Article

The Hidden God, Second-Person Knowledge, and the Incarnation

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Abstract: The paper considers premises of the hiddenness argument with an emphasis on its usage of the concept of a personal God. The paper's assumption is that a recent literature on second-person experiences could be useful for theists in their efforts to defend their position against Schellenberg's argument. Stump's analyses of a second-person knowledge indicate that what is required in order to establish an interpersonal relationship is a personal presence of the persons in question, and therefore they falsify the thesis that a minimalist requirement for a relationship between a man and God has to be belief in his existence. Recent works by developmental psychologists not only verify a hypothesis that a second-person knowledge is not reducible to knowledge-that, but also suggest that one needs a shared form of life in order to establish an interpersonal relationship. These two insights allow the author to formulate his own response to the hiddenness argument: only when God's presence is non-explicit—for example, when God is hidden in a human nature—can a finite person enter into a personal relationship with him. It is the fulfilment of the requirement of being personally present that is the justifying reason for God to permit non-resistant non-belief.

Keywords: the hiddenness argument; second-person knowledge; the incarnation; interpersonal relationship

1. Introduction

The hiddenness argument (later in the text: HA) formulated by J. L. Schellenberg depends on the idea of interpersonal relationships. We expect that if God existed, he would be open to personal relationships with human beings. In a minimal sense, we expect God not to create any obstacles to such relationships. Since being in a relationship with a person requires knowledge of the existence of that person, God, according to J. L. Schellenberg (2015, p. 21), should reveal his existence in such a way that would enable people to believe in his existence—otherwise there would be an obstacle in establishing an interpersonal relationship with him (namely, ignorance with respect to his existence) and one could not speak of his openness to those who want to know him. Consequently, his moral perfection could be questioned. Therefore, there should be no non-resisting nonbelievers in the world. However, they do exist: there are people who wish to examine the question of his existence as objectively as possible; they try to prevent their own moral shortcomings (in case they could interfere with their knowledge of God), and yet they do not share the theists' belief in the existence of God. Reflection on the problem of the hiddenness led Schellenberg to the conclusion that God does not exist. He cannot imagine why a morally perfect being might not want to establish interpersonal relationship with those who strive for such a relationship, especially if one takes into account that if God existed, personal relationship with him would be an inherent good for human beings.

Proponents of HA rely on analogies from human interactions, but they do so without taking into account the discoveries of cognitive psychology which allow for a better understanding of the conditions for interpersonal relationships. An important lesson to be learnt in this regard is that the ability to personally relate to another person is independent of complex cognition capacities that we acquire throughout our lives. Once we recognise this, we understand that the hiddenness of God does not necessarily stand in contradiction to his desire to be engaged in personal relationships with human beings; and if it does

not, then HA fails to prove the non-existence of a personal God. In the following paper I shall analyse a theistic rebuttal to this argument that takes advantage of the concept of second-person knowledge and of the aforementioned recent developments in empirical psychology. I shall try to show how this approach allows theists to repudiate the argument in question.

I shall begin with recalling two main premises of HA. In the Section 2 I shall try to show the insufficiency of the solution which focuses on the first premise of the argument. It tries to deny the requirement of divine openness by alluding to God's transcendence. In my opinion a more promising path for a theist is to shift the attention to the second premise, according to which if God was indeed unsurpassably loving and open to finite persons, then the belief that God exists would be universal across time and cultures. In the Section 3 of the paper I present Eleonore Stump's defence of the notion of second-person knowledge and apply it to the debate on the hiddenness problem. In my opinion her inquiry compels us to re-think our expectations regarding an unsurpassably loving and omnipotent God. I will also argue in favour of Stump's conviction that her hypothesis finds confirmation in research on developmental psychology and I shall show what morals could be drawn from the study of Vittorio Gallese's "shared manifold" hypothesis (Section 4). In the two final sections of the paper I shall invoke the Christian doctrine of hypostatic union in order to show that Christian theism responds to the expectations of divine openness in a way that assumes the requirements of second-person knowledge, and that it also explains, at the same time, the reasons for the divine hiddenness (Section 5). In the last part of the paper I shall also address some of the potential rebuttals to my own defence of theism.

One should also notice that although the problems that are tackled in the following paper have a long history (the problem of the hidden divinity appears in the Bible, the observation of the exceptionality of second-person knowledge occurs in the philosophy of dialogue), my interest is focused solely on the debate in analytic philosophy of religion that was originated by J.L. Schellenberg's argument.

2. Two Premises of the Hiddenness Argument

HA rests on two premises:

Premise 1 (later in the text: HAP1): "If a perfectly loving God exists, then there exists a God who is always open to a personal relationship with any finite person" (Schellenberg 2015, p. 103).

A divine openness means that if a finite person would want to participate in a relationship with God, she would do so just by trying: "Nothing God does or fails to do puts a relationship with God out of reach for finite persons at the time in question" (Schellenberg 2015, p. 41). The intuition standing behind HAP1 states that divine love should be manifested in a manner similar to a parental love. We do expect from parents declaring their love and sacrifice much more than a distanced benevolence; above all, we expect vivid and rich relationships with their children. The proponents of HA conclude that if God is perfectly loving and that a relational love is the most perfect form of love one can think of, then one should expect a relational form of love from God, and hence the requirement of an openness to interpersonal relationships with creatures that are capable of participating in these relationships that HA puts on God.

The second main premise (later in the text: HAP2) of HA reads 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" (Schellenberg 2015, p. 103).

Cyrille Michon (2015, p. 42) once noted that HAP2 expresses what he called The Principle of Minimal Access, that states that the minimalist requirement for a relationship between a human being and God has to be belief in his existence. Schellenberg claims that one does not observe this kind of openness on God's part. There is a considerably large number of non-believers who strive after a relationship with God but fail to establish it because they lack the requisite belief in God's existence. They lack belief due to the weak

epistemic position of theism, which should be quite surprising given the fact that it should not be an issue for an omnipotent God to strengthen its epistemic position—i.e., by gracing finite persons with mystical experiences without violating their freedom (Schellenberg 2015, pp. 66–67). Put in this perspective, the occurrence of the so called non-resistant nonbelief in the world is incompatible with the existence of an all-loving and all-powerful God. Hence the conclusion that a perfectly loving and omnipotent God does not exist, which is tantamount to the conclusion that a personal God does not exist.

3. The Nature of a Divine Love

HAP1 is the focal point of attack by those theists who argue that from the fact that a relational love is an ideal from a human point of view one cannot leap to the conclusion that it is the perfect form of love that one should attribute to God: "Perfect love is not the same as love perfected" (Rea 2018, p. 67). If a philosopher nevertheless argues in favour of HAP1, then she commits the error of anthropomorphism—she is thinking of a God as of a man-like figure. According to this line of argument, if one takes the transcendence of God seriously, one would realise that we do not know what to expect from God. For example, Brian Davies called for resistance to "attempts to construe God's goodness as being like human moral goodness" (Davies 2006, p. 253); Michael Rea (2015, p. 210) argued that Schellenberg's idea of a divine love does not occur in the Christian theology until the 20th century, and that prior to that period the love of God was understood rather as a goodness towards creation, God's use of creation for good purposes, God's willing the good for particular creatures and so on; and finally, Andrew Pinsent, in his refutation of Richard Swinburne's argument from the evidence of cosmic purpose, commented that "most discourses about a 'first cause' in natural theology or philosophy, such as an 'unmoved mover' or 'necessary ground of being' or 'that greater than which nothing can be conceived', do not in themselves convey any sense that this first cause could or should be described as personal" (Pinsent 2013, p. 111).

God therefore cannot be conceived as a deity modelled on an image of, and resemblance to, human beings, that is as engaged or responsive. Human beings are not on a psychological continuum with God, "there is no common standard between God and ourselves" (Pouivet 2018, p. 11). HA considered from this point of view is a straw man argument; combating the existence of a being that was never worshipped by any major religion. By insisting that, if God exists, he is subordinated to the standards of an ideal of a relational love, Schellenberg reveals that his reasoning is in fact directed against a discrete being within the universe, a Demiurge-like figure, who, even if it outclasses all other objects in the universe in terms of power and moral qualities, remains a being among other beings, whereas theism proclaims the existence of a God that is neither a being nor a person, but is beyond being (Hart 2013, p. 30).

Although "God beyond being" theism is immune to HA, it is susceptible to the accusation that it consequently results in an apophatism that has little to do with the theism professed by ordinary believers, and even by those regarded as the most prominent philosophers within the tradition of classical theism. For example, Aquinas claimed that since God is perfect in every possible way, then he has to possess all the good features we encounter in the creation but in an absolute way: "It is necessary to attribute everything perfect in creatures to God as regards to what belongs to the nature of the perfection absolutely, not as it is in this or that particular thing" (Aquinas 2002, p. 254). Since a personal life seems to be the most perfect way of living, one could ascribe it to God[1]. Similarly, I would argue that if a relational love is a perfection of love then one should ascribe it to a divine love. This means that if one subscribes to a perfect-being theism (like Rea and others do), then one is forced to accept HAP1.

Furthermore, Judeo-Christian philosophers who try to reconcile data of the Jewish and Christian revelation with philosophical inquiries cannot argue against HA by revoking HAP1, because the Bible is clear that God is indeed open to interpersonal relationships with human beings[2]. For instance, in the Book of Hosea one reads the following complaint

of God: "I drew them with cords of a man, with bands of love: and I was to them as they that take off the yoke on their jaws, and I laid meat unto them" (Hosea 11:4)[3]. There are many more examples of ascribing a relational love to God in the Bible. They are aptly and succinctly summed up by Joseph Ratzinger in his *Introduction to Christianity*: "The God of faith is basically defined by the category of relationship (. . .). The highest possibility of Being no longer seems to be detachment of him who exists in himself and needs only himself. On the contrary, the highest possibility mode of Being includes the element of relationship" (Ratzinger 2004, p. 102).

It seems to me, then, that a proponent of a perfect being theism, as well as a representative of a Judaeo-Christian theology, should accept HAP1. However, as I shall argue, this does not amount to an admission of defeat, because it is precisely a reflection on divine openness and on what would be needed on God's part if he wanted to participate in close and personal relationships with finite persons, which indicates a way to show that HA is inconclusive.

4. The Second-Person Knowledge of God

In what follows I shall try to show how recent developments in epistemology which are grounded in discoveries in cognitive psychology, especially those that reveal how the experience of a second person or of the second-person relatedness is actually formed, can help us resist HAP2, and, in consequence, reject the hiddenness argument.

The inspiration for the defence I am developing in this paper should be traced back to the philosophy of Eleonore Stump, who fervently argued in favour of the thesis that there is a non-propositional (that is, non-reducible to knowledge *that*) second-person knowledge of persons. According to her, there is something distinct and unique, something one cannot express by means of propositional attitudes, that is learnt when one comes to know a person as a person. She elaborates on Frank Jackson's famous thought experiment about omniscient (with respect to propositional knowledge) Mary, who is imprisoned in a black and white room. She imagines that Mary has all the propositional knowledge one can get about people, but at the same time Mary has never had any personal interactions. Stump stipulates that if Mary would be rescued from her imprisonment and met her mother for the first time in her life, she would gain new knowledge from this encounter, despite the fact that she knew all the facts about her mother before the meeting. According to Stump, Mary would not only learn what it is like to be loved or touched by another person, because that would suggest that a personal interaction results only in a first-person knowledge involving *qualia*: "What will come as the major revelation to Mary is *her mother*" (Stump 2010, p. 52). This is what a second-person experience brings to Mary's knowledge. She would not learn some new facts about her mother (as I mentioned, she already knows everything in this regard)—she would learn something that "encompasses some kinds of knowledge of persons, including certain sorts of knowledge of oneself as well as knowledge of other persons" (Stump 2010, p. 56).

What light is shed by Stump's insights on HA? According to Matthew Benton, by indicating the possibility of, as he calls it, interpersonal knowledge, one is emphasising the fact that one can be in a personal interaction with a person one cannot identify (just like when one recognises a piece of music in the radio but cannot identify its title or an artist performing it). He writes: "For any set of propositions one knows about someone, one could in principle know that someone personally without knowing this particular proposition about them" (Benton 2018, p. 423). From this it follows that one can have interpersonal knowledge about God (i.e., one can know him personally) without knowing that God exists, just like Mary Jane knows Spiderman personally without believing that Spiderman exists (it is possible, because she personally knows Peter Parker).

This is a serious charge against HAP2, which is built upon the conviction that it is impossible to be in a personal relationship with someone whose existence is uncertain to us. Benton's interpretation resembles remarks made earlier by Poston and Dougherty (2007) and Michon (2015), who differentiate between *de re* and *de dicto* beliefs. According to them,

HA is sound only when by "beliefs" or "non-beliefs" in HAP2 one understands "*de dicto* beliefs or non-beliefs". They additionally claim that it is far from obvious why we should understand the terms in a way that is favourable to an atheistic point of view. On the other hand, Schellenberg is convinced that there is indeed a reason for expecting universal *de dicto* beliefs in God in the actual world.

Why would an open-to-relationships God prefer such non-explicit relationships with human beings over explicit ones (Schellenberg 2007a, pp. 200–1)? We can understand the reasons why Peter Parker wants to stay undercover, and knowing these reasons we can agree he was indeed open to a relationship with Mary Jane. However, as Schellenberg claims, it is not clear at all why God would prefer to remain hidden in relationships with us. There are some attempts to answer Schellenberg's challenge in this regard—perhaps the best known example is that of Peter van Inwagen (2006, p. 150), who argues that in order to achieve the conversion of one's heart God sometimes has to stay hidden and act behind the scenes, just like true transformation of attitudes with regard to sexism demands not a forced compliance but one's own transformation on a basis of normal cognitive capacities. The problem with these kinds of responses is that they are sensitive to questions that invoke the omnipotence of God. Schellenberg very often responds to a greater good defence by invoking the so called "accommodationist" strategy, according to which one can accommodate goods emphasised by a critic of HA within Schellenberg's view on a divine-creaturely relationship (Schellenberg 2007b, p. 211). For example, if a theist argues that God is hidden because of the greater good of achieving the conversion of one's heart, then the author of HA would respond that for an omnipotent God there is certainly a way to find a solution that would ensure both: the explicitness of the relationship with him as well as the conversion of one's heart. As long as we do not know the answers to the accommodationist strategy and to the problem of the reasons why God would prefer non-explicit relationships over explicit ones, we cannot assume that the possibility of an implicit belief (a *de re* belief) in God alone is enough to refute HAP2.

In my opinion Stump's thought experiment shows a possible answer to the aforementioned questions. Remember that, according to the earlier example, Mary, while staying in the room, has a *de dicto* belief about the existence of her mother, but she is not in a personal relationship with her, and, on the other hand, by meeting her mother in person, by having a second-person experience of her, she gains new knowledge about her, although not a knowledge that can be put in propositions. My hypothesis is not only that Stump's reasoning undermines the Principal of Minimal Access—it is not true that the minimum content for an interpersonal relation is a *de dicto* belief in the existence of a person in question—but also that her analyses suggest that what is needed in order to establish a personal relationship is a personal presence or the access to a person as a person.

The personal presence of a person in a given situation is a condition for second-person knowledge of the person in question, and because second-person knowledge is irreducible to knowledge-that, one cannot provide a precise definition of personal presence. One can only hope that a reader will grasp an intuition standing behind the concept on the basis of Stump's thought experiment. I could add that personal presence is the direct presence of the person in question in a given situation (in opposition to being present via representatives), in which the essential faculties of a human being are involved. If what individuates a human person is his/her will and reason, then personal presence requires the involvement of the will and reason in an interaction with another human being (as opposed to, for example, a situation in which two people are just sitting next to each other watching TV). If having a body belongs to the essential features of a human being, then having that body accessible to the human senses in an interaction with another human being would constitute personal presence of a given person (in opposition to being present by means of narration, which can only recreate somebody's personal presence). According to Stump, in order to gain this kind of access one does not have to be in a first-hand causal interaction with the person in question, but one can possess it through narration. On Stump's view by telling a story one could present somebody to me personally and, in this

way, re-present a second-person experience of the person in question (Stump 2010, p. 78). However, I would add that the means by which we re-present second-person experiences have to have their origins in a first-hand causal interaction with a person. Otherwise, we would have to admit that it is possible to participate in personal relationships with fictional characters, like Madame Bovary.

Let us go back to Stump's re-interpretation of Frank Jackson's thought experiment and let us imagine that Mary's mother (let us call her Anna) hears that her daughter finally left her black and white room (let us assume that for some reason she could not reach her as long as Mary stayed imprisoned). If Anna loves Mary, then not only would she want to establish an interpersonal relationship with her by giving her a personal access to herself, but she would also turn up in person for a meeting with Mary. In other words, a letter in which Anna would describe herself, so Mary could gain second-person knowledge about her, would not be a sufficient expression of her parental love. The same goes for a simple phone call—by speaking to her daughter, Anna would present herself in a way that would allow Mary to gain a second-person knowledge of her, but if this phone call satisfied her desire to meet and personally relate to Mary, we would wonder about her intentions and would doubt that she truly loves Mary. A relational love demands the personal presence of the person in question; "being in person" for someone with whom one is personally related. Schellenberg assumes that in the case of God, participating in interpersonal relationships would express his perfect relational love to finite persons. If we apply conclusions from the aforementioned thought experiment to the discussion on HA, then we should state that the divine openness to creatures entails his willingness to be personally present for human beings. In other words, if HAP1 is true, then we should expect God to be personally present in relationships with finite persons, because only then (and not when everybody holds the belief in God's existence) does he fulfil both a condition that enables finite persons to personally relate to him and express his perfect relational love to creatures.

Summing up, on Stump's account it is a personal presence that is needed in order to have a second-person experience of the person in question, and a second-person experience is needed in order to have a second-person knowledge about the person which is in turn required for establishing an interpersonal relationship. If we add that God's goal to have interpersonal relationships with finite persons (as HAP1 states) is motivated by his perfect relational love, then removing all obstacles hindering finite persons from entering into them would amount to revealing his personal presence and turning up in person for those who could perceive it and respond to it, guaranteeing in this way a second-person knowledge of him.

5. Cognitive Psychology on Second-Person Knowledge

Recent discoveries provided by cognitive psychology lend support to Stump's claim about the distinctiveness of a second-person knowledge, non-reducible to knowledge-that. They indicate that in order to perceive, and consequently to know a person as a person, one employs separable components of human cognition. A commonly accepted position in developmental psychology is that even infants distinguish between people and non-people—infants are able to track the movement of faces, imitate the facial and hand gestures of people but not of inanimate objects (Meltzoff 2002)—and that their capacity to make such a distinction maps onto their ability of understanding other minds.

Jerry Fodor (1983) suggested that the usage of spatio-temporal information (contained in, i.e., facial configurations) is a sign of "hardwired" object recognition processes, where by a "hardwired" process one understands a process that is incorrigible in the face of counter-evidence. New experiments generate evidence to support the above claim. Susan Johnson, in her paper *Detecing Agents*, presented an experiment, in which a group of adults was introduced to a novel object. As Johnson summarised, "adults used mentalistic language to describe the behaviour of the object in just those conditions that infants followed the object's directional orientation with their gaze. If the object had a face or if it was faceless, but interacted contingently with another agent, adults described it as 'wanting'

something, 'looking' for something, 'trying' to do something, and so on. If, however, it did not have a face and acted only randomly, adults rarely if ever used mentalistic language to describe its behaviour" (Johnson 2004, p. 228). This means that features that elicit attentional following in infants elicit parallel mental attributions in adults. The fact that they spontaneously attribute mental concepts to inanimate objects, despite their beliefs to the contrary, could be explained by the existence of the hardwired object recognition process (Johnson 2004, p. 227). Derek Moore used a technique pioneered by Gunnar Johansson that consists in attaching point-lights to the joints and body of a person who is filmed in a dark room. All that is later displayed on a monitor are point-lights, and the person is invisible. Nevertheless, "even 5-month-old infants have been reported to show preferential attentiveness to such displays". As Moore concludes, "these results provide suggestive evidence that the visual system (broadly conceived) is picking up ecologically significant information from the biomechanical motion portrayed" (Moore 1997, p. 403).

Vittorio Gallese (2004, pp. 170–74) suspects that all human capacities that reveal the distinctiveness of interpersonal knowledge, like mind reading or empathy, are grounded in a basic neural system which we share with other primates. At the basis of understanding and predicting the actions of others lies, according to him, in the mirror-neurons system, and he also predicts the existence of a range of mirror-mechanisms in the brain responsible for understanding the emotions and sensations of others. This hypothesis implies that we understand and predict the actions of others due to the ability to simulate (that is, to connect an observation of an action with its performance) these actions by our motor system. If the mirror-neurons theory of understanding the actions of others is true[4], then interpersonal bonds between human beings are established because of our ability to imitate, which is developed "at the very onset of our life, when no subjective representation can yet be entertained by the organism" (Gallese 2004, p. 160).

This short review of research in cognitive psychology confirms Stump's hypothesis that a second-person knowledge is not reducible to knowledge-that. Moreover, the discovery of the mirror-neurons system provides an argument in favour of Stump's thesis that the personal presence of the person in question is needed in order to generate a second-person knowledge about her. This is because mirror-neurons require activation from visual or at least audio stimuli coming from the observation of another person's actions.

In my opinion, however, there is also another point of interest to be drawn from this study. Gallese's "shared manifold" hypothesis assumes that our mirror-neurons generate a so-called interpersonal space, that enables us to automatically understand and predict the behaviour of other persons, and consequently enables us to engage in interpersonal relationships (Gallese 2001, p. 44). If there is a measure of truth to this, then one can form an interpersonal space, and hence interpersonal bonds and relationships, only with those whose actions one can imitate or simulate—that is, only with those whose form of life resembles, to a certain degree, ours. As Wittgenstein (2009, p. 235) famously stated: "If a lion could talk, we wouldn't be able to understand it". This conclusion, applied to the debate on the hiddenness problem, raises a question: given that God is so disproportionate regarding his creatures, as an infinite Being over against finite ones, what would God have to do if he wanted to enter an interpersonal space with human beings and in this way to ensure the possibility of interpersonal bonds with them? I will give one possible answer to this question in the next section.

6. The Incarnate God

If HAP1 postulates a divine openness with respect to personal relationships, it has to take into account what second-person epistemology has to say about the way we establish such bonds. In my opinion, the lessons to be learnt are twofold:

(L1) One gains a minimum access to a person that allows one to enter into an interpersonal relation with the person in question by experiencing her or his personal presence. (Section 3)

(L2) In order for a personal relationship to be successfully established, there has to be a degree of resemblance between the forms of life of the persons involved in a personal relationship (Section 4).

How do L1 and L2 change our approach to the hiddenness problem? It seems to me that L1 allows an advocate of theism to reformulate (HAP2):

(HAP2′) "If there exists a God who is always open to a personal relationship with any finite person, then he is personally present to every finite person".

On this reading, HA is sound only if God is not personally present to every finite person. This in turn raises the question enhanced by L2: could God be, and is he, personally present in relationships with finite beings? If personal relationships depend on a shared form of life—if, to borrow the term from Gallese's theory, these relationships take place in an interpersonal space of mutual understanding—this would require from God to be an object within that intersubjective space. Christian theology finds an affirmative answer to the above question in the dogma of the incarnation, according to which "the Son of God assumes the human nature, which is united with his divine nature in *persona*, but this kind of union does not blur the differences between the two natures" (Przanowski 2018, p. 696).

As I have stated, personal presence requires the involvement of the essential properties of the person in question, and that in turn assumes that in order to assess this person's presence one knows this person's nature. However, one can argue that we do not know God's nature and, hence, we do not know what is required in order for God to be personally present. Therefore, we do not have an answer to the question of the analogy between the personal presence of a human being and that of God. However, since in Jesus Christ the divine and the human nature come together in one *suppositum*, and one can predicate both divine and human properties of him, we do not have to have this answer. A personal relationship with Jesus of Nazareth is in fact a personal relationship with the Son of God. It is a relationship in which both (i) God is personally present, because of the unitary nature of the Triune God and of the hypostatic union of the Second Person of the Trinity with the human nature of Jesus; and (ii) it is a relationship which one could be aware of, because of the human nature of the incarnate God. In other words, because of the human nature of Jesus, this relationship takes place in an intersubjective space of mutual understanding. Christian theology indicates that a relationship with a human being, Jesus of Nazareth, is a relation one can enter into; that it is a relationship that could be pursued, valued, and developed.

On the other hand, the divine nature of Logos is hidden in the human nature of Christ because the properties of the former are radically different than the properties of the latter (Christ is indeed *Deus absconditus*). To put it differently, God assumed a human nature in order to establish relationships with finite persons in which he could be personally present, but this is exactly what makes his divine nature hidden. As a result, his existence is not evident to all and, hence, one encounters instances of non-resistant non-belief in the actual world. On my defence of theism from HA, however, the removal of all the obstacles hindering us from entering into personal relationships with God is not a sign of his negligence, but rather a direct consequence of his desire to enable us to personally relate to him. On my interpretation, God, having a choice between a world in which there is no non-resistant non-belief, but at the same time a world in which he is not personally present for finite persons, and a world in which the conditions for establishing a divine-creaturely personal relationship are fulfilled, but because of it some people remain atheists or agnostics, would choose the latter world. This is exactly because, as Schellenberg eloquently emphasises, an interpersonal relationship with God is the highest possible good for a human being, and it is the second world which allows finite persons to achieve it.

The above answer is theological, but nonetheless with philosophical importance. I do not argue in favour of Christian revelation, I do not defend the claim that Jesus of Nazareth is indeed the Son of God. My aim is not a theodicy but a defence of theism, which means that I am looking for a possible explanation for the phenomenon of non-resistant non-belief from the theistic point of view. In my opinion, Christian theology can provide a clarification

and a supplement for epistemological considerations on second-person knowledge that provide a credible explanation for the hiddenness of God.

In short, my defence of theism against HA states that from the perfect love of God and his openness to personal relationships with finite persons follows that he is personally present to every finite person (HAP2'). HAP1 and HAP2' result in the conclusion that there is no personal God only if one could show that God is not personally present to every finite person. Since "being in person" or "personal presence" in the case of God could mean (as Christianity proclaims) that his existence is hidden and not evident to all, then mere instances of non-resistant non-belief do not prove that.

I am also convinced that I can defend my position without reformulating HAP2. As I mentioned, Matthew Benton, on the basis of Stump's work on second-person knowledge, concluded that HAP2 is true only when one by "non-belief" means "*de dicto* nonbelief". I also stated that Schellenberg could defend a *de dicto* reading of HAP2 only if theists were unable to find a justifying reason for the concealment of God's identity in personal relationships with finite persons. The answer that refers to the Christian dogma of the hypostatic union states that God can be personally present for finite persons only under the condition that his presence is non-explicit, leaving room for doubt, even to the point of *de dicto* non-belief. A justifying reason for *de dicto* non-resistant non-belief in God can paradoxically be (given Schellenberg's line of reasoning) his eagerness to be personally present for us. A theist can agree with the emphasis that Schellenberg puts on the value of the divine openness to relationships (Schellenberg 2015, pp. 108–9); all the more reason to consider the requirement of a personal presence as a truly justifying motivation for permitting non-resistant (*de dicto*) non-belief. Not to mention that by giving this answer one is not bound to the *de dicto* reading of HAP2 and is able to undermine this premise of the hiddenness argument.

7. Conclusions and Replies

I am not the first theistic philosopher who refers to the concept of the incarnation in the debate on HA. For example, Travis Dumsday wonders in *Divine Hiddenness and Divine Humility* if the reason for the divine hiddenness is God's humility. In his view, humility means a desire to submit to something that is inferior, and a humble God chooses to reveal himself in a way that would not confront his creatures with his existence, that is, by assuming a human nature (Dumsday 2014, p. 63). The logic of Dumsday's argument inevitably leads to the question: wouldn't God show more humility if he had not revealed himself at all? Or if his revelation had been universally rejected? This is why I disagree with Dumsday's usage of the concept of the incarnation in the discussion on HA. Paul Moser, in *Divine Hiddenness and Self-Sacrfice*, claims, on the other hand, that the motivation for the incarnation would be a divine desire to voluntarily submit himself to the test of self-sacrificing love and to give humanity an example of unsurpassable love (Moser 2015, pp. 76–77). His hypothesis is a part of his ethics for the inquiry about a divine revelation, and, as such, it occurs in the context of the debate on the problem of hiddenness. However, it is not treated as a way to undermine HA. Finally, Eleonore Stump, in *Omnipresence, Indwelling, and the Second-Personal*, notes that her theory of the second-person knowledge requires what she calls "the empathic presence" of God in a human experience. Meanwhile, classical theism, of which she is a representative, proclaims God's impassibility (Stump 2013, p. 42). Her solution is to refer to the incarnation of Christ, who sympathises with the whole human race and suffers for it on the cross, so that God can become co-present towards people. I agree with Stump that, thanks to the incarnation, God is personally present in relations with finite people, but unfortunately she does not use this idea to invalidate HA. This short review leads me to the belief that the above-presented defence of theism is original.

I am, however, aware that it is susceptible of many accusations, and as such it still needs some clarifications. There is no room for a full defence here, but nonetheless I shall try to respond to some questions that might have arisen during a reading of the paper.

Q1: Is the incarnation metaphysically possible?

A1: Even though I underline that by referring to the incarnation I do not claim that indeed such an event happened, but only indicate this concept as a possible explanation of God's hiddenness, it still would not serve such a goal if it turned out that it is contradictory to speak about one person in whom two natures come together. To this I would respond by adopting Rudder Baker's theory of borrowed properties. Rudder Baker (1999) notices that I can say, for example, that I am really bleeding if I cut my finger. It is because I borrow the property of bleeding from my body. And even though the fact that I am bleeding is entirely constituted by the fact that my body is bleeding, it is nonetheless true that I am really bleeding. Accordingly, one could say in truth that Jesus Christ died on the cross without ascribing mortality to the person of Christ and without falling into the contradictions of saying that he is mortal and immortal at the same time. The conceptual framework of Rudder Baker's theory of borrowed properties allows us to say that the whole (the person of Jesus Christ) borrows a property of being mortal from its part (the human nature of Jesus of Nazareth). Even though the fact that Jesus Christ died on the cross was constituted entirely by the fact that the human nature of Jesus Christ died on the cross, it is nonetheless true that Jesus Christ really died on the cross (see also: Stump 2002, pp. 206–7).

Q2. Jesus Christ was personally present to some, but he is not self-authenticating towards all people. This, combined with HAP2′ leads to the conclusion that a personal God does not exist.

A2: In response to Q2 I would point to Stump's hypothesis that one can gain a personal access to a person by way of re-presenting certain source second-person experiences. If this is true, then one could say that Jesus Christ is personally present to all people although not via a first-hand interaction with him (if for God being personally present towards people means to assume a human nature, then this includes assuming a certain contingency of a human life which is necessarily attached to human nature. Accordingly, the incarnate God had to have been born in a certain culture, a historical period, and in the timely constraints of a biological life; hence, it is impossible for everybody to have a first-hand interaction with the incarnate God). In order to defend the above hypothesis some philosophers referred to theological considerations that speak about the presence of Christ in the life of a believer, i.e., the dogma of the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist or the dogma of the Church as "the Body of Christ". I am only signalling these problems for the sake of brevity, but also because a reader will find comprehensive elaborations of the aforementioned topics in the context of the debate on Schellenberg's argument in the works of Derek King (2020); Dustin Crummett (2015); and Travis Dumsday (2018). A more difficult question concerns people living before Christ, but even here one could defend the possibility of relating personally to him by reminding the Church Fathers' idea that Logos (the Word of God) has been scattered across cultures and times long before the incarnation took place. There is certainly much more to say in this regard[5], but my main line of reasoning is hopefully clear: a theist can defend the thesis that the incarnate God is personally present to all finite persons.

Q3. The occurrence of non-resistant non-belief in Christ is something that hinders many people from entering into personal relationships with him. If God is truly all-loving and omnipotent, he would remove this obstacle by ensuring the universality of the Christian belief. The fact that there are many non-Christians refutes the defence from the incarnation.

A3. As I pointed out in Section 3 a theist who tries to show that HA does not hold water by refuting HAP2 has to find an answer to the accommodationist strategy. According to the hypothesis I am developing in this paper, God, in order to be personally present to finite persons, could have hidden himself in the human nature of Jesus Christ. If that is the case, then no amount of evidence can put the belief that Jesus of Nazareth is the Son of God beyond a reasonable doubt. Mystical appearances of Jesus Christ, his miracles, and other-worldly wisdom can serve as pieces of evidence that he was a special human being, but there is nothing that could persuade a doubting human mind that apart from that he was also a God. Q3 demands from God the impossible.

If the acceptance of the proposition "x is God" is a matter of faith, then it is dependent on human will. If God does not want to violate human freedom, he has to take into account that not every finite person would recognise his personal presence in the world. Still, because the good of enabling at least some human beings to participate in personal relationships with their Creator is greater than the universality of *de dicto* belief that a God exists, it is reasonable to suspect that he would take that risk. Neither the occurrence of a theistic non-resistant non-belief nor the occurrence of a Christian non-resistant non-belief speaks against God's perfect relational love. According to my defence, he does not hesitate to go the greatest lengths in order to establish interpersonal relationships with human beings.

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Notes

[1] Obviously, on Aquinas's account, a person is an individual substance of a rational nature, where the rational nature is comprised of both intellect and will. This account differs from the modern concept of a person, which sometimes defines a personal life as a complexity of sensations, desires, and beliefs (i.e., Swinburne 2004, p. 21). It is not my intention to adjudicate between these two concepts here. The gist of my claim is that one can reject the idea that God is a person in the modern sense of the word while nonetheless confirming that a personal life belongs to divine perfections. If one confirms that, then one can no longer undermine HAP1.

[2] With regard to the third great monotheistic religion, Jon McGinnis argued that the Islamic theology (or at least its main theological traditions and schools) could defend theism by insisting that HAP1 falsely represents divine nature: "Certain Christian scriptures describe divine love in terms of a personal relation, which is not the explicit language for God's love in the Qu'rān (even though it might be implicit). I mention this point simply because Schellenberg takes relational-personal love to be essential to any forms of theism, whereas certain medieval Muslim philosophers happily interpreted their religion without such a notion" (McGinnis 2015, p. 160).

[3] Translation from the King James Bible.

[4] In the recent scientific literature, there have been voices arguing against Gallese's hypothesis. For example, Gregory Hickok (2014, p. 76) thinks that simulation does not contribute to the understanding of an action unless one knows its goal (and this is because of the ambivalence of bodily movements); but if one knows its goal in advance, then simulating an action has no sense.

[5] In this context I recommend Kevin Vandergriff's (2016) paper, *Natural Nonbelief as a Necessary Means to a Life of Choiceworthy Meaning*.

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