

EPISTEMIC PARADOX AS A SOLUTION TO DIVINE HIDDENNESS

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ABSTRACT: I offer a new, limited solution to divine hiddenness based on a particular epistemic paradox: sometimes, agents knowing about a desired outcome or relevant features of that desired outcome would prevent the outcome in question from occurring. I call these cases *epistemically self-defeating situations*. This solution, in essence, says that divine hiddenness or silence is a *necessary feature* of at least some morally excellent or desirable states of affairs. Given the nature of the paradox, an omniscient being cannot completely eliminate hiddenness, just as an omnipotent being cannot create a rock so heavy that they cannot lift it. Epistemically self-defeating situations provide an undercutting defeater for the assumption that any nonresistant nonbeliever could *always*, at any time, be in conscious relationship with a perfectly loving God. Thankfully, silence is a temporary feature of epistemically self-defeating situations: once the outcome is achieved, agents can know in full.

KEY WORDS: Divine hiddenness, Epistemic Paradox, Self-Defeat Nonresistant Nonbelief, Moral Excellence, Organic Unity

‘For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I will know fully, just as I also have been fully known’ (1 Corinthians 13:12, NASB)

I. Introduction

Problems of divine hiddenness are taken to be at least *prima facie* reason to think that God does not exist. God, if such a being exists, is supposed to be perfectly loving. But there appear to be people who, through no fault of their own, do not have a relationship with God despite their best efforts. How could a perfectly loving God remain hidden from such non-resistant non-believers?

Proponents of hiddenness arguments argue that the answer is that God does not exist. If God is omnipotent and omniscient (a central assumption to many theists),

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the only impediments to divine-creaturely relationship could come from character defects, either human or divine. And since God has every perfection, the defect must not be God's—a perfect being would not hide from people sincerely seeking a relationship. But since it seems that there are people who fail to believe through no fault of their own, proponents of this style of argument conclude that God does not exist (see Schellenberg 2007 & 2015 for some of the most famous arguments to this effect).

I agree that discussions about whether suffering individuals—reporting divine silence despite seeking God—truly *are* nonculpable or nonresistant is a deeply dangerous business and best avoided. The book of Job, a text of wisdom literature, biblically warns against the danger of universally denying such self-reports—canonically, there *are* people who nonculpably and nonresistantly suffer from divine silence. (This appears to be true regardless of debates about the historicity of Job—if Job is simply an 'everyman' character, it is all the more reason to take the nonculpability of those suffering divine silence seriously.) I also wish to avoid the risky business of potentially reevaluating God's character, and whether perfect love might look radically different than we might expect (for arguments that the requirements of perfection are radically different, see Murphy 2017 and Rea 2018).

Instead, I argue that discussions of hiddenness have overlooked something important: there are epistemic constraints that arise not due to the effort, openness, or moral structure of agents, but rather the limitations of states of affairs themselves—limitations that even an omniscient and omnipotent being couldn't eliminate, on pain of contradiction. We have overlooked an important feature of human life and action: knowledge and abilities are time-indexed (or, at minimum, are had and exercised at times). Even if we have a general capacity—to know, relate to another, or some other relationship-relevant ability—these capacities are had or exercised *at a time*. Beliefs are held at a time; actions performed at a time.

With this temporal limitation in mind, I offer a new solution to divine hiddenness by focusing on a particular temporal epistemic paradox: sometimes, knowing about a desired outcome or relevant features of that desired outcome would actively prevent the outcome from occurring. For example, a camera-shy individual will not be able to act naturally for photographs, should they know pictures are being taken. I call these *epistemically self-defeating situations*.

I propose that the outcomes of some epistemically self-defeating situations are desirable or even morally excellent. If this is the case, then we have a partial solution to divine hiddenness: divine hiddenness or silence is a *necessary feature* of at least some morally excellent or desirable states of affairs. Thus, God is morally permitted (and possibly morally required) to remain silent in those cases. The necessity of God's silence does not automatically tell against God's omniscience or omnipotence, since

anything to the contrary would result in paradox. Our approach in these cases should be similar, I argue, to the impossibility of God's creating a rock so heavy that God cannot lift it. What is at issue is not God or God's power, but rather the contradictory requirements specified (i.e., *being able to create an unliftable rock* and *being able to lift anything*). So, too, for certain epistemic cases. Epistemically self-defeating situations show that there are some particular cases in which God could not always have us be aware of the desired outcome, and that there can be case-specific reasons for silence.

A feature (or bug) of this view is that it is epistemically self-insulating: for any specific case in which we ask why God might have to remain silent, there are likely further reasons why God must remain silent about God's silence. A benefit of the view is that it avoids the objection that our skepticism about God's reasons undermines our reason in ordinary moral cases (see Almeida and Oppy 2003). Human moral responsibilities, reasoning, and actions should remain the same—if this were not the case, the desirable outcomes described in the paradox would also not exist. Our ordinary moral reasoning and action—and God's silence—are what we should expect in such cases.

To make this case, I will proceed as follows. First, I will describe epistemically self-defeating situations, demonstrating both their existence and their application to problems of divine hiddenness. I will motivate their application to divine hiddenness in two stages: first, to particular example cases and then more generally, showing how epistemically self-defeating situations are an undercutting defeater to a key premise in Schellenberg's hiddenness argument. The possibility of epistemically self-defeating situations demonstrates that always being open to a certain kind of relationship with someone does not entail that, at a particular time, one is in that kind of relationship even if both parties desire it.

Essential, time-limiting and time-indexed features of relationships are also offered by many theists in response to hiddenness arguments, such as examples of parental relationships with children (see Howard Snyder 2015), mending broken relationships (see Stump 2018 and Rea 2018), or getting to know someone (see Howard Snyder 2015 and Rea 2018). The solution I provide can, potentially, be a helpful framework for understanding the application of these sorts of examples.

I conclude by answering objections to my view, while noting some important shortcomings. Mere demonstration of the paradox in question (and the potential necessity of divine silence) does not *in itself* provide a defense of the moral permissibility of these cases. I utilize the framework provided by Marilyn McCord Adams in addressing the problem of evil, arguing that her notion of organic unities and the importance of the assent of the sufferer are applicable in this case. I then provide rea-

son to think the notion of limitations that I introduce can avoid some of the potential metaphysical pitfalls of Adams's account.

Notably, this solution does not address the very real pastoral problems that are present in cases of divine hiddenness. But it does offer one way in which a sufferer might ultimately assent to the state of affairs in question, perhaps when they eventually understand the reasons for divine hiddenness or silence. I thus invite the reader to be angry with me or my account—if I'm right, any resultant anger can contribute to a good-making feature of the world as well.

II. Epistemically Self-Defeating Situations

Arguing that an epistemic paradox helps explain why God must remain hidden (in some cases) requires that I first establish the paradox in question. So, I will first show that this epistemic paradox affects knowers in more ordinary cases, before proceeding to argue that this paradox applies even in divine cases.

Epistemically self-defeating situations are ones in which particular outcomes are impossible to achieve if the relevant agents know about them. The heart of this paradox is the following: even if something is foreseeable by an agent, it is not necessarily communicable to other agents. Epistemically self-defeating situations are, I'll argue, a type of self-defeating prophecy. This problem is the inverse of self-fulfilling prophecies, wherein knowing about a particular outcome is the very thing which brings the outcome about. Additionally, these cases differ from epistemic paradoxes like the surprise exam paradox, in which informing someone ahead of time of an upcoming exam appears to render surprise impossible—at least, on some conceptions of 'surprise'. Surprise exam cases admit of potential solutions that epistemically self-defeating situations do not.

In epistemically self-defeating situations, knowing about a particular outcome—or key details related to that outcome—actively prevents that desired outcome from occurring.

For example, suppose I make you this offer: 'I will give you one million dollars as long as you don't think about pink elephants within the next few seconds.' In this situation, it is impossible for you to both (a) understand my offer and (b) receive the million dollars. Understanding my offer entails (at least briefly) thinking about pink elephants. Epistemically self-defeating situations are thus scenarios agents can face. (Kavka's toxin paradox could possibly be classified as an epistemically self-defeating situation, see Kavka 1983 for the puzzle.)

The above offer appears unacceptably arbitrary, especially if applied to a divine being who supposedly wants a relationship with their creation. Surely an omnipotent, omniscient, and omnibenevolent being who *wanted* us to have good things

would not make our receipt of such things dependent on ‘pink elephant’-style conditions.

However, some directives or situations appear to be epistemically or pragmatically self-defeating by their very nature (e.g., ‘Act natural’ said to someone not used to the camera or ‘Calm down!’ uttered in the heat of an argument). A photographer who truly wants an amateur subject to ‘act natural’ will often not inform their subjects that they’re taking candid photos. The knowledge that the photos are being taken would make the individual unable to properly relax.

This constraint—that making salient some features of success can, in some cases, be the very thing which would ensure success is not presently achievable—is broader than mere performative contradiction. It is, arguably, part of what is behind the phenomenon of ‘choking’ in professional sports—focus is drawn to the wrong thing (success is in one’s grasp as long as certain conditions are met) at the wrong time. Cases of this nature need not be relegated to the individual, either. Suppose there is an incredibly accurate predictor, who can assess the outcomes of basketball games. It seems possible that the predictor can be in the following situation: After Jones scores with only a minute left on the clock, the predictor knows ‘that was the winning point of the game.’ But the predictor also knows that no players of the game can be made aware of this fact until after the game is over. Why? Jones is currently full of energy; her opponents are flagging. But if Jones *were* to know that was the winning point, she would relax, and her opponents would sense that and score.

This phenomenon exists even if we assume that predictions are probabilistic, rather than infallible. Politicians, for example, are greatly concerned with depressed voter turn-out. Letting voters know that it looks like Candidate Y will win can make it so Candidate Y actually loses, due to lower voter turn-out from their supporters. (There are many demands on one’s time—so why stop by the polls if Candidate Y looks like a sure thing?)

Self-defeating situations have also famously made their way into the Marvel Cinematic Universe. When a character asks Doctor Strange what will happen, Strange replies, ‘If I tell you what happens, it won’t happen’ (*Avengers: Endgame*).

Epistemically self-defeating situations are thus a particular brand of self-defeating prophecy. I give the situations I discuss their own label for two reasons. First, some self-defeating prophecies arise in contexts in which we *want* the relevant agents to know about the potential outcome in question because we want to prevent the outcome from occurring. For instance, a doctor will tell their patient about their cancer diagnosis in the hopes that the prediction that cancer will kill them is false—with the goal that cancer treatment will prevent the otherwise foreseen outcome which would have occurred without the knowledge currently being imparted.

When the ultimate outcome of a self-defeating prophecy is negative, we aim to tell the agent in order to prevent the outcome. I focus instead on cases in which the outcome is positive. In these cases, the agent(s) aren't told in order to (help) ensure that the positive outcome is achieved—if they knew of the outcome at particular times, this knowledge would be the very thing which ensured the outcome did not happen. It's not *entirely* apt to call these cases self-defeating prophecies, then, since the whole goal is to avoid communicating the information at particular time in the hope that the foreseen outcome might occur. (It's possible to read Peter van Inwagen's remarks (2008) on what an omniscient being could know about the free action of agents in this light—according to van Inwagen, knowing what an agent will do would render the action unfree.)

Second, I want to focus on the epistemic status of the individuals in epistemic situations, rather than the objects or agents which could provide prophecies. Epistemically self-defeating situations result from the realities of knowers at times—they do not result simply from performative contradictions (such as a self-refuting idea or liar paradox). The foreseen state of affairs is possible; it's simply that some actors cannot know the full state of affairs (or even key portions of it) at some times.

A general lesson from epistemically self-defeating situations is that always being open to an outcome does not guarantee that, for every time or even any particular time, that outcome occurs. For example, suppose I'm always open to having a surprise party thrown for me. Always being open to having a surprise party thrown for me does not entail that, at every time, I know whether there is a surprise party. If I knew about the party at some times, it wouldn't be a surprise.

III. Application to Particular Theological Cases

In addition to these sorts of situations, it is a feature of human life and relationships that we are inclined towards certain kinds of relationships at particular times. We're not always able to have certain sorts of relationships. It's not uncommon to hear friends or romantic partners say, 'I would have hated you if we'd met earlier!' And certain kinds of relationships require particular kinds of cognitive awareness or maturity. For instance, parents have to wait until their children are older to relate to them in certain terms of friendship, like being an equal emotional confidante—to do otherwise would be to engage in parentification, which is harmful for children.

Given the limitations of human temporality in relationships, it is not unreasonable to think that epistemically self-defeating situations limit God, too—at least, in so far as God has certain kinds of desires for relationship with creation and what God wants creatures to accomplish. Some excellent states of affairs might necessarily involve epistemically self-defeating situations. The question is, then, whether these states of affairs are excellent *enough* to be morally permissible. And here one might

worry about finding ourselves at an impasse—some proponents of hiddenness argument seem to assume that *any* silence in the face of one who seeks is too much (see Schellenberg 2005 and 2015). But this is a difficult claim to establish (see Howard Snyder 1996 and 2015, Cuneo 2013, and Rea 2018 for just a few of the arguments to the contrary).

Consequentialists (and perhaps those generally in favor of greater goods defenses) will see the appeal of appealing to epistemically self-defeating situations for a solution to hiddenness. If it is not possible for an exceedingly good (or perhaps best) outcome to occur without ϕ occurring, then it is morally permissible to allow ϕ . However, at this point some general concerns which apply to greater goods defenses might also surface here: it appear that it is not enough that a greater good come about if it is at the expense of agents who never see the benefit of that good (see Adams, 1999 and 2006; and Stump, 2018 for these concerns).

But paying attention to the nature of epistemically self-defeating situations shows that the agents involved can (*eventually*) directly benefit. God is not necessarily hidden or silent forever, and in these sorts of cases the suffering agent may very likely agree that it was better that they did not know at the time and that it is indeed worth it in the end. Thus, the silence that is a necessary feature of epistemically self-defeating situations fits well with the responses to the problem of evil in which God makes it up to the individual sufferer in question (Stump, 2018). Specifically, divine silence can be an integral part of an organic unity of goodness, to which the sufferer ultimately assents and desires (fulfilling the condition set forth in Adams, 1999).

For example, suppose you feel led by God to become good friends with Jack. Due to this friendship, you eventually begin to see Jack's workplace harassment of his co-worker James. You become friends with James because of your relationship with Jack, and James confides in you. Without a friendship of the very specific nature you have with Jack, you would have never been in a position to witness the harassment, nor been in a situation to report it and make it cease. This process causes you to lose your original friendship with Jack.

Had you known the type of person Jack was originally, you never would have become friends with him in the first place. And this would have prevented your friendship with, and ultimately helping, James. But you may, in the end, be glad for your initial ignorance due to the good outcome. (There are surely more convincing cases that can be made, but which make use of stories which are not fully mine to tell. I trust that a charitable reader will be able to think of convincing enough cases from their own experiences—at least, convincing enough to initially entertain the kind of solution in I'm offering.)

There are intricacies and limitations of human action that cannot be avoided in cases like the above, for the individuals in question. You cannot truly befriend someone you already believe to be morally abominable. At least, not as long as you're not abominable yourself! You could try to act as if you didn't know the terrible truth about Jack, but this is to return to the same difficulty which plagued or photographer who wanted their subjects to 'act naturally'—spy craft is difficult!

A further advantage of the view is that some theological traditions already appear to involve epistemically self-defeating situations. The story of Joseph (Genesis 37-50) is arguably this sort of case. If Joseph's brothers had known the true meaning of Joseph's dreams—that he would save them from famine—the story would have never happened. They never would have conspired against him and sold him into slavery, and Joseph never would have been in Egypt to save his brothers nor the people of Egypt.

It's also one partial, possible interpretation of the explanation (or lack thereof) that God gives Job at the end of the book (Job 38–41). Job has sought an audience with God regarding why he has been made to suffer while innocent, and God responds by describing many scenarios in which God has knowledge which Job lacks.

Epistemically self-defeating situations can thus be used to explain why God might be silent in some cases—or, at minimum, they can at least provide a possible reason God might have for silence. (Given the nature of epistemically self-defeating situations, for any particular instance of suffering or silence someone endures, it is impossible to know that was the reason until the situation has resolved and agents are able to know in full.) I don't claim that they account for all instances of divine hiddenness, so this solution has particular, limited application—though, for any case of silence, we might wonder if we are in an epistemically self-defeating situation.

I thus offer a solution which, in its application, can be used as a theodicy or defense. The theodicy approach requires thinking that achieving the excellent outcome of such a situation actually is, in some cases, one of God's reasons. On this approach, some cases of silence due to epistemically self-defeating situations are morally permissible. The defense approach merely claims that it's possible that cases involving such necessary silence are morally permissible. This approach will use epistemically self-defeating situations to also provide a general reason to reject, or at least doubt, a key premise in divine hiddenness arguments.

But there are multiple problems of divine hiddenness, and particularly pressing is a more general concern outside of the specific cases addressed above: Why is it that people who want a relationship with God lack their desired relationship with God, or even conscious awareness that God exists? On the assumption that God does not

exist, this silence or absence is not puzzling. But if God exists and is perfectly good, then it is puzzling.

I will now argue that epistemically self-defeating situations act as an undercutting defeater for a key premise in divine hiddenness arguments.

VI. Schellenberg's Hiddenness Argument Revisited

J.L. Schellenberg is the standard-bearer for those who think that a perfect being *couldn't* remain hidden or silent from those who are seeking them—due to God's perfections, God would always be open to relationship with their creation, such that any created being capable of meaningful conscious relationship with God could have it just by trying. (See Schellenberg, 2007. Others have pressed problems of divine hiddenness, and so applications of my solution not limited to Schellenberg's argument alone. But since he is considered the standard bearer for this sort of argument, interaction with him will be most illuminating.) And Schellenberg thinks a minimal constraint on a meaningful, conscious relationship is belief that the other party exists.

Schellenberg frames a key intuition, which I will label the *no hiddenness intuition*, as follows: 'If there exists a God who is always open to a personal relationship with any finite person, then no finite person is ever nonresistantly in a state of nonbelief in relation to the proposition that God exists' (2015: 103). Schellenberg puts this point in terms of finite persons, which I will use interchangeably with created persons. I am not the first to use these terms interchangeably, see (Howard-Snyder 2005)). Since there appear to be people in nonresistant states of nonbelief—that is, people who fail to believe or have a relationship with God through no fault of their own—proponents of hiddenness arguments think we can run a quick *modus tollens* against the existence of God.

It is helpful to look at Schellenberg's argument in full (2015: 103):

1. If a perfectly loving God exists, then there exists a God who is always open to a personal relationship with any finite person.
2. If there exists a God who is always open to a personal relationship with any finite person, then no finite person is ever nonresistantly in a state of nonbelief in relation to the proposition that God exists.
3. If a perfectly loving God exists, then no finite person is ever nonresistantly in a state of nonbelief in relation to the proposition that God exists (from 1 and 2).
4. Some finite persons are or have been nonresistantly in a state of nonbelief in relation to the proposition that God exists.
5. No perfectly loving God exists (from 3 and 4).
6. If no perfectly loving God exists, then God does not exist.

7. God does not exist (from 5 and 6)

The actionable, non-derived premises are 1, 2, and 4. Premise 1, which I will label the *openness assumption*, looks eminently plausible. So, too, does premise 4. I have no desire to dispute either the assumption that God, as a perfect being, would always be open to relationship with creation nor that there are non-resistant non-believers; in fact, they strike me as not only highly plausible, but true. (Interpretations of the openness assumption, however, are more fraught than it might initially seem, see Rea, 2018. There are perhaps good theological reasons for thinking that God's continual openness to relationship does not entail that we can be in relationship with God just by trying. Perhaps God is not always open to relationship in the way we would desire or think. The account I offer can be read as one way of rejecting this 'just by trying' interpretation of divine openness, though in this case the rejection of the condition would also result in a denial of premise 2.) I will thus assume that a divine perfection is being perfectly loving, which entails openness to relationship with created beings, and that some people fail to have a relationship with God through no fault of their own.

My target is premise 2, which is the *no hiddenness intuition*. The existence of epistemically self-defeating situations provides an undercutting defeater to premise 2: a general desire for or openness to relationship does not entail that, *for every time*, every willing individual believes that God exists and has a conscious relationship with God.

We can assume God wants relationship with every finite person and is always open to that relationship. God's continual openness to such a relationship does not entail that the finite person in question is *always aware of* God, even if the person is non-resistant. They may be in an epistemically self-defeating situation: knowing of God's existence at a particular time might prevent either their continual, future knowledge of God or prevent some other deeply cherished good that the individual desires (we might again remember cases of human relationships where someone has insisted, 'If I'd met you before, this would have never worked out'). And God desires we ultimately be in everlasting relationship with him. Belief at a particular time might prevent belief at other times. Epistemically self-defeating situations thus provide an undercutting defeater for the *no hiddenness assumption*—given their existence, we have reason to doubt or reject the entailment relation Schellenberg makes between *openness* to relationship and the lack of hiddenness.

This solution, when applied more generally to Schellenberg's hiddenness argument instead of particular cases, may strike you as implausible. Would simply knowing of God's existence at an earlier time *really* prevent these great goods partially

achieved by the silence? But on this point, the epistemically self-defeating situations solution is self-insulating: our inability to know the second-order reason for divine silence may itself be due to another epistemically defeating situation wherein if we knew the reason, the desired outcome would not occur.

My account rests on epistemic limitations, and particularly a gap between God and creation: there are some things that a divine being cannot (currently) tell us. Here, one might wonder if my account simply collapses into a skeptical theist account and faces all the problems therein.

Skeptical theist responses have focused on our *general* epistemic limitations as compared to God's—in virtue of being omniscient, God knows more than us and God's reasons are beyond our ken (Wykstra, 1986; Howard-Snyder, 1996; Alston, 1996; Bergmann, 2001). Almeida & Oppy (2003) objected that focus on this limitation undermines our ordinary ethical reasoning.

But a key feature of epistemically self-defeating situations, as I've described them in theological contexts, is that they require us to act in accordance with our ordinary moral and normative judgments. Without our acting in these ways, the excellent outcomes would not occur. Thinking we might be in an epistemically self-defeating situation thus does not provide reason for us to doubt our actions or moral judgments about what it is good for us to do.

And the account offers significant advantages: the epistemically defeating situations solution allows us to bypass the fraught business of making particularly contentious rulings on individuals' character—human or divine (that is, aside from the most general rulings one has to make about divine character when making defenses or theodicies). I have a special desire to heed the warnings of the book of Job, which both explicitly affirms that people who have done no wrong are not always able to have the particular relationship with God they desire and shows that giving answers on behalf of God is a dangerous business indeed. (Job 1 tells us that Job is blameless, but Job is not granted his desired audience with God until the end of the book. All of Job's friends have given incorrect accounts which require repentance, see Job 42:7–9).

Importantly, like in the case of Job, I believe this solution allows for a view in which God makes it up to the suffering individual in question—and perhaps makes recompense. This is particularly important, since a major concern is that my 'solution' simply pushes the problem back a step. I motivated my position by discussing the cases of friendship with Jack, and Joseph and his brothers. But here we might ask: Why were we in these situations in the first place? James, for example, was rescued from Jack in my case above. But far better for James to have never to have been in a situation in which Jack was abusive! Surely, God could have prevented that?

There are two ways of reading this sort of objection. The first is a demand that an account of hiddenness solve the problem of evil generally—and this is the sort of demand that cannot be addressed without reference to many other considerations. I do not claim that making some observations from epistemic paradoxes solves every issue related to the problem of evil—though it does not seem implausible that something like this sort of case might eventually arise due to the intricacies and interconnectedness of human free agency. To the extent that human action is interconnected, more silence might be required.

Perhaps, in the end, my solution requires something like a free will defense operating in the background. But this more general question about God's prevention is akin to asking why there is evil at all. And there I have no answer, aside from those which have already been gestured toward in the free will literature and elsewhere. My project is much more limited.

A second way of reading the above strain of objection is as a demand for further motivation. I have offered an account which claims that silence is a necessary feature of certain morally excellent or desirable states of affairs. And such claims require motivated reason to think (a) it is necessary and (b) that these states of affairs are morally desirable or excellent. This is a demand which should be addressed, and to do so I will appeal to reasons provided by Marilyn McCord Adams (who responds to the problem of evil with another sort of necessity account).

V. Further Application: Minding the Epistemic Gap

The epistemic solution I offer focuses on an epistemic gap between God and creation. God may have reasons that God cannot currently communicate to us, due to our limitations.

In a related vein, Marilyn McCord Adams argued that sin and suffering are a *metaphysically* necessary consequence of the natures of God and human beings—sin is a function of our created state, and results from our radical limitations in comparison to God (1999, pp. 94–95). The metaphysical size gap is (at least, initially) too great for creatures to act in any way towards God other than sinfully.

Adams's necessity account avoids a classic objection raised to greater goods or free will theodicies and defenses: 'Surely, a perfect being could have created things in another way!' For even an omnipotent being cannot accomplish the logically impossible. But a drawback of this kind of view is that it commits its adherents to a specific metaphysical and theological position which many might find morally or theologically objectionable—Adams famously thought the metaphysical consequences of this gap might require divine apology (2006). My solution avoids some of the potentially morally objectionable consequences of Adams's view, since a ne-

cessity account focusing on our epistemic limitations (though it does not rule out a need for divine apology).

And the epistemic account does offer a response in-line with Adams's view goods which are organic unities, and inextricably involve some suffering as a necessary component. The silence in epistemically self-defeating situations is a necessary feature of the overall desirable state of affairs. I also agree with Adams that the possible, ultimate assent of the sufferer is highly important.

This solution does not necessarily soften pastoral problems of divine hiddenness felt at a particular time, nor lessen the pain of the sufferer. But it does offer one way in which a sufferer might ultimately assent to the state of affairs in question, perhaps when they eventually understand the reasons for divine hiddenness or silence.

But a further question is not only whether silence is permissible, but the duration of silence. After all, a supposedly loving parent would not hide from a hurt child desperately and repeatedly crying for them.

Even here, the case needs to be filled out more. There are countless cases in which a parent ignoring their child's cries would indeed be monstrous. But there are some cases in which the parent is not only absolved but considered a good parent. Consider a child with separation anxiety who is being left with another caregiver. Suppose, too, that the best child therapists agree that the best thing to do for this child, long-term, is for the parent to leave despite the child's cries. It is in the child's best interests and long-term flourishing, in this case, for the parent to hear and not heed the child's call not to leave. (Note that this example is not endorsing anything like a 'cry it out' strategy.) And as a grown adult, the person in question might agree with their parent's actions.

Here, the proponent of Schellenberg-style hiddenness arguments can respond: Surely, there is a temporal limit here. If the child continues to desperately cry for a prolonged period, something must be done. I agree, and think this is an important reason why there is some difference between human-divine relationships and human parent to child relationships (see Cuneo, 2013). Notably, many theists have pushed back on the parental view as the best or only picture by which we should understand conscious relationship with God (see Howard Synder 2005 and Rea 2018). The relationship between creature and creator is more encompassing, and likely more complicated, than any single kind of human relationship.

But note that the hiddenness proponent's objection (a) makes use of time and (b) says that hiddenness should not last forever. I agree with both general requirements, and my solution importantly states that hiddenness is a temporally limited phenomenon. While I cannot answer how long of a duration is too long, I can gesture toward a general theistic answer: God's ultimate goal is to live with us in eternity. So, all cases

of hiddenness or silence are temporary, as compared to an infinite duration to come after all is revealed.

I do not aim to prove that God uses epistemically self-defeating situations. To the extent you think cases like this are possible, they at least provide an undercutting defeater to Schellenberg's no hiddenness assumption.

VI. Conclusion

While my solution is not comprehensive, I believe it is widely applicable. At minimum, it provides a general undercutting defeater to arguments which claims that a God who is always open to relationship with us would be able to *always* make themselves (or their reasons) known.

One might think, in the end, I've offered an account where God operates like a Marvel character: Is it really the case that God might be withholding the desired series of events and outcome from us, because otherwise it wouldn't occur? And in the cases of Jack and Joseph (like the case of Doctor Strange), some slight leading or information from the person who knows of the paradox is part of the set-up of the case. Is the view unacceptably manipulative? (Interestingly, God is part of the mysterious 'set up' in the book of Job as well, see Chapter 1.)

My continued answer will be to appeal to Marilyn McCord Adam's notion of organic unities and the ultimate assent of the sufferer, along with a meta-application of the kind of case at hand. Why is there this 'set up' in some of these epistemically self-defeating situations? There may be some reason this is permissible that we simply cannot have access to at this point in time.

In the end, perhaps God or God's full reasons are too much for us to handle—at least, right now. Here again, I return to the book of Job. While Job has demanded an audience with God, Job doesn't advocate for his case in the way he had planned. God's presence and questioning is overwhelming (Job 42:4–6). But in the end, God vindicates Job, not only restoring him but making something which might appear to be recompense (Job 42:10–16). Perhaps, so too, for those currently suffering from divine silence.

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