations of conflicting desires are a very classical element of Augustinian theology and it would not be surprising for Pascal to appeal to this kind of situation here. I agree

question becomes the following: How does Pascal explain the hiddenness of God for *these* people, people who “sincerely lament their doubt, who regard it as the ultimate misfortune, and who, sparing no effort to escape from it, make their search their principal and most serious business” (L 427, S 681)? Schellenberg says that he could not find in Pascal’s writings an explicit and direct response to *this* question and that he needs to invent or at least suppose “what Pascal *could* have said.”²⁷ I agree with Schellenberg that the question is exactly the one we should ask Pascal, but I disagree when he says that Pascal’s writings give no answer: in fact, I believe the PCH quote above is an answer to just this question.

But let us first see the response which, according to Schellenberg, Pascal could or should have made. Schellenberg’s friendly suggestion to Pascal relies on a distinction between a weak sense and a strong sense of “seeking God with all one’s heart.” In a weak sense, someone seeks God with all their heart when they have a pure desire to have a relationship with him and a sincere remorse *but only momentarily* (they might change their dispositions later on); whereas in the strong sense, someone seeks God with all their heart when their pure desire and remorse are *deeply ingrained* and unalterable. For Schellenberg, Pascal could have said that people who seek God and cannot find him (people who express themselves as in passage L 429 above) might be seeking God “with all their heart” only in the weak sense but not in the strong sense. To those who seek God with all their heart in the strong sense, God appears openly—to *all* of them, without exception. According to this theory, the reason why some God-seekers are still in darkness would be that in fact they are still, to some extent perhaps unknown to them, resistant in their dispositions. Such a theory would provide a response to Schellenberg’s argument from hiddenness: the response would be that nonbelievers who are *really* or *deeply* nonresistant do not exist—as soon as someone is really and deeply nonresistant, God would manifest himself to them. But notice that this is once again a version of the response that denies the very phenomenon of divine hiddenness (in Schellenberg’s sense, i.e. hiddenness to nonresistant people); this is not a version of the response which explains why God permits hiddenness. And more precisely, this is a strategy which explains away the

with Echavarría that this interpretation is quite possible and plausible; but I am not sure that there is any definitive proof to eliminate Schellenberg’s reading either, according to which these people are really *nonresistant*. Of these two possible readings, Schellenberg’s is the one that allows to consider that Pascal really had a (nondismissive) response to the contemporary problem of hiddenness. For that reason, it is certainly the most interesting to consider for our purposes here.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 142.

apparent cases of nonresistant nonbelievers by saying that these cases are in fact resistant. If we adopt this reading of Pascal (or this complement to his thought), then what Pascal has to say to people who suffer from God’s hiddenness (people who express themselves as in passage L 429 above) is basically: “This hiddenness is in fact your own fault; deep inside yourself, you are still resisting God’s attempts to enter in a relationship with you.”

But is this really all that Pascal had to respond to God-seekers who suffer from God’s hiddenness? My suggestion is that the PCH quote can be interpreted precisely as Pascal’s response to the distressed God-seekers:

Take comfort; you would not seek me if you had not found me. (L 919, S 751)²⁸

If we read this quote as a response (Jesus’ response) to the God-seeker who suffers from divine hiddenness, we get a completely different reading of Pascal’s thought. What Pascal has to say to such people is not that they are suffering hiddenness due to their own fault (because they are in fact still resistant in their dispositions); rather, his message is that God is not as hidden as they think he is: they “have [already] found” him, and they even “possess” him.²⁹ Moreover, and somewhat paradoxically, Pascal tells such people that their distress about God being hidden is *itself* the proof that God is not really hidden to them (they would not feel this anguish or this longing for God’s manifestation if they did not already possess him).

This new interpretation of Pascal’s thought on hiddenness also provides a response to Schellenberg’s problem of nonresistant nonbelief or nonresistant nonrelationship. The beginning of the response is once again that apparent cases of nonresistant nonrelationship are not genuine. But instead of saying that these apparent cases are in fact cases of *resistant* nonrelationship (as Schellenberg proposes to read Pascal), this new interpretation says on the contrary that they are cases where there is in fact already a significant relationship with God (even though the distressed God-seeker may not be aware of this relationship). This new interpretation of Pascal is both existentially and logically completely different from Schellenberg’s interpretation. And while Schellenberg proposed his reading as a complement to Pascal’s writings,

²⁸ There are in fact two occurrences of this same thought in Pascal’s *Pensées*. The second one reads as follows: “You would not seek me if you did not possess me. Therefore be not troubled” (L 929, S 756). In both cases, the context does not provide many indications for how to interpret the fragment. The only clear indication, from the first passage (usually called “The Mystery of Jesus”) is that the speaker of these words is Jesus (not God the Father).

²⁹ See the previous footnote for the quote which uses the verb “possess.”

in the absence of an explicit response to the distressed God-seekers, it seems to me plausible that Pascal was in fact not silent about distressed God-seekers and that the PCH quote constitutes his explicit response to such situations.

3. FORMULATING THE PCH RESPONSE TO DIVINE HIDDENNESS

In this section, I will set aside the historical and exegetical question of Pascal's proper interpretation. My purpose here will be to use (what I take to be) Pascal's PCH intuition in order to develop a strategy which could be defensible in responding to the problem of divine hiddenness in the contemporary discussion.

The PCH strategy, as I will present it here, is conceived as a response to the first-person problem of divine hiddenness. Let us start with the four-premise formulation already presented, namely:

The four-premise formulation

- (1) If there is a God, he is perfectly loving.
- (2) If a perfectly loving God exists, then nonresistant nonrelationship does not occur.
- (3) A significant personal relationship with God logically implies the belief that there is a God.
- (4) Nonresistant nonbelief occurs.

Therefore

(~G) There is no God.

The first-person problem of divine hiddenness is this same argument as it is used and conceived by a person who considers herself to be a typical instance of premise 4 and for whom the argument takes its force precisely from her being the proof of (4). Such a person will also accept the nonrelationship formulation of the problem:

The nonrelationship formulation

- (1) If there is a God, he is perfectly loving.
- (2) If a perfectly loving God exists, then nonresistant nonrelationship does not occur.
- (~R) Nonresistant nonrelationship occurs.

Therefore

(~G) There is no God.

In this formulation, the person who performs the argument in the first person will consider herself as the typical instance of proposition (~R), which (at least initially) is taken to be a sub-conclusion of (3) and (4).

My PCH strategy has three stages. The first stage uses Pascal’s intuition to reject premise 3 in the four-premise formulation. The second stage tries to respond to an objector who would maintain (~R) without relying on premise (3): here, I will use Pascal’s conditional proposition in order to show that *if* premise 1 is justified (for the first-person arguer), *then* (~R) is false (for her). Logically speaking, this second stage will not rely on a direct rejection of one of the premises but will try to show that a first-person arguer cannot be justified in both (1) and (~R) at the same time. Finally, in the third stage, I will try to offer an independent reason to accept Pascal’s conditional (a reason that Pascal himself does not provide).

3.1 STAGE 1: SIGNIFICANT RELATIONSHIP WITHOUT DE DICTO BELIEF

Consider a nonresistant God-seeker who suffers from strong doubts and cannot manage to believe in God’s existence; she would like to believe and finds the evidence lacking and suffers from it. This God-seeker encounters Schellenberg’s argument (let us say: in the four-premise formulation), and starting from her own example reasons as follows: I cannot believe in God in spite of my desire, so I am a proof that there are some nonresistant nonbelievers; this absence of belief prevents me (and anyone in my situation) from being in a significant relationship with God, though I would desire such a relationship; if a loving God existed, he would also desire a relationship with me and therefore would have no reason to delay further a relationship we both desire; therefore God does not exist.

What is going wrong in this piece of reasoning according to Pascal (as I read him in the previous section)? What is wrong is that this person (who sincerely desires to believe in God and have a significant relationship with him) is in fact *already* in a significant relationship with him, even though she is unaware of it.

As we have seen in the first section, Schellenberg thinks that this is impossible: Schellenberg thinks that you can have a significant relationship with God only if you believe (*de dicto*) in the following proposition: “there is a God.” This conviction seems to rely, more generally, on the idea that it is impossible

to have a (significant) relationship with anyone if you don't believe in the very existence of that person. But is this true? I will argue that this is true only in one sense (*de re*) and not in another (*de dicto*) and that Schellenberg's argument would need the latter sense for his argument to work.

To see this, let us take a telling example which comes from Ernst Lubitsch's 1940 movie *The shop around the corner*.³⁰ In this movie, Alfred Kralik is the top salesman in a shop in Budapest and has under his order another employee, Klara Novak. Alfred and Klara do not get along at all and frequently quarrel in the shop. But apart from his professional life, Alfred is having a romantic correspondence with a cultured woman he has met via a newspaper announcement but never met in real life. One day, Alfred discovers that his romantic correspondent is in fact no other than Klara Novak. He would like to let her know so that their romantic relationship could go beyond a simple exchange of letters, but he decides to wait before informing her: after all, if he told her immediately, it is very probable that their terrible relationship at work would ruin their romantic relationship. So, for some time, Alfred prefers to continue the romantic relationship without Klara knowing with *whom* she is having this relationship.

In the scenario of *The shop around the corner*, we can say that Klara has a romantic relationship with Alfred and yet, at the same time, that Klara does not know that she is having a romantic relationship with Alfred. But is it possible to have a significant relationship with someone (their romantic relationship was very significant to them) without *knowing* (or being aware) that you are having such a relationship? How could a relationship be significant (to you) if you are not so much as aware of it? The ring of paradox dissolves once we make the distinction between *de re* and *de dicto*. What Klara ignores is that the person X with whom she is having a romantic correspondence happens to be identical with Alfred Kralik. So, *de dicto*, she is not aware of the proposition "I am having a romantic relationship with Alfred Kralik" (she would not assent to this proposition formulated in those terms). But she is well aware that she is having a romantic relationship with X, and as it happens X *is* Alfred Kralik, therefore in the *de re* sense, she is aware of the fact that "I am having a romantic relationship with Alfred Kralik."

From this simple example, we can conclude that, in general, you can have a significant relationship with someone even if you are ignorant, *de dicto*, of the identity of that person. In fact, you can even be ignorant of the very

³⁰ Those who like remake movies can also think of the 1998 movie *You've got mail* by Nora Ephron.

existence of a person with this identity. Klara started her romantic relationship with Alfred (*de re*) before she was even aware of the existence of Alfred Kralik (*de dicto*, under the description “the person called Alfred Kralik,” or under the description “the top salesman of the shop around the corner”).

If we follow Pascal’s suggestion in the PCH quote, I think we should say the same thing about God-seekers who cannot manage to believe in God’s existence: what they lack is the *de dicto* belief that “God exists” (under this description, *qua* God). But this *de dicto* ignorance does not prevent them from having a *de re* significant relationship with God.³¹ Perhaps this *de re* relationship is happening in moments of their life such that they would be totally surprised to discover that they were having a relationship with God *then and there*. Perhaps, like the righteous of Jesus’ parable of the Last Judgment, they would respond to the Lord: “Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?” (Matt. 25:37–39),³² when did we have all these significant relationships with you? But just like in the case of Klara and Alfred, this *de dicto* ignorance does not suppress the great significance of the *de re* relationship.

Therefore, the idea that nonbelief (not believing that “God exists” *de dicto*, under this description) renders impossible a significant relationship with God is false according to Pascal. In the four-premise formulation, this idea was formulated by premise (3).

- (3) A significant personal relationship with God logically implies the belief that there is a God.

³¹ By “*de re* relationship” I mean that the following sentence is true: “the God-seeker is having a significant personal relationship with God, but would not assent to the sentence ‘I am having a significant personal relationship with God.’” In other words, I mean a personal relationship which is *in fact* with God even though the person isn’t aware *de dicto* of having a relationship with God. This does *not* necessarily require that there is some description X such that the God-seeker would assent to the proposition “I am having a significant personal relationship with God,” where X happens to be identical with God. In other words a *de re* relationship with God need not require even the *de re* belief that God exists (under some other description).

³² For the same dialectical use of this passage of the scriptures, see Cyrille MICHON, “Is Atheism (the Fact) Good Evidence for Atheism (the Thesis)? On John Schellenberg’s Argument from Ignorance,” *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 7, no. 1 (2015): 86.

This is the premise that Pascal would reject in our initial formulation of Schellenberg's argument. And given the example of Klara and Alfred, it seems to me legitimate to reject this premise for independent philosophical reasons.³³

In the contemporary discussion of Schellenberg's argument, three philosophers (to my knowledge) have appealed to the possibility of a *de re* relationship without *de dicto* belief. The first are Poston and Dougherty,³⁴ who accuse Schellenberg of failing to make the *de re/de dicto* distinction and conclude that this disambiguation suffices to undermine the argument. This accusation is inaccurate, as Schellenberg noted in response³⁵: Schellenberg is well aware of the possible distinction between *de re* and *de dicto* belief, but he maintains (in full awareness) the strong premise that a significant relationship with God requires *de dicto* belief (because it must be "explicit"). The proper way to object to Schellenberg, therefore, is not to accuse him of some confusion or ambiguity, but to raise doubts about the premise he unambiguously endorses (the *de dicto* requirement). This is what Cyrille Michon did,³⁶ and this is also my line of argument here, inspired by Pascal's PCH.³⁷

³³ No doubt, there are some disanalogies between the case of Klara and Alfred and the case of the God-seeker, as Enrique Moros, Enrique Romerales and Agustín Echavarría rightly pointed out to me. One such disanalogy is the difference between ignorance of the identity of someone and ignorance of their existence. But my argument here is not an argument by analogy: my point is that the case of Klara and Alfred disproves the general principle according to which a significant relationship with X requires a *de dicto* belief that "X exists." If this premise is false, then we lack a good reason to accept premise 3 and Schellenberg's argument is undermined. Would it be possible for Schellenberg to revise his premise in a way that uses the disanalogies between the two cases and explains why a *de re* relationship is possible for Klara but *not* for the God-seeker? Perhaps, but this remains to be seen.

³⁴ Ted POSTON and Trent DOUGHERTY, "Divine Hiddenness and the Nature of Belief," *Religious Studies* 43 (2007): 192–94.

³⁵ J. L. SCHELLENBERG, "On Not Unnecessarily Darkening the Glass: A Reply to Poston and Dougherty," *Religious Studies* (2007): 200.

³⁶ MICHON, "Is Atheism (the Fact)," 85–87.

³⁷ One line of argument Schellenberg might pursue to defend his premise is that a relationship without *de dicto* belief (on both parts) would not be fully *reciprocal* and without reciprocity it couldn't count as a *loving* relationship. But the example of Klara and Alfred shows that this argument does not work: Klara and Alfred *are having* a romantic relationship (a relationship of love) even if Alfred knows, and Klara does not know, with whom (*de dicto*) this relationship is occurring. So this lack of reciprocity does not preclude a relationship of love. For sure, such a relationship requires some degrees (or some aspects) of reciprocity (for instance, the exchange of letters and responses between Alfred and Klara is reciprocal), but it does not require *full* reciprocity (on all levels). And actually, requiring *full* reciprocity for a relationship between God and humans would be clearly unreasonable: if that were the kind of relationship God (under Schellenberg's conception) desired, he would desire something *metaphysically impossible*.

For this stage of the response, I do not think Pascal is being especially original. In fact, though this would require more historical investigation, I am inclined to think that the majority of the Christian tradition, inspired by texts such as the parable of the Last Judgment quoted above, has maintained that it was possible to have a significant relationship with Jesus and with God without having a *de dicto* awareness of this relationship (and therefore, possibly, even without an awareness of God’s very existence *qua* God). The PCH quote itself is probably a reminiscence of Saint Bernard’s treatise *On Loving God*, as Denise Leduc-Fayette identified.³⁸ Here is Saint Bernard’s exact formulation:

“The Lord is good unto them that wait for Him” (Lam. 3:25). What will He be then to those who gain His presence? But here is a paradox, that no one can seek the Lord who has not already found Him.³⁹

And Leduc-Fayette (*ibid.*) traces the source of this Pascalian thought even further back, to Saint Gregory the Great who declared that “he who desires God with all his mind ... has, without doubt, the one he loves.”⁴⁰ Therefore, the Pascalian thought according to which desiring or seeking God is already a form of possessing God and having a significant relationship with him seems to rest on firm grounds in the most ancient Christian tradition. And it provides the first stage of a response to Schellenberg’s problem, because it refutes premise (3) of the argument.

One version of this response, which Schellenberg briefly discusses,⁴¹ is the recent theological suggestion that non-Christians may exhibit “implicit belief.” Schellenberg discusses in particular Karl Rahner’s theory of “anonymous Christians” who can receive grace and salvation due to this implicit faith. But this is only one version of the strategy I am expounding here, and not the strongest one for three reasons.

First, Rahner’s discussion (and the discussion of implicit belief more generally) is oriented towards the question whether non-Christians *can receive salvation* later (in virtue of their implicit belief), and not towards the question whether they are already in a relationship with God (through this

³⁸ Denise LEDUC-FAYETTE, *Pascal et le mystère du mal: la clef de Job* (Paris: Cerf, 1996), 60.

³⁹ BERNARD, *On Loving God*, chap. 7, accessed May 2, 2021, https://www.ccel.org/ccel/bernard/loving_god/loving_god.ix.html.

⁴⁰ GREGORY, “Homily 30,” in *Homilies on the Gospels*, Patristic Bible Commentary, accessed March 31, 2021, <https://sites.google.com/site/aquinasstudybible/home/gospel-of-john-commentary/gregory-the-great-homily-30-on-the-gospels>.

⁴¹ SCHELLENBERG, *Divine Hiddenness*, 41–43.

implicit belief). In that sense, it would be entirely possible for theologians like Rahner to grant that this implicit belief is one that does *not* open a significant relationship in this life and only grounds the possibility of receiving salvation in the afterlife. Therefore, this theology of implicit belief as such does not provide (and does not try to provide) a response to Schellenberg's specific problem.

Second, even if we developed this theory in order to say that implicit belief opens the possibility of implicit *relationship*, this would still be only one version of the strategy I am presenting here. The strategy I am presenting says, in general, that a significant relationship does not require explicit (or *de dicto*) belief in God's existence. This could be true for two different reasons: either because a significant relationship with God only requires an implicit belief, not an explicit one, or because a significant relationship does not require any form of belief, explicit or implicit. For theologians like Rahner, it seemed important to secure the existence of some form of belief or faith, because they were focusing on the conditions of salvation and Christian theology traditionally posits faith as a condition of salvation. But for our purpose, which is only to secure the existence of a significant relationship, there is no absolute need to posit a belief at all, be it an implicit one. Therefore, the strategy I am defending here need not be committed to the existence of an implicit belief in order to ground the *de re* relationship with God.⁴²

Finally, the theology of implicit belief and anonymous Christians is a rather recent theological development. Even if it was defended by prominent theologians like Rahner, it cannot be considered as an element of consensus or longstanding Christian tradition. On the contrary, we have just seen that the idea of a significant relationship with God in the absence of *de dicto* awareness seems to be a very old and probably largely consensual tradition. Therefore, if we are looking for a theodicy of hiddenness that has good chances to be true, from the perspective of the Christian tradition, we should rather keep this more modest and more traditional claim and avoid the commitment to the more recent and more controversial theology of implicit belief.

The first stage of our Pascalian theodicy of divine hiddenness, therefore, is to reject the claim that a significant relationship with God requires a *de dicto* belief that "God exists."

⁴² See also footnote 31 above.

3.2 STAGE 2: PASCAL’S CONDITIONAL
AGAINST THE APPARENT LACK OF RELATIONSHIP

Rejecting premise (3) in the four-premise formulation of the argument may not be sufficient to entirely appease the sincere God-seeker who cannot find God. After all, premise (3) was only one possible way to arrive at the intermediate conclusion that she is not in a significant relationship with God (because she does not believe in God’s existence and this belief would seem required for a significant relationship). But the God-seeker might want to insist that, quite independently of the argument from nonbelief, it seems just immediately obvious to her that she lacks a significant relationship with God. In other words, the God-seeker might abandon the four-premise formulation and focus instead on the nonrelationship formulation, taking proposition ($\sim R$) not as an intermediate conclusion but as a basic premise about her own situation.

The nonrelationship formulation

- (1) If there is a God, he is perfectly loving.
- (2) If a perfectly loving God exists, then nonresistant nonrelationship does not occur.
- ($\sim R$) Nonresistant nonrelationship occurs (at least *for me*).

Therefore

- ($\sim G$) There is no God.

This new challenge leads us away from Schellenberg’s own formulation which is very much focused on the *cognitive* conditions (the belief conditions) of relationship and love. But from the point of view of the first-person problem of hiddenness, this seems to be a very important challenge, to which a theodicy of hiddenness should have a response.

Pascal’s PCH intuition does offer a response to this further problem, or so I will argue now. But the dialectic of this response is a bit more subtle than the previous stage. The idea is that Pascal’s Conditional of Hiddenness, if it is true, does not refute one of the premises of the argument; rather it shows that *if* premise 1 is justified, then premise ($\sim R$) is false (for the God-seeker who performs the argument in the first person). Here is why.

Pascal’s response to the God-seeker who seems to lack a relationship with God is not just to affirm bluntly the opposite (“you *do* have a relationship with God, trust me”). This would be totally inefficient dialectically. Rather, Pascal offers a *reason* to think that ($\sim R$) is false for the God-seeker. The reason is the following conditional:

(PCH') *If* it were true that you don't have a significant relationship with God, *then* you would not be distressed and longing for such a relationship (as I can see you are).

What Pascal is saying to the God-seeker is that, given this conditional, there is in fact *evidence* against ($\sim R$), even though ($\sim R$) might seem initially and basically plausible to her: the evidence against ($\sim R$) lies precisely in her distress and longing for God, because these would not exist if God had not already initiated a significant relationship with her. The theological basis for affirming this is the very traditional thought (seen in Saint Gregory the Great and Saint Bernard) that God himself is the one who causes in us the desire to know him and the love we have for him. Since God is the author and cause of this desire, this desire itself can count as evidence that he has already entered in contact with the God-seeker in order to produce in her this desire.

We can see, therefore, that Pascal gives as evidence against ($\sim R$) the very distress that makes the first-person problem so urgent. This distress, that the God-seeker is tempted to see as evidence against the existence of God and a relationship with him, Pascal says that it is in fact evidence of the contrary: it counts as evidence that a relationship with God has already been initiated.⁴³

So far, it might seem that we are only making a remark about the *pragmatics* of the argument for someone who entertains the argument while being in a certain psychological state (a state of distress for not possessing God). In other words, it might seem that we don't have any objection against the *logic* of the argument properly speaking. In order to see that Pascal's Conditional can be turned into a properly logical objection, we have to notice the close connection between (i) being in a psychological state of loving God and desiring a relationship with him and (ii) believing that God is a god who himself loves and desires a relationship with us (which is premise 1). I will argue that these two mental states are inseparable and can be substituted in the Pascalian Conditional, so that Pascal could just as well have affirmed:

⁴³ If we want to follow the idea that all (or most) solutions to the problem of hiddenness have a structural analogue in some solution to the problem of evil, we could say that this Pascalian solution to the problem of hiddenness is analogous to Aquinas' response to the problem of evil in the *Summa contra Gentiles*, in which he says that evil, far from being evidence against God's existence, is in fact evidence *for* God's existence: "it could be argued to the contrary: 'If evil exists, God exists.' For, there would be no evil if the order of good were taken away, since its privation is evil. But this order would not exist if there were no God" (Thomas AQUINAS, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, trans. Vernon J. Bourke (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001), part 3, chap. 71, para. 10). See also C. S. LEWIS, *Mere Christianity: A Revised and Amplified Edition...* (San Francisco: Harpe, 2001), 38. Thanks to Agustín Echavarría for suggesting to me this analogy.

(PCH*) You would not conceive God as a god of love if God had not already initiated a (significant) relationship with you.

Why do I say that (i) the conative state of desiring a relationship with God is inseparable from (ii) the cognitive state of viewing God as a god who loves? I can see two different ways to argue for such a connection.

First, we can argue from the concept of love given by Adams and Schellenberg. According to Adams and Schellenberg, a state isn't a state of love unless it involves a "desire for certain kinds of personal relationship, for their own sake."⁴⁴ Therefore, someone who really *loves* God is someone who values a personal relationship with God *for its own sake* – that is: not just because of the good it would produce for her, nor just because of the good it would produce for God. The personal relationship (for someone who truly loves) is viewed as having a value in and of itself. As a consequence, given the kind of conative state that true love is, it is inseparable from a certain *evaluative belief*, namely the belief that "a personal relationship with X has intrinsic value in and of itself." In particular, it is analytically impossible to love God without believing that "a personal relationship between God and myself would have intrinsic value in and of itself." But God is a very special object of love since God is a perfect being—which means that God recognizes as valuable everything that truly is valuable. As a result, if I believe that a personal relationship between God and myself would have intrinsic value in and of itself, and if I also believe that God is perfectly good and cognizant of everything that has value, I must also believe that God considers a personal relationship with me as having intrinsic value in and of itself, and therefore that God *desires* such a relationship with me for its own sake. Consequently, I cannot truly love God without believing that God also truly loves me. Conversely, if I really believe that God loves me, i.e. that God believes that a relationship with me has intrinsic value in and of itself, since God cannot be wrong in his beliefs, I must also believe for myself that a relationship with God would have intrinsic value in and of itself, which is inseparable from loving God.

Second, we could make an independent argument based on Thomas Nagel's conceptual analysis of erotic love. According to Nagel, the proper structure of erotic attraction involves at least two levels: the first level is when Romeo is attracted by Juliet without any mutual awareness of this fact; but this attraction becomes a proper structure of erotic attraction when Juliet is also

⁴⁴ See section 1 above.

attracted by Romeo (first level) and Romeo becomes attracted by the fact that Juliet is attracted by him (second level of attraction).⁴⁵ Even though Nagel is talking primarily about sexual and physical attraction, not about love, it seems reasonable to argue that erotic love even of a more spiritual nature supposes the same kind of structure of mutual recognition and second order attraction (be it with different kinds of feelings). From a psychological point of view, it is plausible to suppose that a human person can be attracted by God *precisely because* she feels that God loves her. According to this psychological hypothesis, one way God can introduce into a soul a desire for him, or a love for him, is by giving her the belief or conviction that he loves her. But if God is the author and cause in her of this belief (that he loves her)—which he has introduced in her in order to cause her to love him—then this belief is itself a testimony or is evidence that God has initiated a personal contact with that soul. And this is precisely what (PCH*) says: this soul would not have the belief that God loves her (and desires a relationship with her) unless God had already initiated a personal relationship with her.

Let us take a closer look at this new version of the Pascalian Conditional:

(PCH*) You would not conceive God as a god of love if God had not already initiated a (significant) relationship with you.

What this conditional says about the nonrelationship argument (in its first-person form) is that the God-seeker who performs the argument for herself would not believe in premise 1 of the argument (if there is a God, he is perfectly loving) if premise ($\sim R$) were true (if God had not already started a significant relationship with her). As it stands, it seems a bit too strong. After all, it seems possible that the God-seeker might be caused to conceive God as a god of love for all sorts of reasons or by all sorts of psychological processes. Perhaps a hit at the right place of the cerebrum could possibly have formed this belief. But this way of forming the belief that God is a god of love would not give a *justified* belief, whereas the same belief would be justified if it is caused by God himself having started a relationship with her (and deposited in her heart a desire for him and a belief that he loves her). So it would seem more cautious to reformulate the conditional as follows:

(PCH**) You would not justifiably conceive God as a god of love if God had not already initiated a (significant) relationship with you.

⁴⁵ Thomas NAGEL, "Sexual Perversion," *The Journal of Philosophy* 66, no. 1 (1969): 44–45.

And in terms of the dialectic of the nonrelationship argument, (PCH**) says the following:

(PCH***) If premise ($\sim R$) were true, you would not be justified in believing premise 1.

This conditional clearly poses a *logical* problem for anyone trying to reason on the basis of the nonrelationship argument for herself. Obviously, *using* this argument for oneself (accepting the conclusion on the basis of the premises) would require to be justified in all three premises at the same time. But once we acknowledge the truth of the Pascalian Conditional, we can see that it is impossible to justifiably consider as true premises 1 and 3 at the same time. Granted, the PCH does not tell the God-seeker which one of the two premises she should abandon (as false or as unjustified): perhaps she is in fact unjustified in expecting God to be a god of love, or perhaps it is her impression of lacking a significant relationship with God which is illusory. But one of these hypotheses must be true, and therefore the argument cannot proceed.

What this shows is that the Pascalian Conditional of Hiddenness, if it is true, provides an original response to the problem of divine hiddenness in its nonrelationship formulation (and as performed in the first person by a God-seeker longing for a relationship with God).

3.3 STAGE 3: GROUNDING THE PASCALIAN CONDITIONAL

One important objection against this strategy is that Pascal himself does not give us any reason to suppose that his Conditional of Hiddenness is indeed true. What we have just seen is that *if* it is true, then the belief in premise 1 (the conception of God as a god of love) is itself evidence that a personal relationship has already been initiated by God. But why should we believe that it is true? Or more importantly: why should it be considered as true *by the God-seeker* who is inclined to perform for herself the nonrelationship argument? Pascal does not seem to bring any argument here.

Now, if we look at the theological background and tradition expressing the same kind of thought (Saint Bernard, Saint Gregory), the justification for believing in the Conditional seems pretty clear: Gregory and Bernard believe that God is the author of any truly good movement in us; a movement so perfect as the love of God can only be present in us if God himself instigated it. Therefore, the presence in my soul of this movement is evidence that God has already started an intimate action within my soul. This makes perfect sense from the point of view of Christian theology ... but the God-seeker we

are considering here is not a Christian: she is precisely struggling with her difficulty to start believing in God's existence (let alone in Christianity). Therefore, it would be question-begging to give her a Christian theological reason for believing in the PCH. But if we don't provide her with any reason to believe in the PCH, the nonrelationship argument will still be justified for her (even if the PCH is in fact true unbeknownst to her).

So we seem to need a reason to convince the God-seeker that the PCH is true, but we need a reason that does not presuppose the acceptance of the Christian faith (as Bernard's and perhaps Pascal's reasons seem to do). This is what I will try to provide in this last stage, and here I will be adding a consideration which is absent from Pascal's writings.

In short, my suggestion is that even from the point of view of an agnostic, it is possible to recognize that the conception of God given in premise 1 is a historical product of the Judeo-Christian religion. In other words, if it were not for the Judeo-Christian tradition or revelation, the God-seeker would not have this conception of God as a god of love who desires a personal relationship with us (for its own sake). In the vocabulary of Christian theology, what I am claiming here is that this conception of God is a *revelabile tantum*, a truth that can be known only through revelation and not by the natural lights of reason alone. (It is not a datum of natural theology or philosophical theology, but rather of revealed theology.) I will argue that even an agnostic can have historical reason to recognize this, and that this recognition is enough to block her performing the nonrelationship argument (for herself).

The historical evidence I am referring to is the fact that the concept of God as essentially loving seems to be an invention of the Judeo-Christian tradition. Saint John's striking definition "God is love" (1 Jn 4, 8) does not seem to have any equivalent in other religious traditions across human history. It does have clear preparations in the erotic metaphors of the love between God and the soul in the Jewish tradition (for instance in the Song of Songs, or in the book of Hosea). But there does not seem to be any other tradition, religious or philosophical, that presents the unique creator of the world as having a loving desire for a relationship with his rational creatures. In the ancient Greek civilization for instance, we could not compare this conception neither with the religious tradition of the gods of polytheism (the loves of Zeus for human women is just an anthropomorphic projection of sexual attraction of a male divinity) nor with the philosophical approximations of the conception of the unique "noûs" of the world (who would not be presented by philosophers as desiring a loving relationship). It is not possible to enter here into a detailed historical evaluation of the claim that the conception of

God as loving humans is properly Judeo-Christian,⁴⁶ but I would like to mention one historical clue which seems to me to be significant.

Jean-Baptiste Lecuit, in his book *Le désir de Dieu pour l'homme*,⁴⁷ has developed a careful historical and theological study of the idea that God desires (a personal relationship with) human beings. This historical study reveals the following pattern. First, there is a very strong tradition, in both Augustine and Aquinas, that denies the possibility for God to have any kind of “desire” properly speaking, because a desire implies a lack or deficiency, and God cannot be lacking anything. According to this tradition, when Jesus has desires (his thirst expressed to the Samaritan woman, the desire to “eat this Passover with you”, etc.), it is only in his human nature that he desires, not in his divine nature (p. 170–74). Second, there is an evolution of theology in the modern period where more and more theologians start explicitly attributing a desire to God. Lecuit traces this evolution down to Mother Teresa of Calcutta, whose thought was centred on the spiritual experience that Jesus’ thirst reveals God’s own thirst for a personal relationship with each one of us (p. 192–95). And Mother Teresa’s thought seems to have influenced the magisterial teachings of Pope Benedict XVI, when he affirmed for instance that “in this eager desire of Jesus we can recognize the desire of God himself—his expectant love for mankind, for his creation. A love which awaits the moment of union.”⁴⁸ But Lecuit also shows that this modern evolution of

⁴⁶ Such a historical evaluation would have to consider some potential counterexamples. One might discuss for instance the case of Prometheus, whom Aeschylus calls “the lover of mankind” and who was condemned by Zeus because of “too great a love of humankind” (*Prometheus Bound*, verses 11 and 123). But even though Prometheus “loves” (philein) human beings, in the sense that he cares for their well-being and helps them (by giving them the fire), it is not clear at all that he desires any personal relationship with them (beyond the normal relationship of prayers and sacrifices that is common to all gods); and there is even less evidence that human beings desired a special relationship with Prometheus in anything like a mystical sense. Enrique Romerales made me aware of another possible counter-example in the *Bhagavad Gita* (chap. 11, v. 44): “Therefore, O adorable Lord, bowing deeply and prostrating before you, I implore you for your grace. As a father tolerates his son, a friend forgives his friend, and a lover pardons the beloved, please forgive me for my offences.” These words addressed by a human being to Krishna do take the metaphor of a lover with his beloved. But it could be argued that the relationship between lovers is used here only for one specific aspect of analogy—the aspect of *forgiveness* in the relationship—and that this need not mean that in other respects the relationship between the divine and human beings involves a desire of personal intimacy.

⁴⁷ Jean-Baptiste LECUIT, *Le désir de Dieu pour l'homme – Une réponse au problème de l'indifférence* (Paris: Cerf, 2017).

⁴⁸ BENEDICT XVI, Homily for the Mass of the Lord’s Supper, 21 April 2011 (Vatican City: LEV, 2011), http://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/homilies/2011/documents/hf_ben-xvi_hom_20110421_coena-domini.html.

theology was not in fact a complete novelty: “If we do not stop at the first impression given by the immense importance of Augustine and Aquinas in the western tradition, we discover that the attribution of a desire to God is in fact present at all times.”⁴⁹ Among the various pre-modern quotes that Lecuit provides in defence of this claim, two are particularly significant. One is by Bernard of Clairvaux who writes that “the Father awaits you and desires your coming; not only because of the great love wherewith He loved you..., but because of His Own Self.”⁵⁰ The other is patristic and goes back to Gregory of Nazianzus: “[God] accepts the very desire as a great price; He thirsts to be thirsted for.”⁵¹ Taking stock of these historical observations by Lecuit, we can ask the following question: why is it the case that the conception of God as desiring (and specifically desiring *us*) took so much time to become magisterial and common ground theological teaching if it was already present in many ancient and patristic writings? One interpretation seems to come to mind naturally: it seems that there was a biblical tradition of conceiving God as desiring us, but that this tradition was prevented from finding its full expression in the writings of the great philosopher-theologians of the western tradition (Augustine and Aquinas), due to the influence of the Greek philosophical conception of God (Platonic or Aristotelian). Lecuit himself favours this interpretation.⁵² If we follow this interpretation, then it seems to mean that the Judeo-Christian (revealed) conception of God as desiring us was adding something new and very substantial to the philosophical (natural) conception of God. In other words, the conception of God as desiring

⁴⁹ LECUIT, *Le désir de Dieu*, 190.

⁵⁰ BERNARD, “Sermon XIII for the Advent Season,” in *No Uncertain Sound, Sermons That Shaped the Pulpit Tradition*, ed. Ray C. Petry (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1948), 143–67.

⁵¹ Gregory NAZIANZEN, “Oration 40: The Oration on Holy Baptism,” trans. Charles Gordon Browne and James Edward Swallow, *New Advent*, para. 27, accessed May 4, 2021, <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/310240.htm>.

⁵² See *ibid.*, for instance, the following quotes: “Ce sont les travaux de grands théologiens européens, principalement de langue allemande, qui ont en commun, à la lumière de l’exégèse historique et du renouveau patristique du siècle dernier, d’avoir ôté à certaines conclusions métaphysiques héritées de l’Antiquité et du Moyen Âge la fonction régulatrice qui était auparavant la leur. L’interprétation de l’Écriture et la réflexion théologique n’ont pas à se soumettre à ces conclusions. Tout au contraire, il faut continuer, comme l’ont fait en leur temps et selon leur culture les grands penseurs chrétiens, de repenser la métaphysique à la lumière de la Révélation” (p. 324); “Les théologiens des dernières décennies, en revanche, parlent volontiers d’un désir de Dieu pour l’homme et son salut. Cela semble à première vue devoir être compté au nombre des nouveautés liées à l’affranchissement contemporain de l’autorité d’Augustin et Thomas en ce qui concerne les présupposés métaphysiques de la pensée théologique” (p. 172). In private correspondence, Lecuit assured me that I was not over-interpreting his analyses on this point.

(a personal relationship with) us would be a properly revealed, properly Judeo-Christian teaching, not a datum of philosophical or natural theology.

Saying that the nonrelationship argument relies on a conception of God (premise 1) which is properly Judeo-Christian and properly revealed has a significant consequence on the argument, which Schellenberg did not notice in the paragraphs in which he mentions this possibility.⁵³ The dialectical consequence of this fact is not just that the argument can at best disprove the existence of *the Christian God* but cannot disprove the existence of God in general (under other conceptions, in particular the conception of Greek natural theology). The more important consequence is that it fails to disprove even the existence of the Christian God (for the agnostic God-seeker). Here is why.

The agnostic God-seeker we are considering is someone for whom (qua agnostic) the possibility of God’s existence is a live option, and who (as a longing God-seeker) conceives God as a god of love (which is premise 1). Suppose such a person discovers (for the historical reasons presented above) that her conception of God is a proper inheritance of the Judeo-Christian tradition. One possible reaction she might have would be to view this as undermining her confidence in this conception. This would immediately undermine the nonrelationship argument because it would undermine premise 1. But suppose she maintains her confidence in premise 1, even after receiving this piece of information. In these conditions, I would argue that she should draw the following two conclusions:

- (5) I would not have this conception of God (premise 1) if I had not been in contact with (influenced by) the Judeo-Christian tradition.
- (6) If there is a God, the Judeo-Christian tradition is not just a human tradition but is a truly divine revelation.

The counterfactual proposition (5) follows directly from the historical observation that the conception of God given in premise 1 is properly Judeo-Christian.⁵⁴

Proposition (6) may seem less obvious, but here is why our agnostic God-seeker should endorse it. We have said that our agnostic God-seeker is someone who conceives God as desiring a personal relationship with human

⁵³ SCHELLENBERG, *Divine Hiddenness*, 10–11.

⁵⁴ It may not be logically or metaphysically impossible to have this same conception of God without the influence of the Judeo-Christian tradition, but given that it is proper to this tradition, the *counterfactual conditional* is certainly true, in the common contemporary interpretation of counterfactual conditionals as depending on what would happen in the closest possible worlds in which the antecedent is true.

beings. If she believes this, she should certainly consider it highly probable that God has taken some initiative to establish a contact with at least some human beings—in other words, given her endorsement of premise 1, it is highly probable that there is in the actual world a true revelation of God. But among the available candidates for being the true revelation in the actual world (that is, among the actual religious traditions) only one tradition, the Judeo-Christian tradition, presents a conception of God which is in line with the expectations of premise 1. Therefore, for such a God-seeker, it should be highly probable that *if there is a God*, this God is in fact the Judeo-Christian God, who has revealed himself in the Judeo-Christian tradition. It would be highly implausible that the Judeo-Christian tradition just accidentally got it right about premise 1, because it would mean either that no actual religious tradition at all is a revelation from God (but then we would have to conclude that God didn't even try to reveal himself in the world, which would be highly implausible for a God who desires a relationship with mankind), or that there is a religious tradition which is a revelation from God (let's say the Shinto tradition) but then we would have to conclude that the religion revealed by God himself has a concept of God which is deeply fraught while another religion not revealed by God accidentally got it right. I conclude that the God-seeker who endorses premise 1 and knows that premise 1 is properly Judeo-Christian should accept proposition (6): she should accept that *if there is a God*, then the Judeo-Christian tradition is indeed a revelation coming from God's initiative.

But then, under the hypothesis of God's existence, it would be possible for her to substitute the phrases "the Judeo-Christian tradition" and "the divine revelation." Let us perform this substitution in the consequent of premise 5, we would obtain the following:

- (7) If there is a God, then I would not have the conception of God that I have (premise 1) if I had not been in contact with (influenced by) the divine revelation.

Now, being in contact with God's own revelation is one way to be contacted by God's intention and attempt to contact human beings. It is one way to receive within one's mind and heart the words addressed by God to oneself. It is one way to be intimately reached by God's project to enter into a relationship with us. Therefore, from (7), our agnostic God-seeker could also draw the conclusion 8:

- (8) If there is a God, then I would not have the conception of God that I have (premise 1) if I had not been already in a significant relationship with God.⁵⁵

Notice that the consequent of proposition (8) is just our proposition (PCH*) above. This means that, for our God-seeker, the Pascalian Conditional of Hiddenness is true *if God exists: if God exists*, then her very conception of God is itself evidence that she is not lacking a significant relationship with God (because she has been reached by the Judeo-Christian revelation, which was God’s way to initiate an intimate relationship with her). And since she is an *agnostic* God-seeker (at the time at which she starts considering the non-relationship argument), this possibility is a live option for her: it is a live option for her that God exists, that he is the Christian God, and that he has already initiated an intimate relationship with her by reaching out to her through his historical revelation. In other words, if God’s existence is a live option for her, then it is a live option for her that premise ($\sim R$) is false, and therefore she cannot rely on premise ($\sim R$) for any argument.

In the previous section, we said that the PCH undermined the nonrelationship argument because it allowed us to derive the proposition:

- (PCH***) If premise ($\sim R$) were true, you would not be justified in believing premise 1.

Or conversely:

- (9) If you are justified in believing premise 1, then premise ($\sim R$) is false.

⁵⁵ Enrique Romerales raises the objection that receiving or being in contact with God through a historical revelation (prophets, a revealed text, a Church, etc.) cannot be considered a personal relationship. One problem, according to Romerales, is that it is a *mediated* relationship. But I would reply that a romantic correspondence can be a personal relationship even if the mailman serves as a mediator of the letters (as long as the mailman does not alter the content of the letters, he remains an external or material mediation, not a mediation *within* the relationship itself, which might indeed alter the authenticity of the personal relationship). Another problem raised by Romerales is that the letters (in my analogy) are addressed *personally* to the beloved with first name and last name, while the revelation as a large scale tradition, is not personally directed at anyone, and therefore cannot be interpreted as establishing a personal contact with such and such an individual in particular. I respond that being the recipient of the Christian revelation has never been the case of all human beings, and that there always is an element of “election” in being such a recipient; so that any person who received this message can in all legitimacy consider that (if there is indeed a God) then her having received the message of the revelation is proof that God had the specific intention to reach out to her personally.

One difficulty we encountered is that we did not have an independent reason to believe in the PCH. Given the historical considerations mentioned in this third stage, we have now established a weaker conditional:

- (10) If God's existence is a live option for you, and if you are justified in believing premise 1, then premise ($\sim R$) *might* be false for you (i.e. it is a live option for you that ($\sim R$) is false.)

This conditional is weaker than (PCH***) or (9), but it is just as efficient to undermine the nonrelationship argument, as considered by an agnostic God-seeker. Being an agnostic, she cannot rely on both premise 1 and premise ($\sim R$), because (for her as an agnostic), if she is justified in believing premise 1 she cannot be justified in affirming premise ($\sim R$), which might as well be false for her (if God in fact exists). The only way for her to justifiedly maintain premise ($\sim R$)—that is, to affirm that God has not established a personal relationship with her—would be to *presuppose* that God does not exist; but that would be obviously question-begging since this is precisely what the argument is trying to establish. Before performing the argument, she must be someone who leaves open the possibility that God (the Christian God) exists, and if she leaves this possibility open, this also leaves open the possibility that God has in fact already initiated a significant relationship with her, through his revelation.

I conclude that the kind of possibility to which Pascal brought the attention of the agnostic God-seeker does successfully undermine the possibility for her to perform the nonrelationship argument (and to conclude that God does not exist). The success of the Pascalian strategy need not rely on a question-begging presupposition of the truth of Christian theology. Even an agnostic can recognize that the conception of God she has is a properly Christian conception and that this very conception, and her longing for a relationship with God, constitute *if God exists* the mark of an already existing relationship with God. Because of this, and because she cannot presuppose that God does not exist, she cannot positively believe that she is lacking a relationship with God altogether, which undermines premise ($\sim R$).

4. EXTENDING THE PCH RESPONSE TO DIVINE HIDDENNESS

In the previous section, I have argued that the PCH strategy is successful in undermining the nonrelationship argument when it is performed in the

first person by a distressed God-seeker (the kind of interlocutor that Michael Rea mentions in the opening page of his book, and for whom Pascal clearly felt some strong empathy). I think this result is interesting because more often than not the argument from divine hiddenness takes a lot of its dialectic strength from the first-person perspective. But it is nonetheless a limited and modest result and it should be emphasized that, due to its limitations, this strategy as such cannot provide a complete response to all forms of the problem of hiddenness.

In this final section, I will consider three ways in which the previous result is limited and I will see whether and how the PCH response could be extended or complemented in order to get a complete solution to the problem of divine hiddenness. These three limitations can take the form of the following three questions.

1. “You say that my longing for God is itself evidence of an already existing *de re* relationship with God, but that’s clearly not enough for me: I have a desire for a more explicit personal relationship and I am suffering from the incompleteness of this (already existing) relationship. What do you have to say about *this* suffering?”

2. “You say that the argument does not work when performed by a person who takes her own situation as her main evidence for ($\sim R$). But what if my evidence for ($\sim R$) is someone else than myself? What if I have third personal (or maybe second personal) evidence of the existence of nonresistant distressed God-seekers?”

3. “You say that nonresistant distressed God-seekers are already in a relationship with God somehow, and that the evidence of it is this distress itself, but what about nonresistant *non-distressed* people? What about people who would not resist a relationship with God, yet are not especially longing for it either? Such people would still be a problem for you.”

4.1 THE PROBLEM OF SUFFERING FROM AN INSUFFICIENT RELATIONSHIP

As we have seen in section 3.1, a central element of the Pascalian strategy is the idea that it is possible for a person to have a personal relationship with God, and even a *significant* relationship with God, without being *de dicto* aware of this relationship with God. I used the scenario of *The shop around the corner* to give an example of a significant relationship without *de dicto* awareness. And this allowed me to say that distressed God-seekers are in fact not deprived of a significant relationship with God. In that sense, the

Pascalian solution responds to the problem of divine hiddenness by saying that God is not truly or completely hidden.

But the distressed God-seeker might be perplexed and unsatisfied with this response. She might respond that, significant or not, this relationship with God is clearly not enough to satisfy her longing, and that there is still some very relevant sense in which God is hidden to her. She is still lacking a complete and explicit relationship. *That* is the hiddenness that needs to be justified and explained.

In order to respond to this objection, I think we should distinguish two versions of it. The first version concedes that Pascal's strategy has proved a *significant* relationship with God (or proved that it is a live option), but insists that even though this threshold of personal relationship is secured, it is still surprising and in need of explanation that God shouldn't establish a *maximal* level of personal relationship. After all, if God really loves his creatures, he certainly desires not just a minimal and sufficient level of relationship but a maximal level of relationship. According to the second version of the objection, the remaining distress of the God-seeker proves that the relationship with God which Pascal has proved (or opened as a live option) might already be a personal relationship but is not enough to be a *significant* relationship, at least significant for the God-seeker herself.

Let us start with the first version. The challenge, in this version of the problem, is to explain why God would permit a relatively low (though significant) level of personal relationship instead of a higher one. After all, if he really loves the God-seeker, he should desire a maximal level of relationship with her. So why is there not a maximal level of personal relationship? It is important to notice that this is not a problem that Schellenberg himself considers as central: Schellenberg explicitly acknowledges that the personal relationship between a human person and God is a matter of degree and is capable of growth across time. According to Schellenberg, we should construe the relationship with God "in developmental terms", and in such terms, the essential element is "to get one started in such a relationship" (*Divine Hiddenness*, p. 41). He sees no problem in thinking that God might have created us initially with a "limited capacity" to enter into a relationship with him, for he might have "created us this way so that we may have the opportunity of *growing* in personal relationship with himself" (p. 26). One way in which this relationship may be imperfect at first, and then grow in perfection, is if our *belief* in God's existence is weak belief at first and then grows in certainty; and Schellenberg sees no problem in supposing that "God might

have reasons for leaving me for a time in a state of weak belief and, given that firm belief is not required for a personal relationship with God, might very well do so” (p. 33). So Schellenberg himself does not see any objection against God having reasons for permitting, temporarily, a less-than-perfect relationship; what he sees as a problem is that God should have reasons to permit, even temporarily, a total absence of personal relationship, or perhaps the absence of a level or kind of relationship that would be sufficient to count as personal and significant.

In that sense, the Pascalian strategy, if it succeeds in showing that *some significant degree* of personal relationship is already in place for the distressed God-seeker, succeeds in responding to Schellenberg’s own problem. The further problem (which is not Schellenberg’s) is just about understanding the reasons why God permits a less-than-perfect degree of personal relationship (at least temporarily).

Even though this question is not Schellenberg’s own problem, I think we should acknowledge that this is an important question, especially from the first-person perspective of the distressed God-seeker, which is our focus in this paper. So what should be added to the Pascalian strategy in order to respond to this second problem, the problem of suffering from an imperfect (though already significant) relationship? Is God himself not suffering from the incompleteness of this *de re* relationship?⁵⁶

Though a complete treatment of this problem would require a paper of its own, my inclination would be to complement the Pascalian strategy here with the theological idea that moving directly (without delays and intermediate steps) to a maximal relationship with God (“seeing God face to face”) would be highly detrimental to that person, as she would not be able to bear it. If we use once again the comparison with the scenario of *The shop around the corner*, we can see that if Alfred wanted to move *immediately* to a full *de dicto* relationship with Klara (revealing to her his identity), this would be too soon and would ruin the loving relationship altogether. A relationship of love needs steps and progress, especially when the person we want to know face to face is God himself. This response could be considered as a form of the soul-making theodicy: the suffering caused by the delay before a com-

⁵⁶ According to Cyrille Michon, it is a traditional theological conception that God himself wishes to arrive (ultimately) at a maximal level of personal relationship with us: “In Christianity for example, there is a Maximal Access Principle concerning content, with the idea that nonresistant finite persons will receive the gift of beatific vision of the divine essence in glory” (Cyrille MICHON, “Is Atheism (the Fact) Good Evidence for Atheism (the Thesis)? On John Schellenberg’s Argument from Ignorance,” *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 7, no. 1 (2015): 79.

plete, face to face, relationship with God is permitted only because such a relationship is not possible without some progressive steps of soul-making.

So, even though the Pascalian response to *complete* hiddenness (the total absence of personal relationship with God) consists in denying this kind of hiddenness altogether, it might need to be complemented by some form of soul-making theodicy for *partial* hiddenness (the absence or rather the delay of a complete, face to face, relationship).

The second version of the objection from insufficient relationship is more radical: according to this second version, the problem is not just that the relationship established by Pascal is “incomplete” or “imperfect” (though significant); the problem is that it fails to be significant altogether. It is not that it fails to reach the maximal level, but rather that it fails to reach the minimal level (even if we concede that it already is a relationship). If this objection is correct, then the Pascalian strategy is not just incomplete: it is in fact a complete failure, because the purpose was to secure precisely this minimal level of significant relationship. And the distressed God-seeker might want to insist here: “Whatever you say about God’s activities in his revelation and in my soul, *I* can tell you that this relationship, whatever else it might be, is not significant *to me!*”⁵⁷

I can see three levels of response to this challenge.

The first level starts by distinguishing an objective sense and a subjective sense of “significant” and says that what is important to block Schellenberg’s argument is for the relationship *itself* to be significant (objectively speaking) and not for the subjects involved in the relationship to find it significant *for themselves*. If love is a desire for a significant relationship *for its own sake*, then a disproof of love must be constituted by evidence that the relationship *in itself* (or objectively) is not significant—and not just a proof that one of the subjects involved finds it insignificant *for her*. The Pascalian, here, could go on insisting that what makes a relationship in itself objectively significant is the kind of loving initiatives and responses that objectively occur between the subjects, and that such loving initiatives and responses do occur in the Pascalian scenario we have described (as they do occur in the scenario of *The shop around the corner*).

One difficulty with this first response (if it is taken all alone) is that it would seem to imply that the relationship established in this way would not even need to be significant *to God* (because we have ruled out the requirement of subjective significance altogether). But if we consider that God really

⁵⁷ Thanks to Enrique Romerales and Joseph Milburn for pressing this version of the objection.

loves us, would it not be surprising to say that he would satisfy himself with a relationship that is significant "objectively" but not significant *even for him*? So perhaps we cannot rule out completely the requisite of subjective significance for the relationship.

The second level of response would consist in saying that even though subjective significance *for God* is important in the debate of divine hiddenness, the subjective significance *for the God-seeker* is another problem altogether (namely, the problem of evil or human suffering). Remember that Schellenberg's main accomplishment with the problem of divine hiddenness was to identify a problem that is *not* the problem of evil or human suffering: while the problem of evil starts with human suffering and raises a tension with the divine attribute of Goodness, the problem of hiddenness raises a tension with the divine attribute of Love and the datum that is in tension here is not human suffering or frustration, but rather the paradoxical frustration that God would be uselessly inflicting *to himself* if we supposed that he fails to establish a relationship with people who are not resisting. Therefore, what is important to solve the problem of hiddenness is to secure a kind and level of relationship that is significant *for God*. Now, in the scenario of *The shop around the corner*, we might understand that Klara finds her relationship with Alfred insufficient *for her* (as she does not know the identity of her lover), but arguably the relationship is sufficient and significant *for Alfred*, because *he* knows who his lover is. Similarly, since God does not ignore the details of the relationship he is having with the soul of the God-seeker, one might argue that (whether or not this relationship is sufficient and significant *for her*) the relationship is sufficient and significant *for God* himself. At first sight, this might seem like a horrible and very unconvincing response, because it seems to downplay the point of view of the God-seeker and neglect completely her suffering. But this is not at all what I mean: what I mean is *not* that the suffering of the God-seeker is unimportant (or even "less important" than God's own frustration). It *is* important and *requires* a response. What I mean is only that the kind of problem it raises is a version of the problem of evil, not a version of the problem of hiddenness. The problem of evil is uncontroversially a very fundamental problem, that requires a treatment and a response. There are indeed a variety of strategies existing in the contemporary literature. The argument that we are considering here only says that the specific problem of subjective insignificance *for the God-seeker* would need one or another of these responses to the problem of evil (and I do not have an opinion about *which* kind of defence or theodicy of evil would be best suited to complement this Pascalian response to divine hiddenness).

There is a last subject of concern with this second stage of response, which is Schellenberg's idea that a significant relationship should be "reciprocal." I have said earlier⁵⁸ that a *fully* reciprocal relationship between God and a human being was an unreasonable requisite, but arguably a significant relationship should be reciprocal *under certain respects*, at least in terms of reciprocal love ... and perhaps also in the sense that the relationship should be *at least* subjectively *significant* for both lovers. I do not know whether I subscribe to this requirement, but if we accept it, I still think that the Pascalian would have something to say in order to argue that the kind of relationship he has secured (in his scenario) is subjectively significant *including for the God-seeker* (even if she is unsatisfied in some important sense).

The third level of my response consists in distinguishing two ways in which a relationship can be (subjectively) felt as insufficient and frustrating. A first way in which a relationship can be insufficient and frustrating for me is when I find out that my lover does not love me enough, because she does not make the actions or take the initiatives that she would if she loved me with the intensity with which I would like to be loved. The second way is when we are prevented by external factors (physical distance for instance) to have the kind of intimate exchange that we both desire. In this second kind of frustration, I have no doubt and no dissatisfaction with my lovers' love itself. I am not dissatisfied by her and by the strength of our mutual feelings, but only by the circumstantial impossibility to manifest them in some way. In this second kind of insufficiency and frustration (which is perhaps Klara's frustration with not knowing the identity of Alfred), I would claim that we would still call the *relationship* itself significant (because the cause of the insufficiency is not in the essential components of the relationship itself, but in the external conditions of manifestation). This is why I appealed earlier to the intuition that Klara and Alfred's relationship was significant. The relationship could legitimately be called insignificant for me (in the subjective sense) if I had reasons to doubt the sincerity or intensity of my lover's feelings (because she failed to undertake the actions that a real or intense lover would have taken). This distinction being in place, my claim about the Pascalian strategy is the following: once the God-seeker *becomes aware* that her own desire for God comes from God himself—that is, once she *becomes aware* that if God exists, he has in fact already reached out to her personally—she cannot be unsatisfied in the first sense, but only in the second sense. Of course, she can be extremely frustrated and dissatisfied not to see God face

⁵⁸ See footnote 37 above.

to face (she *should* be dissatisfied in this way), but she cannot be dissatisfied with the intensity of God’s love for her (if he exists) nor consider what he has done for her (if he exists) as insufficient to count as a *significant* relationship. Granted, a distressed God-seeker who *ignored* that this desire in her comes from God and his efforts to reach out to her *could* be dissatisfied with God’s love itself and ask herself why God has not done more to prove his love. *This* could be a legitimate cause of trouble for her and could render the relationship subjectively insignificant from her perspective. But my point is that the *conscious recognition* of the PCH performatively renders the relationship subjectively significant for her, because she thereby becomes aware of all that God has already done for her (if he exists). According to this interpretation, the Pascalian quote

Take comfort; you would not seek me if you had not found me (L 919, S 751)

is not just Jesus *informing* the God-seeker that she already had a significant relationship with him; it is rather Jesus performatively *making* the relationship *significant* by revealing to the God-seeker all that God has already done for her.⁵⁹ This is why the PCH does not only block some philosophical argument but is a reason for the God-seeker to “take comfort” in the recognition that God (if he exists) really loves her personally and immensely and has already proved it.

Therefore, in the end it seems to me that the Pascalian strategy can “give comfort” to the distressed God-seeker in a way that suffices to establish that her relationship with God is in fact significant even for her in the subjective sense.

4.2 THE PROBLEM OF THIRD-PERSON EVIDENCE OF DISTRESSED GOD-SEEKERS

The other kind of complaint about the Pascalian strategy consists in saying that many versions of the problem of divine hiddenness (perhaps even the most

⁵⁹ One might think that if someone did have a mystical experience of hearing Jesus telling her in the second person “Take comfort; you would not seek me if you had not found me,” *this* mystical experience would indeed count as a performative proof of God’s love, but that there is no such mystical experience for most distressed God-seekers. I would respond what I said in section 3.3: that having been reached by the divine revelation is already a proof that God has intended to reach out to me personally, and therefore *becoming aware of this fact* is already a recognition (call it mystical or not) of an intention and a message directly addressed to me.

classical versions) do not rely on first-person evidence at all, so that responding to the first-person version alone is too limited to be interesting.

Whether or not the first-person version of the argument is interesting, we should certainly concede that it is possible to perform the argument from third personal (or perhaps second personal) evidence, and that these other versions of the argument also need a response. Consider for example the young Michael Rea (later simply called “Michael”), as he was receiving the spiritual confidence of his distressed friend (later called Sarah): perhaps Michael himself did not feel like he was lacking a personal relationship with God, but he certainly had (some degree of) evidence of someone (Sarah) lacking a personal relationship though she was seeking God and longing for such a relationship. Whether or not Sarah performed the argument from non-relationship, should Michael himself have performed the argument, using as his evidence for ($\sim R$) the testimony of Sarah? And what could Pascal have said *to Michael* in order to prevent *him* from concluding that a loving God did not exist? The question here is to determine whether the Pascalian strategy can be extended from the first-person evidence of distressed God-seekers to the third-person (or second-person) evidence of distressed God-seekers.

I think this second problem is easily solved, because the Pascalian strategy, even though it was initially formulated and expressed for the first-person point of view, naturally extends to the third-person point of view, without any need for a complementary strategy.

In responding to the third-person problem, we will presuppose that Michael (in our scenario) was not an atheist when he received Sarah’s confidence (otherwise there is no question whether the argument from hiddenness could have led him to *conclude* that God did not exist). He was perhaps a Christian, but at least an agnostic. Let us take the weakest hypothesis, according to which Michael was an agnostic. If he had any inclination to perform the nonrelationship argument, it must have been because he agreed with the conception of God expressed in premise 1—God as desiring a personal relationship with us, including with Sarah. But we have seen, in section 3.3, that this conception of God is inherited from the Judeo-Christian tradition. Michael, therefore, agrees with the specifically Judeo-Christian conception of God, even though he is an agnostic about the real *existence* of such a God. The existence of God is for him an epistemic possibility, a live option, and given his Judeo-Christian *conception* of God, this possibility is equivalent for him with the possibility (or live option) that Judeo-Christianity is in fact a truly divine revelation. In other words, there are two live

options for him: either God does not exist at all, or God exists and he is the Judeo-Christian god. Given these two epistemic possibilities, how should he evaluate the testimony of his friend Sarah who reports to him that she is lacking a significant personal relationship with God? In the hypothesis that God does not exist, then this claim is certainly true. (How could Sarah have any relationship with God if he does not exist?). But what about the other live option? What if God existed? In this hypothesis, Michael can and should say that the god who exists is the Christian god, but if that is the case, then Michael has all reasons to consider Sarah's own distress and longing for God as evidence of her already having a *de re* relationship with God (unknownst to her). This would be evidence of a relationship with God because Sarah's distress would show that she conceives of a personal relationship between God and her as having an intrinsic value in and of itself and she would not have had such a conception of God (and the possible personal relationship with him) unless God had instigated in her this conception and this desire for a relationship with him. Notice here that Sarah need not be aware of this fact. She may not be aware that the conception of God as a god of love who values intrinsically a relationship with us is a specifically Judeo-Christian conception. And as a consequence, if she does not reflect on her own distress theoretically, this distress may not count as evidence *for her* that she is already in a relationship with God. But it is nonetheless evidence *for Michael* that Sarah is already in a relationship with God; or rather, the epistemic situation for Michael is that he can know that Sarah's distress is evidence of her having a relationship with God *if God exists*. (If God does not exist, it does not count as evidence for this conclusion.) But this conditional kind of evidence is enough to block him from performing the nonrelationship argument, because he is (initially) an agnostic and therefore considers the possibility of God's existence as a live option. Therefore, it is also a live option for him that Sarah's distress counts as evidence of her already having a relationship with God. And consequently, it is also a live option for him that Sarah, in spite of her report, is in fact already in a relationship with God.⁶⁰ Michael cannot perform the nonrelationship argument because his

⁶⁰ Is this relationship between Sarah and God *significant for her* (subjectively)? What if we suppose (as we considered at least possible in the previous section 4.1) that a solution to the problem requires subjective significance for Sarah and that this requires an *awareness* on her part that God has reached out to her through his revelation? In that case, Michael's situation becomes particularly important because *Sarah* does not have the awareness that would make the relationship significant for her, but *he* has this piece of information and *could make significant* her relationship with God (just by telling her this piece of information). So the solution to the second-person problem would

evidence for ($\sim R$) is undermined for him—even if it is third-person evidence instead of first-person evidence.

What we have just seen is that the kind of considerations adduced by Pascal and the Pascalian strategy (including my personal addition of stage 3.3) can be extended from the first-person evidence of distressed God-seekers to the second-person (or third-person) evidence of distressed God-seekers.

4.3 THE PROBLEM OF NONRESISTANT BUT NON-DISTRESSED PEOPLE

But there is another objection about the kind of evidence we have been considering for ($\sim R$). So far, we have focused only on the evidence (first-, second-, or third-person) provided by people who are distressed by the (felt) absence of a personal relationship with God. There was a good reason for our focusing on this problem: in the modern spiritual and philosophical literature on divine hiddenness (in particular in Pascal's own thought), this seems to be the most striking and urgent existential situation. But what about nonresistant nonbelievers who are *not* distressed? Even if this kind of nonbelievers are not existentially urgent, they might in fact constitute a more difficult problem from a logical or dialectical point of view. Or at least they constitute a problem for which our Pascalian strategy does not seem to offer any response, since in their case it is not possible to point at their distress or longing as evidence of their having already been reached by God in their intimate psychology.

Consider for example Socrates (or take a fictitious Socrates* if some aspects of the following scenario seem contrary to actual historical facts: the point need not be historical). Socrates has never heard of the Jewish revelation (let alone, of course, the Christian revelation). He does not have a personal relationship with God, but he is not longing for it; nor is he distressed about his lacking such a personal relationship because he does not conceive God as a person with whom it is highly desirable for himself to enter into a personal relationship. And if we follow Pascal's (or Bernard's) thought, there seems to be a plausible reason why he is not longing for such a relationship: God has not reached out to him and produced in his soul such a longing. He is not seeking God *because* he has not found him at all (because

become a pragmatic solution, not just a logical one: to solve the problem for Sarah, Michael would have to *inform* her that God (if he exists) has in fact already reached out to her. As for the *third* person problem (as opposed to the *second* person problem), if we accept these same constraints, we would probably have to resort to other argumentative complements such as the ones discussed in section 4.3 below.

God has not even initiated a relationship with him). But Socrates is an extremely virtuous and saintly person and would not resist God's attempt to enter into a personal relationship with him. Suppose I agree with the conception of God as a god of love (premise 1) and I reflect on Socrates' situation: of course, Socrates himself will not perform the nonrelationship argument because he does not have a conception of God that corresponds to premise 1; but should *I* not perform the nonrelationship argument, taking the case of Socrates as my evidence for premise ($\sim R$)? After all, if *I* conceive God as strongly desiring a personal relationship with Socrates, it should seem strange (to me) that God has not even done the very first move to establish such a relationship, which would be to instigate in Socrates' soul a desire for God. In this version of the problem, I am not distressed nor suffering, and Socrates is not distressed nor suffering either; but should *God* not be distressed or suffering if he existed and really desired a personal relationship with Socrates? What reasons could God have to refrain totally from a relationship with Socrates if he so strongly desires it? The Pascalian strategy does not seem to help us responding to this question.

I think this objection is legitimate as far as it goes: the Pascalian strategy is indeed limited to the explanation of the hiddenness of God *for distressed God-seekers*; it does not provide, in itself, a response for the problem of non-distressed nonbelievers like Socrates. This is why I said in the introduction that the PCH strategy is partial and needs to be complemented with other (perhaps more traditional) strategies for other parts of the problem. That being said, one may ask which kind of strategy would be the most natural complement to the PCH strategy for the case of non-distressed nonbelievers. I must confess that I am not sure what the most plausible answer to this question could be. I can see four possible complements and it seems to me any one of them could work in order to complete the PCH strategy. I will sketch them briefly but I will not argue for any one of them in particular.

A first solution to the problem of Socrates would be to say that Socrates does not count as an instance of nonresistant nonbeliever because he is in fact resistant. One justification for going this way might be the theological view that God can save us from the original sin only through his revelation and grace, so that people who haven't be reached (yet) by his revelation and grace are still in the grips of original sin, and therefore they are still (unbeknownst to them) resistant to God's attempts to enter into a relationship with them—or rather, they would be resistant if God attempted to do so. In section 2, I rejected Schellenberg's suggestion that, for Pascal, the apparent

nonresistant nonbelievers should be counted as being *in fact* resistant. So would this solution be incoherent with my earlier interpretation of Pascal? Not necessarily: I think that Pascal would have avoided saying that the *distressed* nonbelievers are (in fact) resistant because this suggestion has a shocking ring: it is basically saying to someone who is suffering that their suffering is entirely their own fault. But the case of the non-distressed nonbeliever is different: here, it may not be similarly shocking to suggest that Socrates is in fact resistant, because Socrates is not in any way distressed about the fact of which we are “accusing” him. So perhaps it is appropriate in Socrates’ case to adopt this kind of solution as a complement to the Pascalian strategy. According to this view, there would be two very different situations when someone puts forward a putative case of a nonresistant nonrelationship: in the first situation, the agent (Sarah, who is distressed about God’s hiddenness) would truly be nonresistant, but would not in fact lack a personal relationship; in the second situation, the agent (Socrates, who is not distressed about God’s hiddenness) would indeed lack a personal relationship with God but would not be in fact as nonresistant as it might seem.

A second possible solution would be to say that Socrates is indeed nonresistant but is in fact in a personal relationship with God even though it is merely a *de re* relationship. For this, we could extend our suggestion (in section 3) that there can be a significant personal relationship in the absence of *de dicto* belief. I say we would have to *extend* this suggestion because in the Pascalian model offered in section 3.1 the only kind of *de re* relationship we have considered is when God reaches out to a human person through his historical revelation and (through this revelation) instigates in that person’s soul a desire for God. This is the kind of *de re* relationship we have considered so far, and (by hypothesis) Socrates is lacking *even this kind* of relationship with God: God has not reached out to him through his revelation, and has not instigated in his soul a desire for God. Therefore, if we want to say that even (nonresistant) Socrates can be in a *de re* relationship with God, we would have to posit other ways of establishing such a personal relationship. One way to go would be to say that God is identical with Moral Goodness and that Socrates has an intimate relationship with Moral Goodness (through his moral actions). Another way to go would be to appeal once again to Jesus’ parable of the Last Judgment, where Jesus seems to say that a personal relationship with the poor and the people in need is *de re* a relationship with himself, the Son of God; we would only have to suppose, then, that Socrates has performed “works of mercy” to the poor and has been in this

way in a *de re* personal relationship with the Son of God.⁶¹ Of the four “complements” that we are going to see, this is perhaps the one that is most in line with the core intuition of Pascal’s strategy, and perhaps also with the Christian tradition more generally. (For what it is worth, this is the solution I would be most inclined to adopt myself.)

A third solution might concede that Socrates is both nonresistant and lacking a personal relationship with God but would try to put forward a reason for God to permit this to happen. A reason that might come to mind is God’s intention to save humankind not individually but collectively: if there is a value in saving humankind collectively instead of individually (i.e. each individual separately), then God has a reason to reach out to the individuals through a common and universal act, the same for everyone, which is his historical revelation, situated in one time and one place of history. But God cannot obtain this good of a collective salvation if he starts making systematic exceptions and establishes individual relationships with people who have not access to this historical revelation. If God has an absolute reason to preserve this good of a collective salvation, then it is just *not possible* for him to reach out to Socrates individually and outside of the revelation (and given that there is just one historical revelation, it seems inevitable that there will be “uncontacted” people at some place and at some time). If we adopt the more modest view that God has a *pro tanto* reason to use his historical salvation as his way of entering into a personal relationship, then God has a *pro tanto* reason not to establish a personal relationship with Socrates (even though he, God himself, desires it), or rather for *delaying* a personal relationship with Socrates (we need not suppose that this situation of nonrelationship will last after death).⁶²

A fourth solution would also concede that Socrates’ situation is an instance of nonresistant nonrelationship but would deny that there is any evil generated by a putative delay: the idea here is that Socrates would not suffer from the delay of God’s initiative (this is part of the hypothesis) but that God would not suffer either from any delay, because God is outside of time. When the problem of divine hiddenness is a problem of a human who suffers from the delays of God’s relational initiatives, then the delay can be counted as a suffering and needs a special justification (as we have seen in section 4.1). But when there is no part of human suffering in the problem, when the problem of hiddenness is reduced to a problem of divine suffering (so to

⁶¹ See MICHON, “Is Atheism (the Fact),” 85–86 for the same suggestions.

⁶² Thanks to Jean-Baptiste Lecuit for suggesting to me this possible solution.

speak, perhaps we should rather say a problem of the unsatisfied desire of God), then the temporal dimension of the problem changes completely if we suppose an atemporal conception of God. From an atemporal point of view, God sees all moments of Socrates' history (before and after his death) at once. The fact that some moments on this line are moments without a personal relationship with God does count, *ceteris paribus*, as an evil, but it is an evil that can be outweighed by a deeper personal relationship at other moments of the timeline. And if this absence of relationship at one point is indeed compensated by other points on the timeline, then from God's atemporal point of view there is no additional evil of "waiting" or "delay" while God "is standing at" the specific nonrelationship point. Maybe this additional evil of the delay is what makes it unacceptable from the point of view of the suffering human being even to delay one instant a personal relationship with God, but from God's atemporal point of view, it may not be particularly problematic to leave some "uncontacted moments" in Socrates' life, as long as Socrates' life as a whole has been contacted and the uncontacted moments are overcompensated by the contacted ones.

Once again, these are only four speculative suggestions as to how the Pascalian strategy might be complemented. Perhaps there are other ways to complement it. And I don't think the proponent of the Pascalian strategy (for distressed God-seekers) need be committed to one specific complement (for non-distressed nonbelievers).

CONCLUSION

I had two aims in this paper, one historical and the other systematic.

My historical aim was to argue that there is in Pascal's writings a response to the problem of divine hiddenness that has been neglected so far and which is significantly different, dialectically speaking, from Hick's or Schellenberg's interpretations. My interpretation consists in supposing that the Pascalian Conditional "you would not seek me if you had not found me" is addressed (by Jesus) to the distressed God-seeker, which means that according to Pascal the apparent cases of nonresistant nonrelationship are only apparent. But unlike Schellenberg who imagined that Pascal could or should have classified these situations as cases of *resistant* nonrelationship, I argue that Pascal conceived them as situations of nonresistant *relationship* (even

though the agent herself is unaware that she is having a significant personal relationship with God).

My systematic aim was to evaluate the possibility to defend this Pascalian strategy in the contemporary discussion on the problem of hiddenness. I have tried to argue that we can indeed consider the PCH strategy as a promising response to the problem of hiddenness if we concentrate on the first-person version of the problem, i.e. the version of the problem in which the evidence for nonresistant nonrelationship is the thinker herself. Granted, this is only one part of the problem of divine hiddenness: I do not think the PCH strategy in itself offers a complete response to other parts or other versions of the problem of divine hiddenness, and therefore a complete solution to the problem would require some complements (in particular a complement to account for the nonrelationship of God with *non-distressed* nonbelievers). For these complements, there are different ways to go, and I do not think the proponent of the PCH strategy should commit himself to one way or another.

But the PCH strategy, even though it is limited and partial, responds to the part of the problem that is existentially and pastorally the most urgent, namely the problem of *distressed* God-seekers (in the first person, or even in fact in the second- or third-person version). The existence of people who are longing for a personal relationship with God and yet seem to be denied such a relationship by the god who is supposed to desire it is indeed a difficulty that demands an urgent response. The Pascalian response, as I reconstruct it, says in brief the following:

If it's the loving god, the Christian god, whose existence or non-existence you are seriously considering, then you should take into account the different ways in which this god enters into a personal relationship with us; and one such way is by instigating in us a desire for a relationship with him. Consequently, if this god exists, then your distress itself is evidence that he has already initiated an intimate relationship with your soul, by producing in you this desire through his revelation that he is a god of love.

One dialectical element that I added to Pascal's thought in order to defend the PCH strategy is the suggestion that the conception of God as a god of love (a god who desires a personal relationship with us for its own sake) is in fact a *revelabile tantum*, something proper to the Judeo-Christian tradition (or revelation). If that is right, then the problem of divine hiddenness should not be conceived and presented (as it frequently is) as the second huge problem of *natural* theology (alongside the problem of evil). It should rather be conceived as one of the problems of *Christian* theology, alongside the problems

of Trinity and Incarnation. This is not meant to diminish the importance of the problem, which it was Schellenberg's immense merit to bring to the fore. My point is rather to situate this problem in the realm of theological problems in order to understand better its nature. There is no denying that the Christian concept of God (as triune, as incarnate, etc.) *adds* problems, or difficulties, that do not already exist in natural theology itself. In other words, there is an element of *paradox* in Christian theology. If I am right that the concept of God as loving us is a properly revealed concept, then Schellenberg's problem is an instance of these paradoxes introduced specifically by the Christian revelation. Acknowledging this fact might suggest further investigation into the different ways in which we respond to Christian paradoxes in general⁶³; maybe some of these ways can or should be applied to the solution of this specific Christian paradox. Saint Bernard himself, in the quote that seems to be the source of Pascal's own PCH, explicitly presented his remark as being paradoxical:

Here is a paradox, that no one can seek the Lord who has not already found Him.⁶⁴ (emphasis mine)

One risk with theological paradoxes is to indulge into full-blown contradictions or nonsense, without making any real effort to show logical consistency. I hope I have avoided this risk in my elaboration of the PCH strategy in this paper. But once the effort for clarity and logical consistency has been made, we should still remember the element of paradox that the solution contains. Like an optical illusion which persists after one has understood the illusion, we should acknowledge that there is something that remains counterintuitive in saying to a distressed God-seeker that she is already in a significant relationship with God.

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⁶³ See, for instance, James ANDERSON, *Paradox in Christian Theology: An Analysis of Its Presence, Character, and Epistemic Status* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2007).

⁶⁴ BERNARD, *On Loving God*, online, chap. 8.

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“YOU WOULD NOT SEEK ME IF YOU HAD
NOT FOUND ME”—ANOTHER PASCALIAN RESPONSE
TO THE PROBLEM OF DIVINE HIDDENNESS

S u m m a r y

One version of the Problem of Divine Hiddenness is about people who are looking for God and are distressed about not finding him. Having in mind such distressed God-seekers, Blaise Pascal imagined Jesus telling them the following: “Take comfort; you would not seek me if you had not found me.” This is what I call the Pascalian Conditional of Hiddenness (PCH). In the first part of this paper, I argue that the PCH leads to a new interpretation of Pascal’s own response to the problem, significantly different from Hick’s or Schellenberg’s interpretations of Pascal. In short: for any person who is distressed about not finding God, and who (for this reason) seriously considers the Argument from Hiddenness, the PCH would show that their own distress constitutes evidence that God is in fact not hidden to them (because this desire for God has been instigated in them by God himself). In the second part of the paper, I set aside the exegetical question and try to develop this original strategy as a contemporary response to one version of the Problem of Divine Hiddenness, which I call the “first-person problem.” I argue that the PCH strategy offers a plausibly *actual* story to respond to the first-person problem. As a result, even if we need to complement the PCH strategy with other more traditional strategies (in order to respond to other versions of the problem), the PCH strategy should plausibly be part of the *complete* true story about Divine Hiddenness.

Keywords: Divine Hiddenness; Blaise Pascal; divine love; *de re* relationship; revealed concept of God.

„NIE SZUKAŁBYŚ MNIE, GDYBYŚ MNIE NIE ZNALAZŁ”
– INNA PASCALOWSKA ODPOWIEDŹ NA PROBLEM BOŻEGO UKRYCIA)

S t r e s z c z e n i e

Jedna z wersji problemu skrytości dotyczy ludzi, którzy szukają Boga i martwią się, że Go nie znajdują. Mając na uwadze tak strapionych poszukiwaczy Boga, Blaise Pascal wyobraził sobie Jezusa, który mówi im: „Nie szukałbyś mnie, gdybyś mnie nie znalazł”. To właśnie nazywam Pascalskim Warunkiem Ukrycia (PWU). W pierwszej części tego artykułu twierdę, że PWU prowadzi do nowej interpretacji odpowiedzi Pascala na problem ukrycia, znacząco odmiennej od interpretacji Pascala u Hicka czy Schellenberga. Krótko mówiąc: dla każdej osoby, która jest przygnębiona niezalezieniem Boga i która (z tego powodu) poważnie rozważa argument z ukrycia, PWU wykazuje, że ich własne cierpienie jest dowodem na to, że Bóg w rzeczywistości nie jest dla nich ukryty (ponieważ pragnienie Boga zostało w nich wzbudzone przez samego Boga). W drugiej części artykułu odkładam na bok pytanie egzegetyczne i staram się rozwinąć tę oryginalną strategię jako współczesną odpowiedź na jedną z wersji problemu ukrycia, którą nazywam „problemem pierwszej osoby”. Twierdę, że strategia PWU oferuje wiarygodną odpowiedź na problem pierwszej osoby. W rezultacie nawet jeśli musimy uzupełnić strategię PWU innymi, bardziej tradycyjnymi strategiami (aby odpowiedzieć na inne wersje problemu), strategia PWU powinna być prawdopodobnie częścią pełnej historii o Bożym ukryciu.

Słowa kluczowe: Boże ukrycie; Blaise Pascal; Boża miłość; relacja *de re*; objawione pojęcie Boga.