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# CAN GOD BE HIDDEN AND EVIDENT AT THE SAME TIME? SOME KIERKEGAARDIAN REFLECTIONS

C. Stephen Evans

J. L. Schellenberg has argued that a loving God would make his reality evident to all who want to have a relation with God, but that God seems hidden to many such people. One response to this claim, suggested by Kierkegaard, is that God's reality is not really hidden to anyone except those who blind themselves to God's reality. This might seem to imply that all atheism is culpable, but it does not, since some of Kierkegaard's claims imply that those who may think of themselves as atheists may actually have an awareness of God's reality. This does not, however, imply that having a propositional understanding of God is unimportant; "thin theism" may have little or no value, but the kind of understanding of God that comes from knowing God as God does have great worth.

[W]ould it not have an almost madly comical effect to portray a man deluded into thinking that he could demonstrate that God exists—and then have an atheist accept it by virtue of the other's demonstrations. Both situations are equally fantastic, but just as no one has ever demonstrated it, so has there never been an atheist, even though there certainly have been many who have been unwilling to let what they know (that the god exists) get control over their minds.<sup>1</sup>

Many people who only know Kierkegaard from textbooks might have difficulty recognizing that my opening quotation comes from the famous Danish philosopher. To be sure, the claim that no one has ever been able to demonstrate the existence of God certainly sounds like Kierkegaard. Many people know that Kierkegaard is a great opponent of proofs of God's existence, someone who went so far as to say that the person who first came up with the idea of proving God's existence was Judas Iscariot number two. However, the claim that there has never been a real atheist, only people unwilling to allow their knowledge of God to get "control over their minds" does not sound much like the thinker who is best known as the proponent of the "leap of faith."

It is true that the passage in question comes from the "B" section of Kierkegaard's *Papirer*, because it is a passage that Kierkegaard deleted from the final copy of *Philosophical Fragments*, so one might think that the thought in question is one that Kierkegaard decided not to endorse. However, it is plausible to see the deletion of the passage as a decision Kierkegaard made at the same time that he decided to *remove* his own name from this book



as author and attribute the work to the pseudonym Johannes Climacus. When looked at in this light, the decision to delete the passage may be due to the fact that it is too deeply reflective of Kierkegaard's own views to be attributed to a pseudonym, since it does not sufficiently reflect the ironical ambiguity that Climacus displays, especially in *Philosophical Fragments*.

In any case, the passage is quite consistent with what Kierkegaard frequently says about God's existence. Contrary to the portrayal of Kierkegaard as one who despairs of any reason to believe in God but decides to believe anyway because he cannot endure the consequences, Kierkegaard actually displays little of the epistemological worries about belief in God so characteristic of Enlightenment philosophy. He rejects the idea of proving God's existence, not primarily because the proofs are bad, though he thinks they are less than conclusive, but because they make it appear that something (the existence of God) that should be certain for an individual is doubtful. For example, in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* even Johannes Climacus is less coy and makes it clear that he sees no difficulty with the reality of God:

For to demonstrate the existence (*Tilvær*) of one who is present (*er til*, exists) is the most shameless affront, since it is an attempt to make him ridiculous; . . . How could it occur to one to demonstrate that he exists (*er til*), unless it is because one has first permitted oneself to ignore him; and now makes the matter still more crazy by demonstrating his existence (*Tilværelse*) before his very nose? A king's existence (*Tilværelse*) or his presence (*Tilstedeværelse*) generally has its own characteristic expression of subjection and submission; what if one in his sublime presence (*Nærværelse*) wanted to prove that he existed (*var til*)? Would one then prove it? No, one makes a fool of him, for his presence (*Tilstedeværelse*) is demonstrated by an expression of submission . . . and thus one also demonstrates God's existence (*Tilværelse*) by worship—not by proofs.<sup>2</sup>

Rational apologetics thus plays into the hands of the skeptic by making it appear that the weakness of the arguments justifies the skepticism. Kierkegaard's stance on the existence of God thus differs radically from his views about the God-in-time; it is with respect to the latter that the "leap" is required, and the popular conception of Kierkegaard's views about faith in God is probably due to conflating what he says about the incarnation with what he says about God's reality.

I believe that some of Kierkegaard's views on how God can be known are quite relevant to the debate over the "hiddenness of God" that has been recently provoked by J. L. Schellenberg.<sup>3</sup> To summarize the argument briefly, Schellenberg has argued that if there were a loving God, God would make his reality clear to all who wish to have a relation with him; reasonable, non-culpable unbelief would not occur. However, Schellenberg argues that such reasonable non-belief does occur and this gives us reason to doubt that a loving God exists. I think that reflection on these Kierkegaardian themes provides an illuminating response to Schellenberg.

Can one consistently hold that God's existence can be known, even known with a kind of certainty, while maintaining that one cannot logi-

cally demonstrate the existence of God? The answer is surely yes. Alvin Plantinga, as is well-known, has defended the claim that belief in God can be properly basic, and even amount to knowledge, although the person holding the belief may not be able to prove God's existence. On such a non-evidentialist view of religious knowledge, the lack of conclusive evidence for God's existence is clearly compatible with belief in God that is both confident and reasonable. I have argued that Kierkegaard's own view of these matters is remarkably close to Plantinga's, and if this contention is right, then Kierkegaard certainly can consistently hold that one can know that God exists while being skeptical of all attempts to prove God's existence.<sup>4</sup>

Suppose, however, that Kierkegaard is some kind of evidentialist about the existence of God. In what follows I shall assume for the sake of argument that he should be read in this way. Would it then be possible for him consistently to hold that one can know God's reality with some kind of certainty while rejecting the possibility of a conclusive demonstration of God's reality? I believe that this is surely possible. Kierkegaard might hold, for example, that there is evidence of some type, perhaps experiential evidence, sufficient to ground a robust belief, while still holding that the evidence falls short of what one could legitimately call a proof or demonstration.

Obviously, it all depends on what we mean by a proof. If one means by a "proof" or "demonstration" a sound deductive argument with premises that can be known with certainty to be true by everyone (or almost everyone, "all sane, rational human knowers"), then one can easily see how evidence that is insufficient to constitute a proof could nevertheless provide a person with some kind of certainty. Such evidence might fall short of proof in at least two different, not mutually exclusive ways. First, the argument from the evidence could be inductive and probabilistic in character, or an "argument to the best explanation" rather than being strictly deductive in character. The second possibility is that the evidence, whatever its character and quality, might be such that not everyone could recognize it. This second possibility in turn breaks down into several sub-options, again not mutually exclusive: some people might simply not be able to recognize the evidential phenomena in question at all, some might recognize the evidential phenomena but not be able to recognize that the phenomena in question constituted evidence, and some might recognize the evidence but not adequately be able to appreciate the force of the evidence.

If Kierkegaard is an evidentialist about belief in God, as I am here assuming, it is the second kind of possibility (in one form or another) that he seems to have in mind when he says that God's existence is in some sense evident even though one cannot prove God's existence. In other words, he claims that God's reality is or can be evident to human beings but not to anyone and everyone; to become aware of God a person must have or acquire a certain kind of spiritual sensitivity, must possess that quality or set of qualities that Kierkegaard calls "inwardness" or "subjectivity." For Kierkegaard there is indeed a sense in which God's reality is both evident and hidden—evident to those who have eyes to see or ears to hear, hidden to those who cannot see and hear. The following passage from *Postscript* is characteristic: "Nature, the totality of creation, is God's work, and yet God

is not there, but within the individual human being there is a possibility (he is spirit according to his possibility) that in inwardness is awakened to a God-relationship, and then it is possible to see God everywhere."<sup>5</sup>

One might say that for Kierkegaard, who revels in paradoxes, God is both present and hidden in creation—present for the person who has been spiritually formed in the right way and hidden for those who lack such formation. However, hiddenness may not be precisely the right word here, since hiddenness seems to imply some kind of intentional choice on God's part to keep his reality from being manifest. Kierkegaard seems to think that this hiddenness of God is not the result of a decision on God's part, as if God simply decided to make some people but not others aware of himself, but rather reflects the nature of God, which dictates how God can and can't be known. God is not a physical object such as a pencil or a rock, and he cannot be observed simply by opening one's eyes. The idea that God is the kind of thing that could be observed in a "direct" or "immediate" manner is described by Kierkegaard as "paganism."

Why does not God reveal his presence in a direct and unmistakable manner to human beings? Could not God spell out the truth in lights in the sky or do some astounding miracles over major population centers? Surely he could do these things, but he could not really reveal himself by doing them. Kierkegaard thinks that if God did such things, God would not thereby be giving anyone any genuine insight into God's own nature, and thus such a communication would really be a deception. Kierkegaard describes a spiritually immature person, a party-goer who is also the "captain of the popinjay shooting club," who would take notice if God took the form of "a man who is twelve feet tall" or a "rare, enormously large green bird, with a red beak, that perched in a tree on the embankment and perhaps even whistled in an unprecedented manner." If God were to humor the demands of such a spiritually immature person by taking the form of the giant or the bird, the person would be deceived, because though he might become aware of God if God revealed himself in such a manner, he would not be aware of God *as* God really is.

This is surely what Kierkegaard means by saying that "God is a subject and hence [exists] only for subjectivity in inwardness."<sup>6</sup> He does not mean, of course, that God literally comes into existence when a person becomes subjectively developed, though there are texts which, read in a literal and wooden way, might suggest that is the case.<sup>7</sup> Rather, he is here speaking phenomenologically. When a human being is not spiritually attuned, God is not experienced as real, and in a sense God is not real for that person. Thus, if I am mired in evil, God takes a terrible vengeance: in such a situation "God does not exist for me at all, even though I pray."<sup>8</sup>

In such a case one might say that God's reality is hidden from me, but it would be truer to say that I have blinded myself to the reality of God. From Kierkegaard's perspective, the knowledge of God is necessarily linked with spiritual development for a number of reasons that I will try briefly to explain. First of all, such a linkage for Kierkegaard supports a kind of spiritual egalitarianism. Kierkegaard consistently holds that it would be unfair if the knowledge of God was grounded in some kind of "differential quality" such as intelligence or philosophical acumen. Every person must be capable of achieving the kind of God-relationship that makes one

an authentic self, and it would be unjust if those who had greater intelligence or education had an advantage. If the knowledge of God is rooted in such qualities as moral honesty about the human condition and humility, then there is equality because all humans are capable of this kind of personal development.

One might object that rooting religious knowledge in such moral qualities still does not lead to equality, since people differ in their capacities for moral development, both because of differences in temperament and also "moral luck" in being exposed to good role models, being challenged when they do wrong, etc. This is probably true. However, Kierkegaard could respond by holding that God takes all such factors into account in judging an individual. God and only God knows how much moral progress is actually possible for a given person at a given time, and the standards for an authentic relationship are adjusted to fit those differential capacities. However it remains true that the process of coming to know God more deeply and the process of moral development are linked together, and that all people have the ability to make progress towards achieving these goods. There is least equality in the sense that each person can make progress towards the ideal that God requires for that person.

Secondly, Kierkegaard holds that linking the knowledge of God to personal transformation guarantees that the process whereby this knowledge is gained is one that will be personally upbuilding. He holds, at least with respect to moral and religious truth, that the ancient maxim that "only like knows like" (negatively reflected in the child's taunt, "It takes one to know one") is true. Linking the knowledge of God to the development of subjectivity ensures that coming to know God will be a process whereby I grow and flourish as a person. Of course this "flourishing" must be measured in moral and spiritual terms; it is compatible with a person suffering a great deal in worldly terms.

Finally, Kierkegaard believes that if genuine knowledge of God is linked to personal transformation, then we will not be tempted to think that what Paul Moser has called "thin theism," a mere propositional belief in God, has much value, a view that is supported by James 2:19, where James affirms that even the demons believe in God.<sup>9</sup> For Kierkegaard God is fundamentally the Lord, and if one does not recognize God in such a way as to submit to his authority, then one does not really know God at all. A mere knowledge of the truth of the proposition that God exists has little value; such knowledge might even be harmful to an individual.

It looks as if Kierkegaard is claiming that God is in fact evident for those who want to find him, and thus is denying the existence of what J. L. Schellenberg has called "inculpable doubt" or "reasonable non-belief."<sup>10</sup> Certainly that is what the quotation at the beginning of this paper seems to imply. Such a position may appear quite unreasonable, even uncharitable. Surely, among atheists we find at least some individuals who are fair-minded, would be willing to believe in God if the evidence justified it, and perhaps even want to believe in God's reality. Isn't it a bit high-handed to charge that all such individuals have failed to develop themselves spiritually so as to make it possible for them to be aware of God's reality?

Actually, a strong case has been made by Douglas Henry for denying the existence of reasonable, non-culpable non-belief.<sup>11</sup> Given the opacity of

the human heart and the possibility of self-deception, it is not easy to know whether or not people who reject God do so for good reasons. It certainly seems possible that Kierkegaard is right to hold that all atheism is what we might term "motivated" atheism. However, I do not think Kierkegaard's argument requires him to deny the existence of reasonable, non-culpable non-belief, and I want to explore a way in which he might concede that there are atheists whose atheism is more "innocent," so to speak.

As I have already said, I think Kierkegaard would endorse Paul Moser's argument that "thin theism" is of little religious value and may even be harmful. The flip side of that view is that the denial of thin theism may not be very harmful and might even be helpful to a person in some circumstances. In other words Kierkegaard simply does not think that having the right propositional beliefs by itself has the same value that some theologians do. It may indeed be possible for a person to have the wrong propositional belief (i.e. that God does not exist) without this being the result of some spiritual flaw or defect. In fact, from Kierkegaard's point of view, such a person, who denies that God exists, may in reality be aware of God and have a relationship with God. That, at least, is what I take to be the point of the famous (or infamous) claim that "truth is subjectivity."

The relevant passage, I think, is the well-known comparison Kierkegaard draws between an orthodox believer and a pagan:

If someone who lives in the midst of Christianity goes into God's house, the house of the true God, with knowledge of the true idea of God, and now prays, but prays in untruth; and if someone lives in an idolatrous land, but prays with Infinity's full passion, although his eyes rest on an image of an idol: where is there more truth? The one prays in truth to God, though his eyes rest on an idol; the other prays in untruth to the true God, and therefore worships an idol in truth.<sup>12</sup>

I think that it is clear that this passage does not imply any kind of relativism about propositional truth. It presupposes that one of the individuals has beliefs about God that are objectively true and the other has beliefs that are objectively false. The claim is that the pagan who has the false beliefs but "prays with the passion of infinity" in fact has a relation to God, while the person who has the objectively true beliefs about God does not.

One might think that this passage has no relevance to the question of whether there is such a thing as reasonable, non-culpable atheism. After all, the pagan does believe in a God of sorts and even prays. Perhaps such an individual can have a relation to God in spite of his or her false propositional beliefs, but can one have a relation to God if one does not believe in the reality of any God at all?

Surprisingly, I think that Kierkegaard's implied answer to this question is yes. It is possible for someone who does not assent to the proposition "God exists" to be aware of God's reality and even to have a relationship of sorts to God, in which the person hears God's voice and responds to that voice. There is a famous Biblical example of a person who hears God's voice without recognizing that it is God's voice. In I Samuel 3, we read that God calls to Samuel in the night, but Samuel does not at first recognize God's voice, until he is instructed by Eli.<sup>13</sup> Samuel is not of course an

atheist, but the point remains that a person can experience God without realizing that it is God whom they are experiencing, and this implies that some kind of awareness of God is compatible with atheism.

How might an atheist have an encounter with God? For Kierkegaard, the answer lies in human moral experience. Kierkegaard believes very strongly that we humans encounter God in our moral lives, and of course many atheists live exemplary moral lives. Even in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, it is clear that the religious life for Kierkegaard, while not reducible to the ethical life, arises out of the ethical life.<sup>14</sup> However, if we turn from *Postscript* to some of Kierkegaard's non-pseudonymous writings, his conviction that to be a moral person is already to be aware of God's reality and have a relation to God becomes very clear.

The link is expressed in various ways. One of the ways, well-illustrated in the first part of *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*, known to many readers as *Purity of Heart Is to Will One Thing* from the Douglas Steere translation, is to identify God with the Good, as Plato and Robert Adams have done.<sup>15</sup> Here Kierkegaard says that to be committed to the Good is to have a "relationship in which you as a single individual relate yourself to yourself before God."<sup>16</sup> For Kierkegaard this relationship is just another word for conscience. Surely there are persons who are committed to the Good and who have a conscience, but who fail to believe the proposition that God exists. Kierkegaard thinks that such people are in fact aware of God's reality, though they don't realize that it is God whom they are aware of. If they are truly responsive to the voice of conscience and truly seek the Good, then they may in fact be in a situation analogous to Kierkegaard's pagan: someone who has more truth in his or her life than another person who may assent to true propositions about God but who does not truly respond to God's call as that call manifests itself through conscience.

Another way that Kierkegaard thinks about this relation between humans and God that is constitutive of the moral life is by understanding moral obligations as divine commands.<sup>17</sup> In his book *Works of Love* Kierkegaard claims that the fundamental moral obligation humans have towards humans is the duty, captured in both the Jewish and Christian scriptures, to love our neighbors as ourselves. For him this duty is a divine command and thus those who are aware of their obligation to love their neighbors, and who understand that their neighbors are not merely those who are their friends and family but that all humans are included within the scope of "neighbor," have a kind of awareness of God's reality. Presumably those who respond to God's voice and attempt to love their neighbors can even be said to enjoy a relation of sorts to God. Hence Kierkegaard says that "the relationship between the individual and God, the God-relationship, is the conscience."<sup>18</sup>

It is also true that Kierkegaard says that in order to love the neighbor, one must have God as the "middle term." Thus, in a way traditional in both Judaism and Christianity, he holds that one can only love the neighbor if one loves God, and thus the command to love the neighbor is linked to the greatest commandment of all, the commandment to love God. One might think that this implies that one must believe in God in order to love the neighbor.



There is a sense in which Kierkegaard does think this, but he does not think that it is so in the sense that one must have clear, explicit, propositional faith in God in order to love the neighbor. Rather, it is true in the sense that anyone who genuinely loves the neighbor must have something like an implicit love for God that is present as a component in that love for the neighbor. The reason why love of God is required in order to love the neighbor is that one must have a ground for love of the neighbor that is distinct from the neighbor's connection with the self. If I only love those who are my relatives, my friends, my kinsmen, and so on, then my love for the other still reflects a selfishness, because I am selecting those I love solely on the basis of their connection to me. To love my neighbor, I must love those who are truly "other"; in Kierkegaard's words, the neighbor is not "the other-I" but "the first you."<sup>19</sup> The most adequate way of thinking about the neighbor according to Kierkegaard is to think of him or her as a person whom God has created and loves, and as the one whom God commands me to love. I do not love the other on the basis of some "differential characteristic" but on the basis of what Kierkegaard calls "the common watermark," the "inner glory" that every human person possesses as a person whom God loves.<sup>20</sup>

However, Kierkegaard does not think that this conception of God must be clear or explicit. Rather, he acknowledges that the reality he terms "God" has been called "by thinkers" (doubtless Hegelians) "the idea." Kierkegaard himself says this reality is in fact "the true, the good, or more accurately the God-relationship."<sup>21</sup> It is therefore possible for someone to conceive of the neighbor as the neighbor without having an explicit belief in God. Rather than saying that someone must have propositional belief in God in order to love the neighbor, it is more correct to say that the person who truly loves the neighbor already has at least an implicit belief in God. Thus Kierkegaard says that "love is qualified as a matter of conscience only when either God or the neighbor is the middle term."<sup>22</sup> I think he means by this that "God" and "the neighbor" as concepts mutually imply each other. No one can truly love God without loving the neighbor, as both the New Testament and Kierkegaard affirm. But it is equally true that the person who genuinely loves the neighbor in some way is already aware of God and has a love for God.

Imagine then a change in Kierkegaard's comparison of the pagan and the hypocritical Christian in which we substitute for the pagan an atheist who is aware of God's reality and is responding to that reality without realizing this. Suppose that the atheist understands himself or herself as under an obligation to love all human beings as neighbors and is striving to realize that duty, and compare such an atheist with a person who professes correct propositional beliefs about God but lives in such a way as to indicate no concern whatsoever for human beings who have no natural connection to himself. I would argue that Kierkegaard would judge that the former in truth has some awareness of God's reality, even though he or she claims not to believe in God, while the latter in reality has no relation to God even though he or she espouses true propositional beliefs about God.

This Kierkegaardian claim may appear to be at variance with traditional religious convictions. It is, however, supported by at least one important New Testament passage. In Matthew 25, Jesus describes a judgment in

which "all nations" will be separated into two groups, much as a shepherd would divide sheep from goats. The division of the nations is made according to how the people have responded to Christ. The righteous who are welcomed into the "kingdom" prepared for them since the creation of the world are those to whom Jesus says, "For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me." The wicked are described as people who refused to receive Christ in this way.

The interesting thing about the judgment is that both sets of people being judged are apparently surprised by the outcome. The righteous apparently received Christ in these concrete ways without realizing that they were doing so, and the wicked apparently refused Christ in these concrete ways without realizing that they were doing so. How was it possible to act in this way towards Christ without realizing that they were doing so? The answer in both cases is similar: what was done or not done "for the least of these" is actually being done for or not done for Christ. Jesus thus seems to teach that it is possible for someone who is caring for other people not only to be in contact with Christ's reality but even to be responding graciously to that reality without realizing that this is truly a relation to Christ. On the other hand, someone who may assent to true propositional beliefs about Christ may fail to have a real relationship to Christ by failing to relate properly to other humans.

This view also seems to be supported by Matthew 7: 21–23, where Jesus says that having the right propositional beliefs is insufficient for having a genuine relation to himself. "Not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my father in heaven." Jesus adds a solemn warning that many who think of themselves as his followers are in for a rude surprise. To those "many" who will say to Jesus on the day of judgment that they had prophesied in his name and even done miracles, Jesus says bluntly that he will say to them, "I never knew you. Away from me, you evil-doers."

Is then propositional belief of no value at all? Surely the answer is no, and Kierkegaard's view does not imply this. When he affirms that there is *more* truth in the life of the passionate pagan, or, as I have argued, in the neighbor-loving atheist, than in the life of the hypocritical propositional believer this does not imply that the pagan would not benefit from knowing more about the true God, or that the atheist would not benefit from knowing that it is God whom the atheist is serving.

To see this we might make use of an analogy from sense perception. Suppose I am in a dark room and suddenly come in contact with a furry animal. The animal is in fact my dog, and thus I am aware of my dog through the sense of touch. However, it is clearly possible that I might not recognize my dog as my dog, or even as a dog. I might mistakenly think he is some other dog or even think he is some other kind of animal. It is true that I am aware of my dog, and also that this awareness is sufficient for me to gain some true information that could be useful in guiding my conduct. However, if I am aware of my dog *as* my dog, then I may learn much more from this perceptual awareness and what I learn may bear on the relationship I have to my dog. I will, for example, be more attuned to

particular features of the experience and more apt properly to understand the behavior of the animal in question. Things that I might have missed or misread if I did not know this was my dog will be gotten right.

I think that something similar is true in the case of God as well. It is possible to be aware of God without being aware of God as God, and such awareness can be valuable. I may learn a good deal about God, and what I learn may be valuable for my life even if I cannot conceptualize what I learn as knowledge of God. However, if I have a richly developed understanding of God I have the ability to notice and learn about aspects of God that I might otherwise miss or misinterpret. Though propositional beliefs are not necessary for a relation of sorts to God and by themselves are insufficient for a relation to God, this does not mean that such beliefs do not have value when they are allowed to inform the character of the believer as they are intended to do. Christianity teaches that it is by knowing about God's loving, redemptive actions, expressed most powerfully in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, that we see most clearly what love for the neighbor really is like. The New Testament says that "faith comes by hearing" the good news about God's actions in Christ. There is great value in having the right propositional beliefs, then, so long as those beliefs do not function merely as propositional beliefs, but are allowed to transform the hearts of the one who is hearing the good news.

However, it is probably misleading to place too much emphasis on having true propositional beliefs. The person who hears God's voice and recognizes it as God's voice now does indeed have new propositional beliefs, but that occurs as part of the process whereby that individual comes to know God and to recognize God. What is important is not the propositional beliefs by themselves—knowing about God—but the close relation to God that knowing God and recognizing God makes possible.

The Christian affirms that through a relationship to Christ, a relationship that is far more than a set of propositional beliefs, we are offered powerful help in living in accordance with this love that we come to know in coming to know Christ. One of the problems we all face, whether we are theists or atheists, is that we find a gap between the moral ideals we want to realize and the reality of our moral achievements. The Christian believes that a person who comes to know the Biblical story of Jesus can have a deeper understanding of Jesus' identity and thus can enjoy a deeper, fuller relation with him, a relation that does not merely give us a better understanding of the moral task but begins to transform us so that we can fulfill that task. Such a relation presupposes certain propositional beliefs, though the beliefs by themselves are far from the relation.

If one admits the value of propositional belief, as I have done, does this not bring back a version of Schellenberg's worry that the hiddenness of God counts as strong evidence against God's reality? If we need propositional beliefs about God in order to have the best kind of relationship, and if such a relationship is a great good, then would not a good and loving God want everyone to have such propositional beliefs? I have suggested that God is not really hidden in the actual world, but rather that he is evident and hidden at the same time, since many are aware of God's reality without realizing that they are aware of that reality. One might describe such a world as one in which God is partially hidden, since at least some

people who are seeking to know God lack full, propositional knowledge about God. Why doesn't God make his reality so evident that everyone, or at least everyone who wishes sincerely to know God, will have full, explicit propositional belief in him? Why is God partially hidden?

My answer to this question is a simple one: I do not know why God does not make his reality so obvious that everyone who wishes to know him has full, explicit propositional knowledge about God. So far as I can see my ignorance on this point is only troubling if the following proposition is true: "If God has a good reason for being partially hidden, then Evans would know that reason." I see no reason at all to think the above proposition is true, and therefore it seems rash to infer from my ignorance about God's reasons for arranging the world as he is done that God has no good reasons for the arrangement.

Of course the fact that I do not know why God's reality is partially hidden does not mean that I cannot speculate about what possible reasons God might have. Perhaps, as Michael Murray and others have argued, God's hiddenness is designed to protect morally significant freedom.<sup>23</sup> Perhaps, as Laura Garcia has argued, drawing on Pascal and St. John of the Cross, divine hiddenness is sometimes necessary for humans to achieve the kind of relationship and union with God that God desires.<sup>24</sup> Perhaps, as both William Wainwright, drawing on Jonathan Edwards, and Paul Moser have argued, a mere natural knowledge of God would not be of any real value to us humans; the partial hiddenness of God may point us towards God's fuller revelation in Christ.<sup>25</sup> Perhaps God's partial hiddenness is grounded in the ways God wishes human beings to live together in a community in which they are dependent on one another; maybe some do not have full propositional knowledge of God because others of us have poorly fulfilled our responsibility to share with our sisters and brothers the insight that we enjoy.

Perhaps, as Kierkegaard seems to suggest, the doubt and uncertainty that partial hiddenness may lead to for some individuals increases passion and conviction on the part of those persons. Lovers who have been temporarily separated often find their reunion more joyful and sweet than their experience of each other would be if they had never been apart; perhaps humans who have agonized over the question of God will find their final union with God to be more powerful and satisfying than would have been possible otherwise. Perhaps the answers as to why God is partially hidden are different for different individuals. Doubtless there are many other possibilities we might consider, and of course the true reasons for God's partial hiddenness may be such that those reasons have never occurred to us, and even if they did, they might be such that we would not be able to understand them in our current situation.

In any case I do not think that God's partial hiddenness could constitute the same kind of epistemic problem that J. L. Schellenberg thinks God's hiddenness constitutes. For we must remember that even if there are some who do not understand and assent to some of the true propositions about God, this does not mean that such people do not know God. Some of them, hopefully many or even all of them—even those of us who are not universalists are allowed to *hope* that all will be saved—may even be destined to blissful, eternal union with God.

Is there then no problem with the silence or hiddenness of God? I think that Nicholas Wolterstorff is quite right to say that there is a kind of divine silence that we find puzzling at times, at other times frustrating or even exasperating.<sup>26</sup> Those of us who are believers and who are honest often ask God questions—agonizing questions—because God does not seem to govern the universe as we might think he should. Horrible things happen, and we wonder why God did not intervene. Young lives full of promise are tragically cut short, and we ask why God allowed this to occur. For the most part, such questions receive no answer, or at least they do not receive the kind of answer we initially want to hear. We find this silence of God difficult to understand, though perhaps not nearly so difficult to understand as the events that prompted the questions in the first place. Schellenberg may be right to say that some of us also find it puzzling why God does not make his reality more evident than it is. However, the puzzlement we may feel about this strikes me as much less serious than the puzzlement we have about many other aspects of God's ways.

However, I think that Wolterstorff is right to say that the silence of God is the silence of the God who has spoken and continues to speak. We may be puzzled and even disturbed about the evil in the world, and we may indeed wish that God would speak about such things more clearly. However, the divine silence does not have to lead to atheism, because it is only because we already have sufficient knowledge of God and God's character that we are prompted to ask these questions. Those of us who are Christians believe that the best answer we can receive for our questions is to be pointed to God on the cross. There we do not receive the intellectual answer we might like. However, we do receive assurance that the God who speaks to us loves us and shows that love by uniting himself to us in our suffering.

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#### NOTES

1. *Søren Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers*, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Indiana University Press, 1975), Vol. III, entry 3606.

2. The passage is found in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, trans. and ed. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), pp. 545–46. All quotations from *Postscript* will be cited from this edition. However, the translation used in this case is my own, taken from the first edition of Kierkegaard's *Samlede Værker*, Vol. VII, pp. 475–76. My purpose in this paper is not primarily to give an interpretation of Kierkegaard, but to address the problem of the "hiddenness of God." Thus, in this paper I will not deal with the niceties of the interpretation of Kierkegaard's pseudonymous work, and I will quote from *Postscript* and other pseudonymous works without worrying about whether the views in question should be attributed to Kierkegaard himself or the pseudonym. I signal this by my paper's sub-title, "Kierkegaardian Reflections." I will also not deal with the interpretive questions raised by philosophers such as James Conant, who see *Postscript* as an ironical attempt to say the unsayable.

3. See J. L. Schellenberg, *Divine Hiddenness and Human Reason* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993).

4. See my articles "Externalist Epistemology, Subjectivity, and Christian Knowledge: Plantinga and Kierkegaard," in *Vernünfftig: Band 12, Religion in der Moderne*, ed. Rainer Berndt (Würzburg: Echter Verlag, 2003), and "Kierkegaard and Plantinga on Belief in God: Subjectivity as the Ground of Properly Basic Beliefs," *Faith and Philosophy* (V, 1), 1988.

5. *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, p. 246.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 200.

7. For example, "But freedom, that is the wonderful lamp. When a person rubs it with ethical passion, God comes into existence for him" (*Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, p. 138). I have criticized "anti-realist" readings of Kierkegaard in "Realism and Anti-Realism in Kierkegaard's *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*," in *The Cambridge Companion to Kierkegaard*, ed. Alastair Hannay and Gordon Marino (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

8. *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, p. 163.

9. See Paul K. Moser, "Cognitive Idolatry and Divine Hiding," in *Divine Hiddenness: New Essays*, ed. Daniel Howard-Snyder and Paul K. Moser (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 120–48.

10. J. L. Schellenberg, *Divine Hiddenness and Human Reason*, particularly pp. 58–82.

11. See "Does Reasonable Non-Belief Exist?" in *Faith and Philosophy* (18, 1: January 2001).

12. *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, p. 201 (my translation).

13. My thanks to Merold Westphal for suggesting the story of Samuel as an illustration and for several other good suggestions as well.

14. That is surely the point of the long section of the book on "Religiousness A," which is a type of religiousness that develops when people conscientiously pursue the ethical task.

15. See Robert Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods: A Framework for Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University press, 1999), particularly chapter one.

16. *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), p. 129.

17. For a defense of the claim that Kierkegaard holds a divine command theory of moral obligation, see my *Kierkegaard's Ethic of Love: Divine Commands and Moral Obligations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

18. *Works of Love*, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), p. 143.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 57.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 89.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 339.

22. *Ibid.*, p. 142.

23. See Michael Murray, "Deus Absconditus," in *Divine Hiddenness: New Essays*, pp. 62–82.

24. Laura L. Garcia, "St. John of the Cross and The Necessity of Divine Hiddenness" in *Divine Hiddenness: New Essays*, pp. 83–97.

25. In addition to the article by Moser previously cited, see William J. Wainwright, "Jonathan Edwards and the Hiddenness of God," in *Divine Hiddenness: New Essays*, pp. 98–119.

26. Nicholas Wolterstorff, "The Silence of the God Who Speaks," in *Divine Hiddenness: New Essays*, pp. 215–28.