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ON THE AXIOLOGY OF A HIDDEN GOD

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Abstract. One axiological question in the philosophy of religion is the question of what impact, if any, God's existence does (or would) make to the value of our world. Elsewhere I argue that we should prefer a theistic world where God is hidden to an atheistic world or a theistic world where God isn't hidden. This is because in a hidden theistic world all of the theistic goods obtain in addition to the experience of atheistic goods. I attempt to complete this line of argument by showing that theistic goods do (or could) indeed obtain in a world where God hides. However, I also suggest that the experience of theistic goods in a world where God doesn't hide and a world where God hides are likely so different that there is a difference in value between the two worlds, despite them having the same goods. Given this, I conclude that we can't tell the difference between the value of a world where God doesn't hide and a world with a hidden God. The axiological solution to divine hiddenness remains incomplete.

I. THE AXIOLOGICAL QUESTION

In the philosophy of religion, the question of whether God exists is an *ontological question*. The question of whether it's rational to believe that God exists is an *epistemological question*. Various ontological questions about God dominate the history of the philosophy of religion, while the epistemological questions have garnered more attention in the second half of the 20th century and continue to be discussed into 21st century. I explore a different and more recent *axiological question* which asks what impact, if any, God's existence has (or would have) on the value of our world. More specifically, I'm asking about the value our world would have were God to exist or the closest (possible or impossible) world to ours where God does not exist. The axiological question is distinct from the question of what (dis)value the *belief* that God exists has for individuals, and how the existence of individuals with such beliefs might impact the overall value of our world.¹ That question might be construed as the axiology of an epistemological question about God, or something close to it. In this sense, then, the axiological evaluation I'm concerned with is about the axiology of the ontological question about God's existence.²

Pro-theism is the position that God's existence does (or would) increase the value of our world. Anti-theism, on the other hand, is the view that God's existence does (or would) decrease the value of our world.³ Likewise, each of these general positions can further be subdivided into the following categories: First, there is a difference between impersonal and personal judgments regarding the axiological ques-

1 Myron A Penner has aptly referred to this as the *doxastic axiological question*.

2 Klaas J. Kraay, "Invitation to Axiology of Theism", in *Does God matter? Essays on the Axiological Consequences of Theism*: (Routledge, 2018) is a masterful in-depth introduction to the current scholarship on the axiological question. Kraay also points out different directions that would move the debate forward. I recommend the reader to this work if they desire more by way of introduction to the axiological question.

3 While these are the two views that have received the most discussion in the literature to date, Klaas J. Kraay observes that they are hardly the only stances one could take toward the axiological question. There are at least three more possible answers: Neutralism is the view that God's existence does (or would) make no difference to the value of our world. Quietism is the position that the axiological question (in principle) cannot be answered. Finally, Agnosticism is the idea that the question might have an answer but we currently don't have it (Kraay, "Invitation to Axiology of Theism", 10). Kraay further notes that "[t]he positive agnostic has judged that, given the available arguments and evidence, suspending judgment is the most reasonable thing to do. The withholding

tion. Klaas J. Kraay explains “[t]he latter... focus on the axiological implications of theism for worlds (or their features or proper parts), without reference to whether these implications are good (or otherwise) for persons.”⁴ For instance, an individual’s life might lose its meaning if it turns out that God exists (personal judgment). But that same individual may recognize that God’s existence is a good overall because it provides the best explanation for various features of our world (impersonal judgment). The categories of impersonal and personal can also be applied to each of the general answers to the axiological question noted above. These positions can also be even further subdivided into narrow and wide categories. With respect to this distinction Kraay writes, “[t]he former concern the axiological consequences of theism in one respect only, while the latter focus on the overall axiological effects of theism.”⁵

There are two further considerations worth nothing before proceeding. First, one might wonder whether the axiological question is meant to be answered in terms of rational preference or in terms of objective axiological judgments. This is because some suggest that rational preferences need not always reflect overall (or objective) axiological judgments. In other words, there can be cases when it’s rational for an individual to prefer the worse over the better.⁶ However, for the rest of this project I will assume that rational preference and axiological judgments are (or should be) the same, though I acknowledge this isn’t uncontroversial.

Second, early discussions of the axiological question worry that the question isn’t philosophically significant. For instance, the objector might ask us to consider following conditional: *If God exists then the value of the world would increase*. But consider that if God exists, God exists necessarily. If God exists necessarily, then God exists in every possible world. But then, any conditional with an antecedent positing God’s non-existence is a counter-possible and hence only trivially true. So the axiological question is at best trivial, and hardly merits serious philosophical attention.⁷

There are different ways to avoid this objection, but Guy Kahane’s early statement about what exactly the axiological question is asking remains informative:

We are not asking theists to conceive of God’s death—to imagine that God stopped existing. And given that theists believe that God created the universe, when we ask them to consider His inexistence we are not asking them to conceive an empty void... I will understand the comparison to involve the actual world and the closest possible world where [the opposite about the truth of God’s existence is true].⁸

While this is the comparison that those working in the axiology of theism appear to have in view, it doesn’t solve the problem about counterfactuals. For if God exists, then there is no world where God does not exist; such worlds are impossible. But if God does not exist, then any world where God exists is impossible too. The comparison between an atheistic world and theistic world, then, necessarily involves comparing a possible world to an impossible world. Shifting focus from *metaphysical* possibility to *epistemic* possibility helps make sense of the comparison. Think of the comparison as between two epistemically possible worlds. The first is the world that results from the discovery that there is no God, and the second the one that results from the discovery that there is a God. Both of these worlds are consistent with everything we know *a priori*. And both are epistemically possible (i.e. conceivable), even though

agnostic, on the other hand, is someone who simply withholds judgment, even about the statement ‘agnosticism about the axiological import of God’s existence is the most reasonable position’ (*ibid.*).

4 Kraay, “Invitation to Axiology of Theism”, 12.

5 *Ibid.* Kraay also writes: “Some of these sixty combinations of existential and axiological positions can consistently be held together with other pairs. For example, consider an atheist who thinks that God’s existence would make things better for her in certain respects, but who is unsure about the overall axiological import of theism. Such an atheist would be both a narrow personal pro-theist and wide impersonal agnostic. But, clearly, not all combinations are compossible. Most obviously, for example, a quietist of any stripe cannot also be a pro-theist, anti-theist, neutralist, or agnostic of the same stripe. To date, most work on this topic has concerned pro-theism and anti-theism, and mostly from the perspectives of the theist and the atheist. But, given the vast array of views distinguished here, it is clear that this discussion could be broadened in many ways.”

6 Kraay, “Invitation to Axiology of Theism”, 20.

7 This assumes a Lewis/Stalnaker understanding of counterpossibles. Thanks to an anonymous referee for bringing this to my attention.

8 Guy Kahane, “Should We Want God to Exist?”, *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 82, no. 3 (2011): 676.

one is necessarily metaphysically impossible.⁹ For the rest of this project I'm going to assume that this challenge about counterpossibles can be met.¹⁰ In any case, it's not just a challenge for me; it's equally a problem for anyone working on the axiological question.

I'm now in a position to address the main idea I want to examine in this project. It turns out that what one thinks about divine hiddenness very much influences what stance one might take toward the axiological question. The literature on the axiological question thus far assumes that God is a maximal being who is (ultimately) responsible for everything that contingently exists. God is omniscience, omnipotent, and omnibenevolent. But those working on the axiological question could agree on this conception of God and yet disagree about (i) whether God can be hidden; and/or (ii) whether God is in fact hidden. In this project I bring together the axiological question and ontological question by discussing connections between the axiology of theism and divine hiddenness. In the next section I will outline the argument I offer elsewhere that we should prefer a theistic world where God is hidden to an atheistic world or a theistic world where God isn't hidden.¹¹ I then attempt to complete this line of argument by showing that theistic goods do (or could) indeed obtain in a world where God hides. However, I also suggest that the experience of theistic goods in a world where God doesn't hid and a world where God hides are likely to be so different that there is a difference in value between the worlds, despite them having the same goods. Given this, I conclude that we can't tell the difference between the value of a world where God doesn't hide and a world with a hidden God. The axiological solution to divine hiddenness remains incomplete.

II. THE AXIOLOGICAL SOLUTION TO DIVINE HIDDENNESS

Guy Kahane points out that it could be rational for a certain individual to prefer that God not exist if her life would lose meaning if turns out that God exists.¹² Myron A. Penner comments on the relative merits of Kahane's argument, which has come to be known as the Meaningful Life Argument.¹³ Part of the Meaningful Life Argument rests on the idea that there are certain goods, goods such as privacy, autonomy, and understanding that only obtain on atheism (or nontheism). If such goods are intimately connected to the meaning of one's life (i.e. one's life pursuits), then it's rational for that individual to prefer that God not exist. Of course, this argument can only justify narrow personal anti-theism. This is because the goods in question are goods for specific individuals, but not necessarily for all persons. Likewise, it shows that God's non-existence is good in certain respects (i.e. with respect to meaning), but not necessarily good overall.

One of the criticisms that Penner levels against the Meaningful Life Argument is that goods like privacy, autonomy, and understanding can still obtain to a high degree on theism. This fact coupled with the other goods uniquely associated with theism make it irrational to endorse the Meaningful Life Argument. While I have objected to Penner's reasoning by arguing that goods like privacy and autonomy only obtain in a complete sense on atheism, he counters that these goods still don't obtain in a complete sense on atheism.¹⁴ However, Penner never considers the fact that the degree to which such goods are experienced differs between theism and atheism. Even if we can never have maximal privacy or autonomy on atheism, these goods still obtain to a higher degree on atheism than theism.

For instance, with respect to the good of privacy one reason to think it obtains to a greater degree on atheism than on theism is based on a divine property called omnismjectivity. Linda Zagzebski argues that the traditional divine attributes of omniscience, omnibenevolence, and omnipotence entail that God

⁹ Thanks to anonymous referee to pressing me to consider the distinction between metaphysical and epistemic possibility.

¹⁰ For a unique solution to this problem see Joshua Mugg, "The Quietest Challenge to the Axiology of God: A Cognitive Approach to Counterpossibles", *Faith and Philosophy* 33, no. 4.

¹¹ See my "The Axiological Solution to Divine Hiddenness", forthcoming.

¹² Kahane, "Should We Want God to Exist?", 674–96.

¹³ Myron A. Penner, "Personal Anti-Theism and the Meaningful Life Argument", *Faith and Philosophy* 32, no. 3 (2015).

¹⁴ "Kirk Loughheed, "Anti-Theism and the Objective Meaningful Life Argument", *Dialogue* 56, no. 2 and Myron A. Penner, "On the Objective Meaningful Life Argument: A Reply to Kirk Loughheed", *Dialogue* 57, no. 1 (2018).

is omnisubjective.¹⁵ This is the idea that God possesses total and perfect empathy with every conscious being. The only difference between God’s experience and the subjective consciousness of a human, say, is that God never forgets that he is in fact God. While omnipresence suggests God is present everywhere, which in some sense denies humans of any physical privacy, omnisubjectivity shows that we have no mental privacy from God either. God literally knows exactly what it is like to be me. My privacy is not violated in this way if God does not exist. While this discussion is brief, it begins to show why it remains plausible to endorse the Meaningful Life Argument in the face of Penner’s criticisms of it.

One idea that assessors of the Meaningful Life Argument never seem to consider is the possible axiological difference between a world with a hidden God and a world where God exists but doesn’t hide. Suppose the goods of atheism can be experienced in a world with a hidden God, but they can’t be experienced in a world where God exists but doesn’t hide. Elsewhere I argue that if this is right, then it’s rational to prefer a world with a hidden God to (i) an atheistic world where there are no theistic goods; and/or (ii) a world where an unhidden God exists without any atheistic goods.¹⁶ Of course, this assumes that there are no theistic goods which obtain exclusively in the world where God doesn’t hide (or at least if there are such goods, that their value isn’t significant enough to outweigh the experience of the atheistic goods in a theistic world where God hides). The following chart explains the relevant comparisons:

Possible World	Ontology	Phenomenology	Value
Atheistic World	God does not exist	Not a world where God doesn’t hide. Possibly a world where God hides.	Atheistic goods No Theistic goods
Hidden Theistic World	God exists and is hidden from humans	Not a world where God doesn’t hide. Possibly an atheistic world.	Experience of Atheistic goods Theistic goods
Unhidden Theistic World	God exists and is not hidden from humans	Not an atheistic world. Not a world where God hides.	Theistic goods No Atheistic goods

Examining the value of these different worlds reveals that the world with a hidden God has a higher value than a theistic world where God is obvious or an atheistic world. This observation supports pro-theism since the world with the highest value is one in which God exists. It likewise supports that the idea that if God exists, God is hidden. This is because as an omniscient, omnibenevolent, and omnipotent being God would tend to maximize the value of any world that he actualizes.¹⁷ So if God exists, then God would hide in order to maximize the good. Not only does this observation support pro-theism, but it constitutes a novel solution to the problem of Divine Hiddenness: God might hide to increase the value of world.

The most promising objection to this line of argument is that it overlooks the comparison between a world where God doesn’t hide and a world where God hides. Arguments from hiddenness often rely on the idea that a world in which God doesn’t hide and makes humans aware of his unconditional love for them (along with his desire for a relationship with them) is *very* different from a world where God hides.¹⁸ So there is a lot of value lost in the move from a world where God doesn’t hide to a world where God hides. In other words, many, if not all, of the theistic goods *do not* obtain in a world where God remains hidden. Likewise, even if they do obtain the *experience* of such goods is so different in a world

15 Linda Zagzebski, “Omnisubjectivity”, in *Oxford Studies in Philosophy of Religion*: (OUP, 2008); Linda Zagzebski, *Omnisubjectivity: A Defense of a Divine Attribute* (Marquette University Press, 2013); Linda Zagzebski, “Omnisubjectivity: Why It Is a Divine Attribute”, *Nova et vetera* 14, no. 2.

16 See my “The Axiological Solution to Divine Hiddenness”, *Ratio* 31 no. 3 (2018).

17 It’s an open question whether God necessarily has to create the best possible world. Indeed some have levelled a prior argument against theism on related considerations: If there isn’t no best world, then God doesn’t exist. Some argue that for any possible world there is always a better world. So there’s no best world God could create, hence God doesn’t exist. This argument is known as the ‘problem of no best world’. But even theists who reject the claim that God needs to create the best still believe that God needs to actualize a very good world.

18 J. L. Schellenberg, *Divine Hiddenness and Human Reason* (Cornell University, 1993).

where God doesn't hide compared to a world where God hides that there is a significant value drop between the two worlds. In this project I explore a response to this line of objection. The response to this objection involves demonstrating the following: (i) that theistic goods can obtain in a world where God hides and; (ii) the experience of theistic goods is the same in both worlds.

III. THEISTIC GOODS IN A WORLD WITH A HIDDEN GOD

I'm now in a position to demonstrate that theistic goods can (or do) obtain in a world where God hides. Part of the challenge with attempting to answer the axiological question with reference to theistic and atheistic goods is that such discussions seem fated to be incomplete. For instance, it's possible that we aren't even aware of certain theistic or atheistic goods. It's also difficult to know what it would take for a list of theistic goods to be sufficiently representative of *all* of the theistic goods. It would be ideal to be able to identify a property of theistic goods that they all have in common and then demonstrate why that property can always be instantiated in a world where God hides. But I don't have any grasp on what such a property would look like, so I won't use that strategy here. Rather, my argumentative strategy is to show that any of the goods associated with theism we're currently aware of can be instantiated in a world where God hides. In what follows I will take four theistic goods oft discussed in the literature and demonstrate that they can obtain in a world where God hides.

1. *Forming a Relationship with God*

One good associated with theism, and of particular importance to those levelling hiddenness arguments, is the good of an intimate relationship with God. Schellenberg contends that God's desire for this relationship is an extremely important reason why God wouldn't hide from us. If God exists then there would be no instances of non-culpable, non-resistant, non-belief. But it seems that there are instances of non-culpable, non-resistant, non-belief. So this constitutes a reason to think God doesn't exist.¹⁹ Relating this back to the axiological question is the idea that the good of a relationship with God isn't possible in a world where God hides. Even if God's existence is compatible with hiding, contra Schellenberg, this is a good that can only manifest itself in a world where God doesn't hide. Thus, this is a good that can only obtain in a world where God is obvious, not in a world where God hides. With reference to this good, then, a world with an unhidden God is more valuable than a world with a hidden God.

As counter-intuitive as it might first appear, it's possible to form a relationship with God even if God is hidden. One could very much doubt that God exists and still have a meaningful relationship with God. This seems evidenced in the private journals of Mother Teresa, where she laments the fact that she doesn't experience God's presence. To show more clearly how this is feasible, Andrew Cullison argues in favour of this possibility in response to the hiddenness argument.²⁰ For instance, Sally could form a relationship with a person with the use of a computer, even if she believes that a computer program is on the other end of the connection. Indeed, there's nothing to preclude this from being an intimate relationship. Maybe it's easier for Sally to form a relationship with a person if she believes a person is *not* on the other end of the connection because she suffers from severe social anxiety. In what can hardly be considered fanciful science fiction in the 21st century, it could soon be possible to form a relationship with a person even though one wrongly thinks they are a very lifelike robot.²¹ Again, it's possible that forming this sort of relationship could be easier for someone with social anxiety. Maybe one is able to form a romantic relationship because one thinks they are merely out on a date with a lifelike robot (and hence aren't nervous), even though they are spending time with a real person.

19 Schellenberg, *Divine Hiddenness and Human Reason*; J. L. Schellenberg, *The Hiddenness Argument: Philosophy's New Challenge to Belief in God* (OUP, 2015).

20 Andrew Cullison, "Two Solutions to the Problem of Divine Hiddenness", *American Philosophical Quarterly* 47, no. 2 (2010).

21 Ignore the question of whether Artificial Intelligence is 'conscious'.

One might object that there is an important disanalogy between forming a relationship with a computer and forming one with a hidden God.²² The hidden God is not responding to Sally in the same way that the computer program responds to her. To make Cullison's initial example relevantly analogous it would have to be similar to a case in which a person isn't sure whether they're conversing with God, having a regular hallucination, or conversing with the being who constructed the program we're inhabiting (i.e. the creator of the Matrix). In all of these cases a genuine relationship is possible, just as someone who thinks solipsism is possibly true can have a genuine relationship with other people (even though she believes such people could be figment of her imagination).²³ In other words, Sally would have to be unsure whether she is conversing with a human or computer and hence not sure where the responses come from if and when she receives them.

However, rather than showing that the cases are disanalogous and hence irrelevant to divine hiddenness, this objection serves to demonstrate that this sort of response is even more plausible. For instance, one might wonder whether a hidden God could even respond to a person while remaining hidden. And if God couldn't respond at all to a person without remaining hidden, then a relationship with a hidden God appears impossible (or at least highly improbable). But the above objection shows just the opposite: God could respond (at least sometimes) to a person and yet remain hidden. For Sally might be unsure whether her correspondent is in fact God, just as it seems Mother Teresa was often unsure. The existence of alternative possibilities such as hallucinations, etc., could cause Sally to doubt whether she is really conversing with God. She's simply unsure whether God exists. And yet, if it turns out God does in fact exist, then Sally is in fact in a relationship with God. This is perfectly intelligible; the alternative explanations for the cause of the responses apart from God actually help to show that it's possible to have a relationship with a hidden God.

2. No Gratuitous Evil

Another good often associated with theism is the good that no gratuitous evil is possible if God exists. In a discussion about why wide impersonal anti-theism might prove difficult to defend Klaas J. Kraay and Chris Dragos observe that even if God can allow evil to occur "God cannot permit any gratuitous evil to occur: on theism, any evil that occurs is permitted either for the sake of obtaining a sufficiently significant, otherwise-unobtainable good, or for the sake of preventing a sufficiently significant, otherwise-unpreventable evil."²⁴ Whether or not gratuitous evil is possible if God exists is not dependent on whether or not God is hidden. Thus, this good can clearly obtain in a world where God isn't hidden.

3. Afterlife

Another good often associated with theism is the afterlife. It's worth noting that theism doesn't logically guarantee an afterlife. Likewise, atheism doesn't logically preclude the possibility of an afterlife.²⁵ But for the sake of argument, assume that this good is unique to theism. Suppose theism guarantees an afterlife.²⁶ Again, if theism guarantees an afterlife, it appears to make no difference whether or not God is hidden. Of course, knowledge of this good may differ between a world where God hides and a world where God doesn't hide as will be discussed below.

4. Cosmic Justice

Finally, cosmic justice is related, but distinct from, the goods of gratuitous evil and the afterlife. This is the good that God's existence ensures that there will be cosmic or final justice. Many atrocities seem to go

²² Thanks to anonymous referee for bringing this objection to my attention.

²³ These examples come from an anonymous referee.

²⁴ Klaas J. Kraay and Chris Dragos, "On Preferring God's Non-Existence", *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 43, no. 2 (2013), 166.

²⁵ Supernaturalism doesn't guarantee an afterlife either. Naturalism might entail that there isn't an afterlife, but it depends on how one defines naturalism.

²⁶ It's an open question whether an afterlife is a good, particularly if it turns out that some people end up in hell. But leave this to the side for now.

unpunished in our world, but in the end God ensures that the scales of justice will be balanced. Affirming this good need not commit one to specific details about how this gets accomplished. Nothing about a hidden God precludes the good of cosmic justice from obtaining. Again, the experience of knowledge of this good may constitute a difference between a world where God doesn't hide and a world where God hides with respect to this good, but that is not what's under discussion in this section.

IV. EXPERIENCE OF THEISTIC GOODS IN A WORLD WITH A HIDDEN GOD

At this stage it might be thought that the axiological solution to divine hiddenness is complete. We've seen that all of the theistic goods mentioned in question can obtain in a world with a hidden God. This fact, coupled with the experience of atheistic goods in such a world make a world with a hidden God more valuable than a world with an unhidden God. But this conclusion is too quick. For while the theistic goods might obtain in a world where God hides, it's unclear whether the *experience* of such goods is the same between a world where God doesn't hide and a world where God hides. And the experience of a good is itself a good (regardless of whether the good actually obtains) and hence impacts the value of the world. Whether someone believes this is wrong is irrelevant within the dialectical context of our discussion. For the axiological solution to divine hiddenness assumes that the experience of goods is valuable. In what follows I will explore the experiential difference of the theistic goods mentioned above between a world with an unhidden God and one with a hidden God, with the exception of the good of forming a relationship with God. This is because the very nature of that good is experiential. If it obtains for a person, then that person necessarily experiences it. Thus, the obtaining versus experience distinction does not apply to the good of forming a relationship with God.

1. No Gratuitous Evil

While if theism entails no gratuitous evil then this obtains regardless of whether God is hidden or unhidden, the good of *experiencing* the fact of no gratuitous evil differs between a world where God doesn't hide and a world where God hides. It's the *awareness* of this good that differs between a world where God doesn't hide and a world where God hides. For it is possible that an evil is not gratuitous even if that isn't clear to observers or experiencers of the particular evil.²⁷ The victim of a horrific attack might believe that the evil she experiences is gratuitous even though it isn't. But let's assume, with Kraay and Dragos, that theism precludes the possibility of gratuitous evil. This means that in a world where God doesn't hide it will be *obvious* that no evil is gratuitous. For in this world it's obvious that God exists and hence obvious that no evil is gratuitous. In this world a victim of horrendous evil will necessarily have awareness that the evil isn't gratuitous. The type of psychological or emotional comfort this awareness provides anyone who suffers surely adds value the world. And this occurs in the world where God isn't hidden.

But awareness of this good is not guaranteed in a world where God hides. This is because it's unclear whether an evil is gratuitous in a world where God hides whether or not God exists. Perhaps theists in a world with a hidden God are able to experience this good, but non-theists (including agnostics) cannot experience this good. So while some people may experience this good in a world with a hidden God, not everyone does as they will a world where God isn't hidden. This signals a value drop from a world where God doesn't hide to a world where God hides, at least with respect to the good of experiencing no gratuitous evil. A world where God doesn't hide has a clear advantage over a world with a hidden God in this regard: knowledge of God entails knowledge of no gratuitous evil.

The simplest way to reject this idea is to deny that theism entails no gratuitous. This strategy will allow one to hold that a person could be fully aware of God's existence and yet unaware that no evil is gratuitous. But I can't appeal to this strategy because it's awareness of gratuitous evil which is the good in question. In either world one would cease being aware of no gratuitous evil and hence the good wouldn't

²⁷ This idea is similar to the sceptical theist's response to evil. See Trent Dougherty and Justin P. McBrayer, eds., *Skeptical Theism: New Essays* (OUP, 2014).

exist. Even if the good didn't exist in a world where God doesn't hide, it also wouldn't exist in a world where God hides. So at best this response would merely eliminate the good from the value comparison.²⁸ The same is true if one appeals to agnosticism about gratuitous evil to solve this problem.

2. *Afterlife*

The experience of the good of an afterlife will only differ between a world where God doesn't hide and a world where God hides if its existence is made clearer to individuals in a world where God doesn't hide. Suppose, as with no gratuitous evil, that theism entails there is an afterlife. If this is so then individuals in a world where God is unhidden are aware of an afterlife and non-theists in a world where God hides will not have this some knowledge of the afterlife. But notice that it is the knowledge of this good *before* death that differs between a world where God doesn't hide and a world where God hides. Once an individual dies, her experience of the afterlife in a world where God doesn't hide and a world where God hides is identical. It's the knowledge of this good before our deaths which is the distinguishing feature between the two worlds. With respect to the good of the experience of an afterlife, then, a world where God doesn't hide has a higher value than a world where God hides.

3. *Cosmic Justice*

Similar considerations to those mentioned about the afterlife are also relevant to the experience of cosmic justice. On various understandings of theism the good of cosmic justice might only occur in the afterlife. Furthermore, it may only occur after humanity or outside of time. If this is right, then again the experience of this good will differ between the two worlds, at least before death. If theism entails cosmic justice, then those in a world where God doesn't hide have full awareness that cosmic justice will be achieved in the universe. Those in a world with a hidden God do not have the same assurance. But again, the difference may only be until after death.

V. COMPARING THE VALUE OF A WORLD WHERE GOD HIDES TO A WORLD WHERE GOD DOESN'T HIDE

Recall that the purpose of showing that theistic goods obtain in a world with a hidden God was to defend the claim that such a world is more valuable than a world where God doesn't hide or an atheistic world. However, after discovering that the experience of these theistic goods (which is a good in itself) differs between the two worlds we are still left wondering what stance to take when comparing the value of the two worlds. In this section I explore two different ways of explaining why there is an axiological difference between the two worlds and why we should reject such explanations.

1. *Experience of atheistic goods is more valuable than the experience of theistic goods*

One might say that the experience of the atheistic goods in a world where God hides outweighs the experience of the theistic goods in a world where God doesn't hide. But there needs to be some principled reason for thinking this is the case. Perhaps one reason is that the experience of the theistic goods is necessarily for a finite amount of time, at least with respect to experiencing the goods of no gratuitous evil, an afterlife, and cosmic justice. For if theism is true, then it is likely that one will eventually have knowledge of the good in question (and hence experience it). However, the objector may respond that this may also be the case with respect to atheistic goods. Such goods will only be experienced for a finite amount of time, especially if there is something like a theistic afterlife. For instance, in a world where God hides one might experience a high degree of privacy because she doesn't believe that God exists. But when she dies she might be unable to escape the reality of the presence of God. While this objection doesn't show

²⁸ It's noteworthy that there are certain theists who deny that God and gratuitous evil cannot co-exist (e.g. Peter van Inwagen and William Hasker).

that a world where God doesn't hide is more valuable than a world where God hides, it does demonstrate the difficulty in attempting to compare the two worlds by appealing to the experience of the goods.

2. *Experience of theistic goods is more valuable than the experience of atheistic goods*

On the other hand, one might argue that a world where God doesn't hide is superior to a world where God hides because the experience of theistic goods is more valuable than the experience of atheistic goods. Again, however, we need a principled reason for thinking that this is true, and none appear to be in the offing. Perhaps if theism is true then the experience of theistic goods is more valuable because they're connected to the Good and/or the True (i.e. God). Likewise if atheism is true maybe the experience of atheistic goods is more valuable because they are more closely connected to the true metaphysical picture of reality. However, we still require more details to support this line of argument. We would need reasons to think that the value of experiencing a good is increased if that good is connected to the true metaphysical picture of the world. Likewise, we're trying to answer the axiological question about what impact God's existence has (or would have) on the world *independently* of the ontological question of whether God exists.

VI. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this discussion of goods and the experience of goods serves to show that the axiological comparison between a world where God doesn't hide and a world where God hides results in a stalemate. It should be clear that this is not an *in principle* stalemate. There could be a difference between the values of the two worlds. Nothing in my discussion entails that a value difference between the two worlds is impossible. Thus far, however, we have no principled reason to favour one world over the other. As more work continues to be done on the axiology of theism perhaps the answer will begin to become clearer. Where does all of this leave us with respect to completing the axiological solution to divine hiddenness? First, it's worth noting that while we can't conclude a world where God hides is more valuable than a world where God doesn't hide, we also can't conclude the opposite. So the axiological solution to hiddenness isn't completely defeated. While we don't have decisive reasons to accept it, we also don't have decisive reasons to reject it. We should suspend judgment about whether the axiological solution to divine hiddenness succeeds.²⁹

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