

BELIEF, RESISTANCE, AND GRACE: STUMP ON DIVINE HIDDENNESS

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Abstract. Arguments from divine hiddenness attempt to show that God, as understood by traditional theists, does not exist. Eleonore Stump has claimed that, contrary to a key premise in such arguments, it is possible for God to have a personal relationship with human beings who do not believe that he exists. In this paper I describe Stump's defense of divine hiddenness, as well as her account of the human will. I show that her account of the knowledge of persons does not solve the problem of divine hiddenness. I also argue that Stump's account of the will commits her to the claim that nonbelief in God entails resistance to God. I conclude with a few potential replies and my own responses to them.

I. INTRODUCTION

Arguments from divine hiddenness try to convince us that God's nature, along with the possibility that a nonbeliever can be open to belief in God's existence, mutually entail that God does not exist. Those who argue that hiddenness is evidence against God's existence, such as J. L. Schellenberg, take it as an observed truth that it is possible to lack belief in God without being somehow resistant to God's will — call this nonresistant nonbelief.

Some traditional theists, such as Eleonore Stump, do not object to the possibility of nonresistant nonbelief, but still reject arguments against God that rely on hiddenness. Stump rejects a different premise, namely the claim that God's openness to personal relationship with all persons entails resistance on the part of any nonbeliever.

In this paper, I aim to show that Stump's counterexamples to this premise trade on an ambiguity in the concept of belief. I then argue that Stump's theory of grace and free will is opposed to the possibility of a certain kind of nonresistant nonbelief. The result is that Stump's rejection of one of Schellenberg's premises is not sufficient, while she is committed to rejecting a different premise.

In Section Two of the paper, I briefly explain the problem of divine hiddenness and describe what it means to be a nonresistant nonbeliever. In Section Three I describe Stump's proposed solution to the problem of divine hiddenness, which includes counterexamples to one of Schellenberg's premises. I argue that the problem of divine hiddenness can be weakened to ward off her counterexamples, while retaining the original conclusion (God's nonexistence).

In Section Four of the paper, I detail Stump's interpretation of Aquinas's account of grace. I argue that this account of free will and grace, which is defended and utilized by Stump, is incompatible with the existence of a certain kind of nonresistant nonbeliever.¹ In Section Five I detail three potential responses, maintaining that none of these is sufficient to remove the worries.²

1 In Section Three I elaborate on the specific kind of nonresistant nonbeliever I have in mind here. In this paper I make no claims regarding Aquinas's views on nonresistant nonbelief. I simply argue that Stump's views are incompatible with the concept of a nonresistant nonbeliever.

2 Many thanks to those who read and provided feedback on earlier drafts of this paper, including Mark Boespflug, Helen De Cruz, Alexandra Romanyshyn, Eleonore Stump, Yiling Zhou, as well as multiple blind reviewers. I am grateful as well to

II. DIVINE HIDDENNESS AND NONRESISTANT NONBELIEF

The topic of divine hiddenness has been posed in recent years as a problem for theism. J. L. Schellenberg, in *Divine Hiddenness and Human Reason* and *The Hiddenness Argument*, argues from prima facie plausible premises to the conclusion that God does not exist. His argument can be written as follows:³

1. If the traditional theist's God exists, then God loves all human beings perfectly.
2. If God loves someone perfectly, then God is always open to being in a personal relationship with that someone.⁴
3. If God is always open to being in a personal relationship with someone, then it is not the case that said person nonresistantly lacks belief in God.
4. There exists or has existed at least one nonresistant nonbeliever.⁵
5. So, it is not the case that the traditional theist's God exists.⁶

Schellenberg's argument moves from certain assumptions about the nature of God, namely that God is all-loving, to show that the world would be a different place if such a being existed. If God exists, then there have existed no nonresistant nonbelievers in all of human history.

Schellenberg defends premise 3 by claiming that, in order to have a personal relationship with another, one must believe that the other exists. So, if God is truly all-powerful, then he would make certain that nothing *he* does prevents a personal relationship from forming between you and him; this includes lacking a belief in his existence. As Schellenberg puts it, "God would make it the case that every capable person is always in a position to participate in such a relationship..."⁷ Otherwise, God must not be truly open to a personal relationship with all persons.

Support for premise 3 can be laid out in argument form based on an understanding of God's nature that derives from traditional theism:⁸

- (a) God is all-powerful and all-knowing.
- (b) (from (a)) For each person, God knows if she believes in him or not; and God knows what he can do and refrain from doing to make sure she has the cognitive ability to form a belief in him, based on what she knows.

those who listened to this paper (and its earlier versions) in presentation form. Many insights resulted from such feedback and discussions, which greatly improved the paper.

3 This is nearly a restatement of Schellenberg's argument; see J. L. Schellenberg, *The Hiddenness Argument: Philosophy's New Challenge to Belief in God* (Oxford Univ. Press, 2015), chs. 4 and 5. For a similar argument against God's existence, which takes advantage of nonbelief and varying beliefs across the world, see Stephen Maitzen, "Divine Hiddenness and the Demographics of Theism," *Religious Studies* 42, no. 2 (2006), 177–91.

4 The notion of a personal relationship here is important, since it seems obvious that one has some sort of relation to God whether he believes in God or not. Schellenberg discusses the notion of a personal relationship in defense of this premise, but for reasons of space I will simply grant that Schellenberg is right in his account of such a relationship. For objections to the premise that love entails openness to relationship, see Ebrahim Azadegan, "Divine Love and the Argument from Divine Hiddenness," *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 6, no. 2 (2014), 101–16; see also Travis Dumsday, "Divine Hiddenness as Deserved," *Faith and Philosophy* 31, no. 3 (2014), 286–302. For other discussion of this premise, especially the nature of perfect love and its connection to openness, see Jeffrey Jordan, "Divine Hiddenness and Perfect Love," *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 9, no. 1 (2017), 187–202; and J. L. Schellenberg, "Response to Jordan," *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 9, no. 1 (2017), 203–7.

5 Schellenberg claims that 'exists' here can mean *exists at some point in human history*. As long as one human among all those who have ever existed was a nonresistant nonbeliever, then (he claims) his argument works.

6 For the original argument, see J. L. Schellenberg, *Divine Hiddenness and Human Reason*, (Cornell Univ. Press, 1993).

7 J. L. Schellenberg, "Divine Hiddenness and Human Philosophy," in *Hidden Divinity and Religious Belief*, ed. Adam Green and Eleonore Stump (Cambridge Univ. Press, 2015), 27.

8 It should be noted that this is my own interpretation of how premise 3 is best supported, taking into account Schellenberg's texts as well as others in the literature.

- (c) Believing in the existence of another, in this case God, is necessary to participate in a conscious, interactive, and positively meaningful relationship with him.⁹
- (d) (from (a)–(c) and def. of openness)¹⁰ If God is open to a relationship with someone, then God has the knowledge and power to ensure, and would do whatever he could to ensure, that said person has the cognitive ability to form that belief.¹¹
- (e) Nonresistant nonbelief is just a lack of belief based solely on cognitive ability to form said belief.
- (f) (from (d) and (e)) So, if God is always open to being in a personal relationship with someone, then it is not the case that said person nonresistantly lacks belief in God.

Given that premises 3 and 4 of the main argument discuss nonresistant nonbelief, it is worth detailing how Schellenberg understands this concept. A *resistant* nonbeliever is someone who resists or ignores whatever evidence or information is available to her that would lead her to believe that God exists, because she is defiant against a relationship with God. As Schellenberg puts it, "...[I]f God is open to personal relationship then the divine light will remain on unless we close our eyes."¹²

Resistance, then, is a person closing her eyes to the divine light of God; this could be grounded in a desire not to form a belief in God or in a desire to do something that is incompatible with belief in God.¹³ Resistance in this case is opposition to a personal relationship, but nonbelief is partly explained by this opposition. That is, *part* of the reason such a person does not ever form a belief in God is because she does not have a desire to be in relationship with God.

Resistant nonbelief has often been separated into two kinds: one kind of resistant nonbeliever resists believing in God, and her resistance is due to some failure in her. That is, whatever her reasons are for lacking a belief in God, those reasons are such that she is responsible for this nonbelief. Another kind of resistant nonbeliever is one who does not believe in God for various reasons, but who is not culpable for this nonbelief. Someone who has never been informed about God or divinity may be counted as inculpable for any lack of belief she has, even if she is defiant against all opportunities to become informed.

Even with information at hand, nonresistance seems possible. For instance, a woman who has been hurt in the past may be resistant to a personal relationship with others, or even hesitant to gain knowledge of others. However, it does not follow that she is responsible for this resistance, despite the fact that the person who seeks personal relationship with her is not at fault either.¹⁴ She may have lost trust

9 This premise is a direct quote from Schellenberg, *Hiddenness Argument*, 57. For other interesting responses to this premise, see Ted Poston and Trent Dougherty, "Divine Hiddenness and the Nature of Belief," *Religious Studies* 43 (2007), 183–98; and Andrew Cullison, "Two Solutions to the Problem of Divine Hiddenness," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 47, no. 2 (2010), 119–34.

10 See Schellenberg, *Hiddenness Argument*, 56–8.

11 For an interesting objection to this claim, one focused on the nature of our obligations toward those in our community, see Dustin Crummett, "'We are Here to Help Each Other': Religious Community, Divine Hiddenness, and the Responsibility Argument," *Faith and Philosophy* 32, no. 1 (2015), 45–62. For other interesting discussions of this premise, see *Divine Hiddenness: New Essays*, ed. Daniel Howard-Snyder and Paul K. Moser (Cambridge Univ. Press, 2002), esp. Laura L. Garcia, "St. John of the Cross and the Necessity of Divine Hiddenness," 83–97; Jonathan L. Kvanvig, "Divine Hiddenness: What Is the Problem?," 149–63; Paul Draper, "Seeking But Not Believing: Confessions of a Practicing Agnostic," 205. See also Sarah Coakley, "Divine Hiddenness or Dark Intimacy? How John of the Cross Dissolves a Contemporary Philosophical Dilemma," in *Hidden Divinity and Religious Belief*, ed. Adam Green and Eleonore Stump (Cambridge Univ. Press, 2015), 229–45.

12 Schellenberg, *Hiddenness Argument*, 55. This claim does not rely on an account of belief as voluntary. In fact, Schellenberg believes that his argument only works if belief is involuntary (see pp. 59–60). The will has control over information and evidence that the intellect has access to, even if the will does not have the power to alter the state of the intellect itself.

13 "We might imagine a resister wanting to do her own thing without considering God's view of the matter, or wanting to do something she regards as in fact contrary to the values cultivated in a relationship with God. But it would also involve *actions or omissions* (at least mental ones) in support of such desire.... Here we might imagine careless investigation of one sort or another in relation to the existence of God, or someone deliberately consorting with people who carelessly fail to believe in God and avoiding those who believe, or just over time mentally drifting, with her own acquiescence, away from any place where she could convincingly be met by evidence of God" (Schellenberg, *Hiddenness Argument*, 55–6).

14 This is something Stump grants (see Eleonore Stump, "Theology and the Knowledge of Persons," in *New Models of Religious Understanding*, ed. Fiona Ellis (Oxford Univ. Press, 2018), 181, 184–5).

in society as a whole, and this loss of trust may be warranted based on the past experiences she has had. Additionally, someone with mental illness may resist certain frames of mind or habits of thought, but it does not follow that she is culpable for such resistance.

The point is that it is possible to imagine a person who is hostile to another person, or even to a belief or other mental state, even though she is not blameworthy for such hostility. Resistance by itself does not entail culpability – the two are conceptually distinct.¹⁵ Importantly, Schellenberg argues that, if God exists, then all nonbelievers are resistant in some way. He is not claiming that, if God exists, then all nonbelievers are *culpably* resistant.

One might respond to Schellenberg by rejecting premise 4 of the hiddenness argument. That is, one might think that the notion of a nonresistant nonbeliever is incoherent. All nonbelievers are resistant to God in *some* way.¹⁶ This response places the problem in the nonbeliever: regardless of whether the nonbeliever is culpable for her action(s), it is still the case that she is resistant to forming a belief in God.¹⁷ That is, what ultimately explains her nonbelief is some fact about *her*, not any desire God has or fact about God's nature. In contrast, some theists, such as Eleonore Stump, admit that nonresistant nonbelief is possible and perhaps even common, claiming instead that Schellenberg's argument is mistaken in some other, more palatable, way.¹⁸

I will argue later in this paper that this second kind of theistic response, namely any response that saves premise 4, is incompatible with Stump's account of grace, which she argues is derivative of Aquinas. First, though, I will detail Stump's proposed solution to the problem of divine hiddenness, namely her objection to premise 3 of the argument.

III. STUMP'S PROPOSED SOLUTION

Stump, in a recent essay on the knowledge of persons, attempts to work around the problem of divine hiddenness by arguing that premise 3 is false. She provides examples in which a person is known by one description but not another, and yet loving relationships flourish. Because (for Stump) knowledge of

15 Di Ceglie argues (in Roberto Di Ceglie, "Divine Hiddenness and the Suffering Unbeliever Argument," *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 12, no. 2 (2020), 211–35) that Schellenberg's distinction between resistance and culpability does not change the argumentative strategy, since nonresistance entails inculpability (see pp. 224–5). Schellenberg's discussion of resistance is in precisely converse terms to Di Ceglie's. Previously, Schellenberg had assumed that resistance entailed culpability, but in recent work he admits that resistance could be culpable or inculpable. The change in argumentative strategy from culpability to resistance seems designed to thwart the problem of God's existence entailing that all nonbelief is culpable, regardless of whether all nonresistant nonbelief is inculpable. If Di Ceglie is right, then the claim (i.e., premise 4) that *there exist or have existed some nonresistant nonbelievers* is stronger than the claim that *there have existed some inculpable nonbelievers*, since presumably it would be easier to show that there is at least one inculpable nonbeliever, whether she is resistant or nonresistant. But this allows for a weaker (and thus easier to defend) premise 3, that if God is open, then all nonbelief derives from resistance, even if it is not culpable resistance. So, Schellenberg's claim that resistance does not entail culpability is more relevant to his line of reasoning than Di Ceglie's claim that nonresistance implies inculpability. Thanks to a blind referee for bringing Di Ceglie's claims to my attention.

16 For an interesting objection of this kind, see Elizabeth Jackson, "Wagering Against Divine Hiddenness," *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 8, no. 4 (2016), 85–108. For other recent attempts to rebut Schellenberg, see Paul K. Moser, *The Elusive God: Reorienting Religious Epistemology* (Cambridge Univ. Press, 2008) and Michael Rea, *The Hiddenness of God* (Oxford Univ. Press, 2018).

17 One might argue that *resistance* is a red herring; it is really *culpability* on which the argument hinges its soundness. For example, suppose that the notion of a nonresistant nonbeliever is absurd, but not the notion of an inculpably resistant nonbeliever. Then changing the argument to account for this, premise 3 would be false: perhaps God has good reason to remain hidden from those who nonculpably lack belief in God. The response continues: when we really look at the evidence, we find that history and experience favor the existence of inculpable nonbelievers. So, perhaps we can live with the conclusion that it is impossible to be a nonresistant nonbeliever. This is an avenue Stump could take, one I take to be consistent with her account of grace and free will.

18 See John Greco, "No-Fault Atheism," in *Hidden Divinity and Religious Belief*, ed. Adam Green and Eleonore Stump (Cambridge Univ. Press, 2015), 109–25; Stump, "Theology"; and Di Ceglie, "Divine Hiddenness." It is not necessary in this paper to argue against this line of reasoning; in fact, none of the claims in this paper supposes Schellenberg's concept of a nonresistant nonbeliever to be plausible or actual, only that the concept is incompatible with Stump's views.

persons is not reducible to propositional knowledge, it is possible to know God without knowing that God exists.¹⁹ Hence, close relationship with God does not require knowledge that God exists under the descriptions given by traditional theists or religious communities.²⁰

Consider, for example, that a child lives next door to the town's mayor, who is a kind and wonderful neighbor. The child may know that his neighbor exists but not know that the mayor exists, even though his neighbor is the mayor. The child may even have a great and loving relationship with his neighbor. If so, then he has a loving relationship with the mayor without having a propositional belief that *the mayor exists* or that he knows the mayor.²¹ The child may even have a belief that he does *not* know the mayor, because he does not know that his neighbor is the mayor. As Stump says, “[J]ust as it is possible to know that *p* without knowing that one knows that *p*, so it is also possible to know a person without awareness of having knowledge of that person, under some other description of that person.”²²

Consider also the case of Father Longo, a Catholic priest who attempts to evangelize a Pygmy, whose religion consisted in a god of the forest.²³ The Pygmy was entirely insulated from Christian beliefs at the time, and yet immediately responded to the evangelization with the exclamation that the Christian God to which Father Longo was referring was the same as his god of the forest. The idea here is the same as before – the Pygmy had previously had a personal relationship with God while lacking belief in the existence of the Christian God.

This response seems to be a plausible one: the point is that specific beliefs such as “God exists” are not required for personal relationships with God.²⁴ Knowing someone by one description and not another is possible. As well, if knowledge of persons is not reducible to propositional knowledge, then it may be possible to know someone without any descriptive propositional knowledge at all, or perhaps with only false descriptions of that person. As Stump describes Schellenberg's argument,

Schellenberg assumes what many people would find uncontroversial, namely that the God of the major monotheisms wants a loving relationship with human beings but that a person's loving relationship with God requires that that person have knowledge of God's existence.... But what is essential to a loving relationship with another person is not knowledge that but knowledge of a person. And knowledge of a person can be had without propositional knowledge that that person exists.²⁵

Recall premise (c) in the argument used to defend premise 3: “Believing in the existence of the other person, in this case God, is necessary to participate in a conscious, interactive, and positively meaningful relationship with her.”²⁶ Stump's counterexamples to premise (c) dissolve the standard reasoning for thinking that premise 3 of the main argument is true.²⁷

19 Stump, “Theology,” 180. For a related objection to premise 3, in which it is argued that desire for God can produce knowledge of God that lacks belief, see Julian Perlmutter, “Desiring the Hidden God: Knowledge without Belief,” *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 8, no. 4 (2016), 51–64.

20 See Stump, “Theology,” 183. For other interesting discussion of interpersonal knowledge and its connection to the problem of divine hiddenness, see Matthew A. Benton, “Epistemology Personalized,” *The Philosophical Quarterly* 67, no. 269 (2017), 813–34; and Matthew A. Benton, “God and Interpersonal Knowledge,” *Res Philosophica* 95, no. 3 (2018), 421–47.

21 Stump, “Theology,” 181–3.

22 Stump, “Theology,” 180.

23 See Stump, “Theology,” 182–3.

24 Perhaps knowledge is required though, in which case Stump distinguishes between knowledge of persons and knowledge that — propositional knowledge. For purposes of space, I do not address this distinction in detail in this paper, though I grant Stump the claim that knowledge of persons is irreducible to propositional knowledge.

25 Stump, “Theology,” 181. One thing to notice about Stump's point is the word “essential”. Though Stump shows that it is not strictly essential for a loving relationship that the two persons have specific propositional knowledge, it is perhaps still desirable. And it does seem true that, given God's desire for long-term, close personal relationships with humans, he would have a desire that such persons believe in him. The question then arises as to whether God's desire for such belief may conflict with or be outweighed by other desires he has.

26 Schellenberg, *Hiddenness Argument*, 57.

27 It is possible that the conclusion (f) (premise 3 of the main argument) is true, despite counterexamples to premise (c). For it is possible that God's openness entails resistance for any nonbeliever because some other part of God's nature includes a strong desire for the kind of relationship that *does* include belief in one another's existence; see footnote 25 above.

However, it is not immediately clear that premise 3 has been rebutted. In cases in which a person, Sally, knows Max by one description rather than another, often Sally will also have certain propositional beliefs, which contain descriptive propositional content *about* Max. That descriptive content may be true or false, complete or incomplete. It may be possible that someone has knowledge of a person without having descriptive, propositional beliefs about that person, if we grant that knowledge of persons is not reducible to propositional knowledge. But, even if Sally has no other propositional beliefs about him, it will still be the case that she knows something exists, which partly makes possible her personal knowledge of Max. Once she has descriptive knowledge of Max, then she can point to him and know that he is the “something” that she believed existed all along.

With this case in mind, let us consider a few revised premises to the main argument from hiddenness. Stump’s examples have shown that premise 3 has not been properly justified, but a weaker version of premise 3 can be provided:

- 3(a). If God is open to being in a personal relationship with someone, then it is not the case that she both: (a) has conceptual knowledge about God’s nature, and (b) nonresistantly lacks belief in God.

And premise 4 can be rewritten to accommodate this new premise 3(a):

- 4(a). There has existed one or more persons throughout history who, when confronted with the concept of God, nonresistantly did not form belief in him.

Or to put 4(a) in a more explicit way for the argument’s sake:

- 4(a’). There has existed one or more persons throughout history who, at the same time, both (a) had conceptual knowledge of God and (b) nonresistantly lacked belief in God.

Stump’s counterexamples show that one can have a personal relationship with another prior to having a conceptual understanding or a descriptive understanding of said person. It does not show that more strict forms of nonresistant nonbelief are compatible with God’s existence. Consider the scope of the claim that any and all nonbelievers throughout history were/are resistant to God in some way. However difficult it would be to defend this claim, it is not much more difficult than providing evidence for the following weaker claim: *everyone who has the concept of the Christian God available to her, and still remains a nonbeliever, is resistant to God in some way.*²⁸ This negation of premise 4(a’), though weaker, is still difficult to defend given the sheer number of people to which it applies.

Stump’s examples show that persons such as the Pygmies, who had no concept of the Christian God and so could not formulate propositional beliefs about him, can have a personal relationship with God that lacks full-fledged *belief*. However, Stump has not shown that descriptive knowledge of God, which many contemporary atheists have, combined with nonresistant nonbelief, is compatible with God’s nature.

Consider again the two cases that Stump addresses. The child in the neighbor case lacks propositional knowledge of his personal relationship with the mayor for the simple reason that no one has shared the information with him that would be required to gain such knowledge. The claim can be put in terms of a counterfactual: if the child were to understand that his neighbor is the mayor, then he would believe that *the mayor exists* and that *I know the mayor*. Even after gaining more knowledge about his neighbor, he would still believe that his neighbor exists and that he knows his neighbor. In the same way that a true man of faith may not know the details of the doctrine of the trinity or divine simplicity but may still have union with God, so also a child may not know anything about the mayor while having a relationship with his neighbor, who is the mayor. However, in each of these cases, greater conceptual understanding (or even in some cases, simple information distribution) would add to one’s set of propositional knowledge.

²⁸ It is not necessary that the nonbeliever have a complete understanding of God’s nature, were he to exist. However, a basic understanding of God, from the Christian perspective, would be requisite to explain why, upon hearing about God from others, she does not have a moment of enlightenment as in the case of the Pygmy.

The same answer applies to the Pygmy. As soon as information was distributed to the Pygmy, he formed a belief in the existence of the Christian God. All the Pygmy was missing was the concept of the Christian God, and he was immediately able to understand that the referent of the god of the forest and the Christian God are identical. So, the case of the Pygmy seems only to support my claim, that what is missing is *information* required in order to form certain beliefs.

But in the case of someone who has learned about Christian concepts of God's nature, and who still lacks a belief in God, the problem cannot simply be resolved by telling her *about* God. In fact, her lack of belief may include a deep and careful deliberation based on the concept of the Christian God that she has in hand.²⁹ Therefore, her nonbelief, or even disbelief, may be partly the result of her knowledge of the concept of the Christian God. Certainly, this lack of belief is not the result of a lack of conceptual or descriptive knowledge. In contrast, in the case of the Pygmy, it seems that nonbelief is present solely because descriptive knowledge is absent. In other words, the Pygmy believed in something by one description rather than another; but he recognized the truth of the Christian description immediately when presented to him.

Both of Stump's cases thus trade on an ambiguity in the meaning of nonbelief. For it is clear that both the child and the Pygmy have a relationship with the mayor and with God (respectively), and in some sense they each believe in the existence of *that thing with which they have a personal relationship*. The Pygmy lacks belief in Christianity's description of God not because he has considered the claim that *the Christian God exists* and remains skeptical of it or disbelieves it. He merely hasn't been exposed to the description of God defended by Christians. But once we see that many nonbelievers, who also seem nonresistant, do have the relevant information at their disposal and still lack belief in God, the problem of divine hiddenness arises as before.

In contrast to what I have tried to show, Stump believes that she has shown both premise 3 and a version of premise 3(a) false. From the doctrine of divine simplicity combined with the doctrine of correlative transcendentals, Stump argues that "in knowing goodness or in sensing beauty, a person is also knowing God, to one degree or another."³⁰ Stump concludes, "So from a person's sincere self-report that he does not believe in an omniscient, omnipotent, perfectly good God, it does not follow that he does not know God in any way or to any degree."³¹ However, it is far from clear that a nonbeliever with the concept of God could have a close personal relationship with him just in virtue of knowing beauty or goodness. Such a person would lack belief in even the possibility of having a personal relationship with goodness or beauty, given that goodness and beauty are thought to have a personal nature only given certain theistic doctrines.³²

Stump believes she has shown that, not only is propositional belief not requisite for personal relationships, but in fact it is pretty easy for persons to have close personal connections with God even if they *disbelieve* in him. Yet, the examples she uses do not provide evidence of genuine nonbelief (nonbelief that includes conceptual understanding). As well, it is not clear that knowledge of persons is possible without at least propositional knowledge of another's existence. Finally, her discussion of beauty and goodness does not show evidence of close personal relationship, only of knowledge to some degree. I hope to have shown that Stump's conclusion, therefore, is too quick; her counterexamples do not demonstrate 3(a) to be false.

29 This does not mean that her belief is voluntarily formed. It just means that, in part, her reasons for believing, not believing, or disbelieving include a conceptual understanding of God, or minimally a descriptive account of God.

30 Stump, "Theology," 183. For a brief response by Schellenberg to William Wainwright's formulation of the same claim, see J. L. Schellenberg, "The Hiddenness Argument Revisited (I)," *Religious Studies* 41, no. 2 (2005), 207–8.

31 Stump, "Theology," 183.

32 This response can be drawn out further by slightly altering premise (c) in the argument for premise 3. What is here being defended is the more nuanced claim that, (c) for a person Sally to have a relationship with another person Max, it is necessary that Sally know Max (whether propositional or personal knowledge), and that Sally believe that Max is a *person* with which she is capable of being in close personal relationship. Relatedly, it may even be necessary for knowledge of persons (of the kind Stump defends) that the knower believe that the object of knowledge is, in fact, a person. For how can I have true knowledge of a person *as a person*, which is not reducible to propositional knowledge but instead is irreducibly personal in nature, if I lack belief that she is really a person whom I am capable of knowing in that manner?

IV. STUMP'S ACCOUNT OF GRACE

In this section, I try to show that Stump's account of grace is incompatible with premise 4(a'), and perhaps also with the original premise 4 as well. The conclusion I argue for, then, is that Stump is committed to the claim that nonbelief (of the kind described in premise 4(a')) entails resistance to God. In order to fully describe the theistic problem of free will and Stump's account of grace, I will stray from the topic of divine hiddenness for just a moment.

For theists who accept that God provides grace to human persons, which has causal power over them, a problem arises. Many theists do not simply argue that God has causal efficacy over the universe, they further allege that all goodness in the world derives from God. All goodness is derivative of God's grace, including the goodness inherent in and derived from human action; this presents a problem for human free will.

At first glance, it seems that the human will can either be in union with God's will, which means being in a state of grace because it wills the good, or in disunion with God, which means being outside of God's grace. If we can either have a will that desires union with God or a will rejecting such union, and if *all that is good comes from God*,³³ then how can we ever move from rejection to union with God, without God's intervention through grace, and therefore without God violating our free will?³⁴ It seems that, if all goodness is derived from God, then we cannot be truly free in our decision to be united with God in our willing the good.

Stump gives us an answer, which she argues is Aquinas's view: there exist more than two states of the will. The good will, the rejecting will, and the quiescent will are each distinct states of human persons.³⁵ For any person to begin transformation from rejecting union to desiring union with God, her will must first move into a state of quiescence; this happens when she finally ceases resisting God.³⁶ God can then act on the will in this state, by the giving of grace, without violating her free will. She freely chooses to cease fighting God, and in doing so God is able to infuse grace into her will. Her will then becomes conformed to God's will through grace.³⁷ She can reject this transformation of the will at any point and return to her original state (Stump calls this the *refusal of grace*). In order, therefore, for this theory to fully explain how humans have libertarian free will even in the midst of God's grace working in our lives, it *must* include this intermediate state of the will — quiescence.³⁸

Though Stump does not connect her account of quiescence to the hiddenness argument, I argue that this Thomistic account of the will is incompatible with the claim that it is possible for a nonresistant non-

33 This is the disputed claim that leads to problems of free will in theology. For if not all good action is derived causally from God, then human agents can plausibly perform good deeds of their own volition. But if all goodness arises from God, then any goodness from humans would be derivative and therefore not fully free.

34 Thanks to Alexandra Romanyshyn for helping me to clarify this point.

35 I will not defend the claim that this account is Thomistic; see Eleonore Stump, *Aquinas* (Routledge, 2003), ch. 13 for such a defense. My description of the will is a very general one. Stump explains these in terms of second-order willing (see pp. 389, 400) and provides much more detailed an account than I have the space to explicate in this paper. Though in *Aquinas*, it is not obvious that Stump herself endorses Aquinas's account, she utilizes the account in Eleonore Stump, *Wandering in Darkness: Narrative and the Problem of Suffering* (Oxford Univ. Press, 2010) (see ch. 8), and in Eleonore Stump, *Atonement* (Oxford Univ. Press, 2018) (see ch. 7).

36 It is perhaps unclear how long one's will could be in such a position, but one strong intuition is that God would never allow her will to remain in that position for more than a moment. If so, then she would be in a state of nonresistance and non-grace for only a moment. In fact, Stump frequently mentions that God immediately acts on her will once she moves into the state of quiescence (see Stump, *Aquinas*, 377, 381, 393, 444).

37 This description of grace and union of wills is closely related to Schellenberg's conception of the *relating position*. For interesting discussion, see Schellenberg, *Divine Hiddenness*, 31–4; J. L. Schellenberg, "Response to Tucker on Hiddenness," *Religious Studies* 44, no. 3 (2008), 289–93; Chris Tucker, "Divine Hiddenness and the Value of Divine-Creature Relationships," *Religious Studies* 44, no. 3 (2008), 269–87; and Schellenberg, *Hiddenness Argument*, 54–6, 60.

38 It is not within the scope of this paper to explain how Aquinas's view preserves libertarian free will. For an argument to that effect, see Stump, *Aquinas*, ch. 13.

believer (with conceptual knowledge of God) to exist, at least for more than a short moment.³⁹ That is, such an account is incompatible with the claim that nonresistant nonbelievers have existed throughout history. Consider the ways in which Stump describes Aquinas's view: for a person Paula to surrender (i.e., moving to the quiescent state of the will) to God "is for her to desire him and union with him after a period of resistance to him."⁴⁰ Referencing the processes of justification and sanctification that occur via grace, Stump adds,

The point of the processes is rather the establishment and deepening of a relationship of love between Paula and God that is undermined by the absence of psychic integration in Paula, and the ultimate end of these processes is a union between Paula and God.⁴¹

The purpose of justification (the process that follows the quiescence of the will) is to create a loving interpersonal relationship between a human person and God.⁴²

When a person Sally becomes filled with grace and begins the process of justification, she immediately forms a desire for *union with God*. These desires would then slowly become realized over time, since the process of justification results in a greater union between God and Sally. But the desire itself is instantaneous. What could such a desire look like if she honestly lacked a belief in God's existence? If she truly understood the concept of the Christian God, then she would have a desire for union with a person whom she did not believe existed. Moreover, she would understand her lack of belief to be nonbelief in the Christian God.⁴³ Thus, her desire would be one that she did not believe could be realized.

God's act at the moment of quiescence involves infusing grace, allowing the person to form an immediate desire for union with God. Since this desire is formed through grace once a person ceases resisting God, it follows that a person with this desire, if it is to persist and grow, should have an expectation that such a desire be fulfilled eventually. If said person truly lacks belief in God, then she will not have such an expectation. If her desire lacks an optimistic expectation, then it will likely collapse into rejection of God's grace and thus she will count as a resistant nonbeliever.⁴⁴ Even if it does not collapse on its own, it is a hopeless desire, one that God has the power and reason to make a hopeful desire through intervention. If his intervention does not result in a hopeful desire (i.e., a desire informed by a belief in God's existence), then the nonbeliever is resistant to God's grace. On this account, in which God's desire for union is combined with his power to intervene through grace, it seems that all persons who are genuinely nonresistant, and who have a basic understanding of God, would believe in God.⁴⁵

39 For other discussion of Aquinas in connection with the hiddenness argument, see Roberto Di Ceglie, "Christian Belief, Love for God, and Divine Hiddenness," *Philosophia Christi* 18, no. 1 (2016), 179–93.

40 Stump, *Wandering*, 168.

41 Stump, *Wandering*, 171.

42 The transformed will, the will that wills for the good, is what Stump calls the "will of faith" (see Stump, *Aquinas*, 384, 402). Therefore, I take it that the cognitive state of a person with a will that wills the good includes an attitude of faith towards God, at least in some respect. So, this is not merely an instance of desiring a personal relationship without knowing that one is doing so; rather, the transformed will includes faith, and plausibly belief.

43 Notice that this is not so strong as to say that she believes that God does not exist. She could have such a disbelief, but she could also simply lack a positive belief in his existence. Either one of these would entail that she has a desire for union with a being whom she does not believe exists, even though she understands what it would mean for her to believe in such a being.

44 Notice that this is the case *whether or not* she is culpable for this lack of belief in God. If her desire collapses due to genuine failure to form a belief in God's existence, then she would be returning to the resistant state of the will, in which she no longer accepts God's grace in her life. She may not be culpable for this refusal of grace, but this refusal of grace still constitutes a genuine *resistance* to God's will.

45 God's openness, on Schellenberg's account, seems to explain why God *would* use grace in such situations. For openness on God's part involves a willingness to do nothing to prevent or impede union between him and another person. Even if belief in God's existence is not strictly required, lacking belief certainly stymies such union. So, if Schellenberg is right that God is always open to close personal relationship, then any reason he has to withhold belief would be overridden by his openness. However, even if Schellenberg is wrong about God's love implying an openness to personal relationship, Stump's account of justification provides reason for thinking that God would intervene through grace to generate belief in him. Justification, after all, involves an immediate intervention of grace to generate a desire for union with God. If God has reasons to prevent a person from believing in him, it seems that such reasons would also prevent other interventions through grace. If a person does not refuse the grace that results in a desire for union with God, then why would she refuse grace that generates a belief or knowledge of the thing

One could think of Stump's problem in another way: God has a desire complementary to the desire of justified persons — a desire for union with each person. If a person refuses to believe that God exists, while at the same time being privy to all the relevant information needed to form such a belief, then she is in some sense doing something that stifles further union between herself and God. Thus, insofar as God desires to be in union with her, he also desires for her to give up resistance to this belief.⁴⁶ Suppose God does not ensure, through the intervention of grace, that she forms a belief in him, for whatever reason. Still, her nonbelief, despite knowledge of God's nature, runs contrary to God's desire for union with her. As well, it runs contrary to her own desire for union with him, since nonbelief inhibits the formation of a deeper personal relationship. If she remains in such a state of nonbelief, knowing what it is she lacks belief in and knowing what it is she desires union with, then she has rejected God's desire and is thus resistant to deeper union with him. This is so even if she rejects this grace for nonculpable reasons, meaning neither God nor she is responsible for the lack of union between them.

Minimally, then, nonresistant nonbelief is impossible when one already has propositional beliefs about the nature of God. So, premise 4(a') ought to be rejected by Stump. But it may be the case that all nonresistant nonbelief is impossible on this account as well, even for those without the concept of the Christian God. For instance, God could provide Sally with the conceptual knowledge necessary for her to have an accurate (though not a total) understanding of God's nature, such as that descriptive knowledge needed by the Pygmy. Such true descriptions of God would then ground the propositional knowledge of God's existence imparted to Sally via grace. I will not argue for this further, but it is worth stating that Stump's account of grace may be incompatible with all versions of premise 4.

V. RESPONSES AND CONCLUSIONS

In this section, I will further describe the case of quiescence without belief to determine if and how the case could be resolved by Stump. First, suppose that a person Sally moves into a state of quiescence while retaining nonbelief about God's existence. She is then infused with God's grace, which causes her to desire union with him. She also has the relevant information about religion and the nature of God needed to generate a true propositional belief. Yet she still does not form the belief that *God exists*. If a person with all the relevant information is receiving God's grace and does not come to believe in God, then this amounts to her desiring union with someone whom she does not believe exists.

Thus, she would be desiring something that is not to her mind attainable, assuming that God does not (and is not by his nature required to) use grace to give Sally reasons to believe in him. This desire could not last long, since she would lose hope in desiring union with someone in whom she could not bring herself to believe. Thus, her beliefs would either conform to her desire — she would form a belief in God's existence — or she would bring her desire into conformity with her beliefs, thereby resisting God's grace. Again, it seems contrary to God's desire for union, and so contrary to the grace provided by God, that one could have a continuous desire for union with God, while at the same time refusing to accept the possibility of ever achieving union with God. If she never accepts this possibility, then she will shift back into a state of refusal of grace.

Thus, we have two kinds of nonbelievers: those who give up hope in their desire for union with God, and those who have never desired union with God. In both cases, the nonbeliever has a will that is not

with which she desires union? Justification by itself cannot explain why God would withhold grace resulting in belief but not grace resulting in desires. Thanks to a blind referee for noting the need to explain this reasoning.

⁴⁶ Here it is worth distinguishing God's desire for union with God's openness. Stump, *Wandering*, discusses God's desire for union with his creatures, but Schellenberg does not see this as necessary for the hiddenness argument: "[Openness to close relationship] doesn't even require that God want such relationship, though if perfectly loving, we might expect that something corresponding to this would be realized in God. No, being open in the relevant sense at a certain time simply means not (then) being closed. It means not through one's own actions or omissions making it impossible for the other, whom one loves, to participate in personal relationship with one at that time should the other wish to do so" (Schellenberg, *Hiddenness Argument*, 41).

conformed to God's and so is in a state of resistance with respect to God. So, Stump is forced to accept that any person *with the concept of the Christian God* is resistant in her lack of belief in God.⁴⁷ That is, Stump is committed to the negation of 4(a').⁴⁸

One potential response from Stump goes like this: the example described above is not really possible. For if someone ever has *the correct information* about God's nature, then she cannot help but believe that God exists. Those who are "lost" Christians are not so because they became nonbelievers after receiving a proper Christian upbringing and came to reject it, but rather because, for those who are nonculpable at least, at some point in their lives they became misinformed about Christianity (and even perhaps God's nature) in such a way that their *false* beliefs about Christianity and God led them down a path of skepticism and nonbelief, or outright disbelief. What they reject is someone (or something) which they do not truly understand. Any person who seeks union with God, rather than rejecting his offers to be in close relationship, when provided with true descriptions of God, would immediately quiesce and then accept God's grace, which would result in the formation of belief in God and union with God.

I consider this response unsatisfying; it entails, implausibly, that all nonculpable non-Christians have an inaccurate understanding of the Christian God. Specifically, anyone who accurately understands the Christian God would not be able to resist belief in him without performing a moral wrong. The response does not say that if one *completely* understands God then he cannot help but believe in him, but just that one must have some basic true beliefs about God's nature. Having the right concept of God does not necessarily mean having a total understanding of him; many find it impossible to gain full understanding of God. Having the right concept of God does mean having basic concepts that are true, yet it seems that non-Christians can have just as much of this type of understanding as Christians can.

Let us move on to a second response. Perhaps, as Stump implies, a nonbeliever can have a personal relationship with God without believing in God as he truly is. She may have outright false propositional beliefs about God and still have a deep relationship with him. On this view, one could know God while having *false* beliefs (rather than lacking true beliefs) about important matters, including perhaps God's nature or his existence. Moreover, personal knowledge of God could increase through God's grace after quiescence, even if false propositional beliefs remain. This could explain how persons of different religions could all have interpersonal relationships with the same God, whom they understand differently. So too could an atheist or agnostic have a deep relationship with God while lacking propositional beliefs in his existence.

This response may, at first glance, provide a route to explaining how quiescence is compatible with nonresistant nonbelief. If what is important for union with God is knowledge of God, and propositional beliefs do not impact such personal knowledge, then it would make sense that she could be in union with him despite her nonbelief. However, even if a nonbeliever did not need to form a propositional belief in the Christian God in order to grow in union with him, she would still have a belief in some *thing*, namely the thing to which she understands herself to be in relation, which would in truth be God. Whatever her beliefs are about the relatum to which she is connected, those beliefs would simply not include the concepts that are traditionally associated with God. In this way she could go her whole life without believing

47 To accept this position is to accept that anyone who rejects the Christian God must be resistant. But many Christians believe that persons of other religions can be in a state of grace (i.e., nonresistant). So, this strategy of biting the bullet may not be worthwhile after all.

48 One might object by saying that we do not always know what our desires are when we have them. Thus, a person may have a desire for union with God and at the same time not be aware of the fact that she desires to be in union *with God*, and even perhaps the fact that she has a desire at all. However, I think this response is mistaken. For such a person as I have described has all the information about God that she needs in order to form a *belief* in his existence, and she has all the grace she needs to do so as well. Even if she does not know precisely what this desire means for her, the grace (which is continuously flowing), the desire itself, and the information she has on hand regarding God and Christianity should still be enough to lead her to form a belief in God's existence. This follows from Schellenberg's argument as well. The idea is that God is all-powerful, so a person who has a desire for union and has the relevant concept of the Christian God has all of the prerequisites in place to form a belief in God; God's grace can do the rest of the work.

in Christianity, or even God as traditionally understood, but she would still have a relationship with God *and* a belief in him as a person with whom she can have a close personal relationship.

Such a person would still have beliefs about the relatum, though, including *the existence of the relatum* and its being truly distinct from her. She would not be a nonresistant *nonbeliever*, at least not in the sense meaningful to atheists or agnostics who understand what God's nature would be, if he existed. She would still have a belief, in the same way the Pygmy did, of something, other than herself, to which she was closely connected on a personal level and to which her will was conformed.⁴⁹ So, in cases in which "atheists" are said to be in union with God, such persons are not really nonbelievers in the strong sense described previously, since they still have a belief in something which in fact is God. So, Stump's account of quiescence and grace still seems to entail that *strong* nonresistant nonbelief is not possible. Moreover, Stump's counterexamples in Section Three do not provide evidence for thinking that strongly nonbelieving atheists are counterexamples to premise 3(a) described earlier.

Let us return to Stump's theory of grace and the will, which may suggest a third potential response. Remember, on Stump's account, resistance to God (culpable or not) is constitutive of a will that is *not* conformed to God's will. Quiescence of the will requires a person to cease resisting. A will conformed to the good requires continuous nonresistance to God. These exhaust the possibilities. So, the claim that nonresistant nonbelief is possible might be interpreted as the claim that one can have a will conformed to God's will while at the same time lacking a belief in the existence of God.

A third response, then, may be to claim that it is possible for a person's will to be conformed to another without that person believing in said other, or even perhaps while she *disbelieves* in said other. I may have a will conformed to my mother's will because of my childhood conditioning, even though I falsely believe that my mother has died. Notice that this is slightly different from the second response, in which it was said that personal relationships are possible without believing in the existence of one another. It may then be claimed that, while God's love for his creatures entails openness to them, such love does not entail openness to form close personal relationships, but does entail openness to generate union between his will and the will of each creature.

This solution to the problem seems to me not to work, though. Unless God's will is that Sally *lack* a belief in him, then it seems as though she cannot be in a state of good will without also having the right kinds of beliefs about God, whose will she is attempting to imitate. But even if God's will for her is to lack a belief in Him, a question arises. Is it possible for a person Sally to have a will united with God's will, when Sally's will is guided by the beliefs she has, which do not include any true beliefs about God? Beliefs guide our actions, and in the case of a nonbeliever who is united with God, the result of quiescence is that Sally wills what God wills *despite* believing that God does not exist. So, in such a case, her nonbelief plays no role in her action, and in fact is contrary to the state of her will. This seems unreasonable to accept, if we are granting that the intellect, which forms and maintains beliefs, is (at least partly) guiding the will, in collaboration with God's grace. If God's will does *all* the causal work after one reaches a state of quiescence of will, then perhaps one's intellect and beliefs are irrelevant to the conformation of the will. Otherwise, this response fails.

Yet this strong possibility — that God's will, when unified with the will of a human person, can act as the only causal power underlying the decisions she makes — is simply not plausible for Stump, since even for a human person with a good will, the intellect and will are deeply interconnected in a causal manner.⁵⁰ If one's intellect has any causal role in the conformation of the will, then that role must be explained by

49 Not only would it be strange to call this person a nonbeliever, it is strange in itself that God would not provide the grace to allow her to form the right propositional attitudes toward Him. If, for instance, she believes that Nature is some mystical, personal, entity and she is closely connected to Nature (where the referent of 'Nature' is God), then why would God not use this "acceptance" of him to provide her with the grace needed to transform her beliefs about him into the right ones (e.g., that God is a personal, Trinitarian being)? Perhaps God does not use grace to transform her beliefs because, knowing His true nature, she would then reject God. If so, then it seems as though she is resistant to God in at least one way — she is resistant to what God actually *is*. So even if she is a nonbeliever, she is a kind of resistant nonbeliever.

50 Stump acknowledges as much (see Stump, *Atonement*, 16, 47–8).

the right beliefs a person has. But if a person has all the wrong beliefs, and does all the right actions, then how can we explain the causal connection between the two? Since belief in another's existence seems to ground all other beliefs about that other,⁵¹ it is plausible to think that a true nonbeliever would lack all beliefs necessary to influence the will in the right way (i.e., in conformity with God's will). If this is right, then in order to show that nonresistant nonbelief is possible, Stump must show that one in fact *can* have all the wrong beliefs, and all the right actions.

In this paper I have tried to show that Stump's rejection of premise 3 of the argument from divine hiddenness is not sufficient for solving the problem of hiddenness. I have also tried to show that Stump's account of quiescence of the will, which Stump argues resolves issues surrounding the connection between free will and grace, makes it impossible to account for the apparent fact that nonresistant nonbelievers, with the concept of God at their disposal, have existed throughout human history.⁵² Stump is thus committed to rejecting premise 4(a') of the argument. Though the argument from divine hiddenness may ultimately be rejected for various reasons, I have tried to show that Stump's reasons for rejecting it fall short, and that her views of free will are incompatible with the possibility of some kinds of nonresistant nonbelief.

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51 Why think that beliefs about existence ground all other beliefs? If I lack belief in another's existence, while having the right concept of that person, then all other propositional beliefs about that person would turn out to be false; I would lack all other true beliefs about her because all other true beliefs I could have rely on her existing. For instance, if I do not believe that Sally exists, then I do not believe that Sally has brown hair, even though she does have brown hair (at least where the referent of "Sally" is the same in both propositions). If I do not believe that Sally exists (or did exist), then I cannot believe that Sally is the daughter of Sam, even though she is. If I do not believe she exists, then I cannot not have any other true beliefs about her nature. So, I lack all the true beliefs necessary to influence my will in the right way to form a union with her.

52 See Stump, *Aquinas*, ch. 13. Stump admits that this solution is not without its own problems, but she utilizes this account of the will in both Stump, *Wandering*, and Stump, *Atonement* (see footnote 35 above).

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