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The Hidden Love of God and the Imaging Defense

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1. What *Must* a Loving God Do?

When we look out at the world, what must we expect to find if it is truly the case that a perfectly loving God exists? J. L. Schellenberg has argued that, at a bare minimum, we should expect that such a God would ensure that everyone who is capable and open to embarking on a personal relationship with God would believe that God exists.¹ The thought expressed here is that openness to a personal relationship with the beloved belongs to the very nature of a loving being.² Furthermore, it is impossible to be truly open to a personal relationship with the beloved if the lover is unwilling for the beloved to believe that the lover even exists. Thus, by definition, if God is to be loving, God must be willing for all of his human creatures, which are capable and non-resistant to the belief in God's existence, to believe that God is in fact there.³ Moreover, because it belongs to the very idea of divine perfection that God also has perfect knowledge and power, God's perfect love would thus not only be necessarily *willing* to prevent non-resistant non-belief in God's existence, but God's love would also be *able* to prevent such unbelief.⁴ If this form of thinking is correct, then it logically follows—just in virtue of an analysis of what it would mean for there to be a perfectly loving God—that there must be no such thing as humans who are open to forming personal relationships with God, but who fail to believe the proposition that God exists. Perfect love would motivate God to prevent such failures of belief in humans non-resistant to personal relationships with God, and perfect knowledge and power would enable God to ensure that no such failures of belief occur.⁵

If a perfectly loving God exists, then, necessarily, belief in God's existence is evident to anyone cognitively capable and reasonably open to recognizing it. But,

¹ I will be drawing principally from two of Schellenberg's most recent publications explicating and defending the argument from hiddenness. The first is *The Hiddenness Argument: Philosophy's New Challenge to Belief in God* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), and the second is an essay entitled "Divine Hiddenness and Human Philosophy," in *Hidden Divinity and Religious Belief: New Perspectives*, ed. Adam Green and Eleonore Stump (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 13-32. Although a more popular recounting, *The Hiddenness Argument* has the virtue of displaying very clearly the logical structure of Schellenberg's argument and his primary strategies for supporting its premises. "Divine Hiddenness and Human Philosophy," on the other hand, provides a more detailed clarification of the argument in the face of the interpretations and objections put forward by his most influential critics.

² Schellenberg, *The Hiddenness Argument*, 38-51.

³ *Ibid.*, 52-53.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 45, 57.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 56-73.

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Schellenberg observes, that is not what we find when we look at the world. Instead, we find many instances of human beings who are not (or were not) resistant to forming the belief that God exists, but who nevertheless are (or were) unable to believe that God exists or that he is open to a relationship with them. Some such people would very much *like* to believe that God exists and desires a relationship with them, but simply cannot genuinely and honestly come to form that belief.⁶ God remains hidden to them. Others in human history—including our earliest ancestors in human pre-history—have lacked the requisite cultural and religious infrastructure, training, or background to so much as conceive of the existence of a personal and perfect divine being who desires relationship with them. Such people would not have even had the wherewithal to desire relationship with God or recognize God as hidden. Having literally no conception of a perfectly loving divine being, they therefore could not have knowingly resisted an open relationship with that being. Still, we can assume that many such people, if they could have formed the relevant conception of God, would have desired relationship with God. But these facts of divine hiddenness violate what we must expect to find if there really were such a thing as a perfectly loving God. Given the existence of divine hiddenness, we are logically forced to conclude that such a God does not exist.⁷ But if God is supposed to be *essentially* loving, then the non-existence of a loving God entails simply that there is no God.⁸

In putting forth this atheistic argument from the hiddenness of God's existence,⁹ Schellenberg is careful to distinguish it from the atheistic argument from evil. The problem of divine hiddenness, he notes, is not merely a version of the problem of evil, since it does not require us to think of God's hiddenness as *bad*.¹⁰ The phenomenon of non-resistant non-belief in God's existence is not cited as a barrier to belief in God because it is an evil that God ought to prevent. Rather, the phenomenon of non-resistant non-belief is a barrier to belief in God because its existence is logically incompatible with a divine attribute—love—that God is supposed to have essentially. Moreover, it is precisely divine love, and not divine goodness or power or knowledge that generates the problem. Whereas divine goodness or benevolence, for example, aims at the well-being of others, divine love is aimed at a mutual conscious awareness of others in personal interactive relationship with them.¹¹ In other words, the demands of divine love include not merely a pursuit of our highest good, but also a divine pursuit of fellowship or

⁶ Ibid., 74-86.

⁷ Ibid., 86-88.

⁸ Ibid., 102-103.

⁹ For a more formal presentation with numbered premises and the conclusions that follow from them, see *ibid.*, 103; and Schellenberg, "Divine Hiddenness and Human Philosophy," 24-25.

¹⁰ Schellenberg, *The Hiddenness Argument*, 28-31.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 38.

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communion with us, and it is that demand that Schellenberg takes to be logically or conceptually inconsistent with non-resistant non-belief.

Despite the fact that Schellenberg's argument is distinct from the traditional problem of evil, it nevertheless bears a striking structural resemblance to the deductive formulation of that problem.¹² Both purport to be deductive arguments to the conclusion that God does not exist. Both are predicated on a conceptual analysis of divine attributes combined with an empirical premise that is taken to be logically inconsistent with that analysis. Both, that is, take the following form:

1. If God exists, God is essentially F
2. If God is essentially F then, necessarily, P
3. Not-P
4. Therefore, God is not essentially F (from 2 & 3)
5. Therefore, God does not exist (from 1 & 4)

Premise 1 specifies some essential attribute(s) F of God. In the problem of evil F is divine goodness, power, and knowledge, whereas in the problem of hiddenness F is divine love. The second premise is a conceptual analysis of F, which claims that there is some empirical fact P that is *entailed by* F, some state of affairs that *necessarily follows from* F. As Alvin Plantinga shows in *God Freedom and Evil*, the classical formulation of the problem is only made fully deductive once this premise is made explicit.¹³ Once it is made explicit, the deductive or "logical" problem of evil can be seen to claim that if God is essentially perfect in knowledge, power, and goodness, then, necessarily, evil would not exist. On Schellenberg's argument, this premise is explicitly spelled out, but in terms of the claim that perfect love is necessarily open to personal relationship and that openness to personal relationship necessarily precludes non-resistant non-belief. Thus, Schellenberg's claim is that if God is essentially perfect in love, then, necessarily, non-resistant non-believers would not exist.

It is only once we get to premise 3 that we have moved out of conceptual analysis of what would necessarily follow if God were F and into the empirical territory of what is in fact the case. In the logical problem of evil, the empirical claim not-P in premise 3 is that it is not the case that no evil exists (i.e., evil exists), whereas for Schellenberg, the premise not-P is that it is not the case that there is no non-resistant non-belief (i.e. there

¹² Michael Rea and Michael Murray also point out the parity of Schellenberg's current argument with the logical problem of evil. See Michael J. Murray and Michael C. Rea, *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 182.

¹³ Alvin Plantinga, *God, Freedom and Evil* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 12-23.

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are non-resistant non-believers). But if God having the relevant essential attribute *necessarily* requires there is no evil or there is no non-resistant non-belief (premise 2), then finding some evil or some non-resistant non-believers logically entails the conclusion 4, that God does not have an essential or defining attribute F; on the problem of evil this means that God does not have perfect knowledge, power, and goodness, whereas on the problem of hiddenness the entailment is that God is not perfectly loving. But since (according to premise 1) these are essential attributes of God, God lacking the relevant property logically entails the stronger conclusion in 5, that God does not exist.¹⁴

The deductive validity of the argument therefore depends on the inconsistency of that empirical claim with a necessary truth about God given in premise 2. Schellenberg appears to recognize this fact in his most recent formulation of the problem in *The Hiddenness Argument*. There he says that from the premise that “a loving God *would not* permit nonresistant non-belief, it deductively follows that there are no goods, known or unknown, such that for their sake God *might* do so.”¹⁵ A charitable reading requires us to suppose that what Schellenberg means is not that a loving God merely *would not* permit non-resistant non-belief, but that he *could not*. If permitting non-resistant non-belief were something God merely would not do, as a matter of what we have reason to believe God is disposed or inclined to do, given some things we take ourselves to know about God, then we might be able to come up with some further considerations about God or some possible scenarios in which we *could* imagine God in fact permitting non-resistant non-belief for some reason that does not impugn God’s perfect love. Even if it is unlikely for God to permit it, maybe he could—just as we might say that Mother Theresa would not eat a baby, but she could. There is a possible world in which she *does*, but it is just an extremely remote possible world.

If Schellenberg similarly has in mind, not that God remaining hidden from non-resistant non-believers is a conceptual or logical impossibility, but rather that what we can know of God makes the likelihood of remaining hidden vanishingly small, then premise 2 in the above argument would have to be revised. Instead of affirming the

¹⁴ Cf. Schellenberg, *The Hiddenness Argument*, 103; and “Divine Hiddenness,” 25. Michael Rea has pointed out to me in private correspondence that, although the argument as Schellenberg currently defends it takes the form of the deductive problem of evil, his earlier formulation in *Divine Hiddenness and Human Reason* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993) claims that the problem of hiddenness is a “special instance of the *empirical* problem of evil” (p. 9, emphasis original). There Schellenberg appeals to the fact identified by the empirical premise—that non-resistant non-believers exist—as a phenomenon that is both an evil and one that gives us sufficient reason to suppose that God probably does not exist. This formulation of the problem more nearly approximates an *evidential* problem of hiddenness. However, there is also an *existential* problem of hiddenness consisting in God’s permitting us to undergo a subjective condition that is bad for our relationship with God. This paper does not seek to address the evidential or existential problems, but in subsequent work I will aim to extend the defense I outline here to address them as well.

¹⁵ Schellenberg, *The Hiddenness Argument*, 111.

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impossibility of non-resistant non-belief, it would have to say, “If God is essentially loving, then *possibly* there is no non-resistant non-belief” or “If God is essentially loving, then there is *likely* no non-resistant non-belief.” But on any such revision we would no longer have a deductively valid argument. Even if an essentially loving God permits something unlikely, given what we know or can know about divine love, it does not follow that God is not essentially loving or that God does not exist. We should therefore suppose that Schellenberg instead wants us to read premise 2 with the full force of conceptual, logical, or metaphysical necessity in place.¹⁶ If God is essentially loving, then non-resistant non-belief is *impossible*.

Making explicit this formal parallel between the logical problem of evil and Schellenberg’s logical problem of divine hiddenness provides a helpful way of identifying the appropriate strategy for responding to the argument. The parallel should call to mind the strategy for undermining the logical problem of evil made famous by Plantinga’s treatment of it in *God, Freedom and Evil*. Plantinga pointed out that in order to show that premise 2 is false, and thus that the deductive argument fails, all we need to do is undermine its strong modal claim that P is a *necessary* consequence of God’s being essentially F. To do that, it is sufficient to adduce a scenario on which P is *possible* for a God who is essentially F, however remote the possibility might be. Provided that the imagined scenario includes a plausibly coherent possibility that P, we will have a defeater for the claim of premise 2 that P is impossible. Thus, with respect to the logical problem of evil, premise 2 would require that if God is essentially perfectly wise, powerful, and good, then necessarily, no evil exists. But since this entails that there is no possible reason that a God who is essentially perfectly wise, powerful, and good might permit any evil, showing that it is false is as simple as offering a counter-example—a plausibly coherent scenario in which an essentially perfectly wise, powerful, and good God possesses a sufficient reason to permit an instance of evil. Plantinga suggests that a divine interest in human free will is one possible such reason. He is careful to identify this scenario as supplying us with a “defense” rather than a “theodicy” because he does not purport to show that the divine interest in promoting human free will is the *actual* reason a perfectly wise, powerful, and good God in fact permits evil, or even a *likely* reason that God permits evil. He only purports to show that it is a possible reason.¹⁷ But if it is so much as possible, then premise 2 of the deductive argument from evil is false

¹⁶ It will not much matter for the purposes of my argument what sort of necessity is involved here, only that the state of affairs I posit as a defense can be plausibly regarded as possible in the corresponding sense.

¹⁷ Plantinga, *God, Freedom and Evil*, 28-29.

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and the argument fails.¹⁸

Given the formal parity between the logical problem of evil and Schellenberg's problem of hiddenness, a Plantingian defense should likewise be sufficient to undercut Schellenberg's argument. If we can cite a merely possible scenario in which God remains in the relevant sense essentially perfectly loving while nevertheless failing to ensure, for every non-resistant finite person S capable of personal relationship with God, that S believes the proposition that God exists, then premise 2 comes out false and the atheistic conclusion does not follow. Moreover, as was the case with respect to the logical problem of evil, the relevant counter-example need not mark out any actual state of affairs, only a possible one. Many, perhaps most, of the proposed responses to Schellenberg that theists have formulated can be plausibly interpreted as Plantingian defenses.¹⁹ We can read them as possible counter-examples to Schellenberg's claim that a perfectly loving God must not permit non-resistant non-belief, which purport to offer scenarios on which a perfectly loving God could possibly permit non-resistant non-belief. My aim in this paper is to add another Plantingian defense onto the heap, but one of a different sort than is typically given.

2. What *Might* a Loving God Do?

Recall that the argument from hiddenness specifies premises 1 and 2 of the argument schema above in the following way, which I will call H1 and H2:

H1: If God exists, then God is essentially perfectly loving.

H2: If God is essentially perfectly loving, then, necessarily non-resistant non-belief does not exist.

We saw that the kind of necessity involved in H2 is supposed to be a conceptual, logical,

¹⁸ Or, at any rate, it is defused by shifting the burden of proof back onto the atheist to demonstrate that there is something about God's being essentially F that entails the impossibility of P despite the counter-example offered by the Plantingian Defender.

¹⁹ Thus, for example, while the contributors of *Divine Hiddenness: New Essays*, ed. Daniel Howard-Snyder and Paul K. Moser (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001) take themselves to be responding primarily to an evidential rather than logical problem, they all offer some defense of the *compatibility* of divine love with the existence of non-resistant non-belief. Michael Murray offers a free will defense (p. 63), while Laura Garcia (p. 95), William Wainwright (p. 115), and Paul Moser (p. 145) all hold that hiddenness is compatible with an essentially loving God's general plan for the world. In reckoning with Schellenberg's explicit argument for the incompatibility of divine love with the existence of non-resistant non-belief, many of the contributors to the more recent *Hidden Divinity and Religious Belief* (e.g., Moser, Howard-Snyder, and Green) likewise attempt to adduce some plausible scenario in which perfect divine love possibly co-exists with non-resistant non-belief.

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or metaphysical necessity, derived from the very meaning of being essentially perfectly loving. So on what analysis of “perfectly loving” can Schellenberg claim that perfect love excludes the existence of non-resistant non-belief in the lover? Schellenberg derives this analysis by looking, first, at what he supposes love must involve, and then, adding to this his analysis, what *perfect* love must involve. He holds the following three claims L1-L3 about the nature of love relationships between any lover S1 and a beloved S2:

L1. S1 loves S2 only if, when morally and metaphysically possible, S1 is open to a personal relationship with S2, where a personal relationship involves valuing, desiring, and seeking mutual conscious reciprocal interaction between S1 and S2.²⁰

L2. S1 is open to a personal relationship with S2 only if S1 does whatever is morally and metaphysically permissible to ensure that where S2 is capable of a personal relationship with S1 and not resistant to it, S2 stands in a state of belief in relation to the proposition that S1 exists.²¹

It follows from this analysis of love that:

L3. S1 loves S2 only if S1 does whatever is morally and metaphysically permissible to ensure that where S2 is capable of a personal relationship with S1 and not resistant to it, S2 stands in a state of belief in relation to the proposition that S1 exists.

On Schellenberg’s analysis of what it means for God to be an essentially *perfect*

²⁰ Schellenberg claims that love requires a minimal kind of valuing, desiring, and seeking to pursue personal relationship, and further claims that such seeking “normally requires openness” (“Divine Hiddenness and Human Philosophy,” 20). In the case of human love, he acknowledges “possible and generally unusual circumstances in which a lover may lack the resources to accommodate the possible *consequences* of openness, that is, to make them consistent with the flourishing of all relevant parties and of any relationship that may exist or come to exist between them. But since God is not such a lover, we may ignore this qualification hereafter” (ibid, cf. also 29-30; and *The Hiddenness Argument*, 49-50). I have accounted for Schellenberg’s qualification of the relatively limited resources of human lovers by simply building it into his general analysis of love as constrained by moral and metaphysical resources of the lover. Thus, for human lovers, in some cases it is morally or metaphysically impossible to remain open to relationship with the beloved despite valuing, desiring, and seeking to cultivate personal relationship.

²¹ His strategy for securing this analysis is to defend the claim that a lover’s failure to do what is morally or metaphysically possible to ensure that a beloved believe that the lover exists necessarily belongs to the definition of being “not open” to personal relationship. See “Divine Hiddenness and Human Philosophy,” 23, 27; and *The Hiddenness Argument*, 57.

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lover, God must love every finite person.²² Since a perfect God must be a lover of every finite human person, it follows on the above analysis of love that God satisfies L3 and does whatever is metaphysically possible and morally permissible to ensure that every finite person capable of entering into a relationship with God and not resistant to God actually believes the proposition that God exists. But ensuring the beloved's belief in God's existence is both metaphysically possible and morally permissible for a being with perfect knowledge and power such as theists think God is. It necessarily follows, therefore, that a being of that sort, who is also essentially perfect in love, would ensure that every finite being stands in a state of belief in relation to the proposition that God exists.

From the above analysis of what constitutes a perfectly loving God, it does not merely follow that, if such a being exists, there *are* no such things as non-resistant non-believers in God's existence. Rather, what follows is the stronger claim that there could *not possibly be* any non-resistant non-believers in God's existence, which is the claim we find as the second premise of the argument in H2. If God could *possibly* love someone without being open to relationship with that person (contra L1), or if God could be open to relationship with a beloved without doing whatever is morally or metaphysically permissible to ensure that the beloved believes in God's existence (contra L2), then there might well be non-resistant non-believers who are nevertheless loved by God, and H2 comes out false. So the necessity expressed in H2 derives from the claim that L1 and L2—and consequently L3—are necessary conditions for a love relationship. It is this necessity of love's demands that Schellenberg applies to God as an essentially perfect lover in order to secure the necessity of H2—such that God being a perfect lover with a universal scope, sufficient motive, and infinite resources necessitates that all non-resistant humans necessarily come to believe in God's existence and openness to them.

We can therefore undermine H2 by undermining either L1 or L2 (or both) as necessary conditions for a loving relationship, and we can do that by offering a Plantingian possible counter-example to either L1 or L2 (or both). If we can adduce any merely possible instance in which love—even perfect love—might coherently be thought to co-exist with a closure to personal relationship or without the lover necessarily having to ensure that the beloved believes in that lover's existence, then L3 would not necessarily follow. But if L3 does not necessarily follow, then H2 would lose the force of necessity as well, and Schellenberg's argument would fail in just the same way that the logical problem of evil does. Accordingly, many Plantingian Defenders have pursued the route of finding plausibly coherent counterexamples to L1 or L2.

The Plantingian counterexamples currently offered in the literature on hiddenness

²² Ibid., 40. [to which of the prior volumes does this refer?]

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tend to be grounded in a resemblance between God's love for us and our love for one another. "Perhaps," Schellenberg supposes, "someone will suggest that God could be perfectly loving without perpetual openness to relationship if what it is for *God* to be loving is very different from what it is for *us* to be loving. Why should we think that ultimate love would be at all like our love?"²³ Rather than contemplating the prospects for this line of reply, Schellenberg simply dismisses the suggestion as a kind of special pleading:

The short answer is that it had better be, since otherwise we have no business using that word to refer to it! A somewhat longer one [would say that w]hat it would *feel like* (to put it crudely) to be God loving, and more generally *what would happen* in God—this might indeed be very different from what we find in any finite human case. But what it *means* to be loving is determined by facts about human language, which link it to giving and sharing relationship. The concept of love is our concept...If so then of course what I've said applies [to God's love as well as ours]...If not, then...who knows what someone who makes that suggestion [i.e., that God is loving] is talking about?²⁴

Likewise, with the notable recent exception of Michael Rea (on which, more in a moment), Plantingian Defenders have granted this parity between divine and human love. They therefore begin by considering scenarios of human love relationships where it seems possible for love to remain non-defective while permitting the beloved's non-resistant non-belief in the lover's existence. Such instances of hidden human love are then applied to the case of hidden divine love in order to undermine the inference in H2. Thus, for example, just as there are some possible scenarios involving a human beloved and a human lover on which it would be better for the beloved if the knowledge of the lover's existence and openness were hidden, so too there are possible scenarios on which it would be better for us if a divine lover withheld knowledge of God's existence and openness from us.

Defenses that depend on some essential resemblance between the kind of love relationship with us to which God is open and the kind of love relationships to which humans might be open with one another are what we might call *anthropological* defenses. They are grounded precisely in those features of divine-human love relations that we can likewise adduce from human-human love relations. So, to cite one influential

²³ Schellenberg, *The Hiddenness Argument*, 48.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 49.

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example, Daniel Howard-Snyder has suggested that, just like human love relationships can sometimes include short-term expressions of closure to personal relationship (thus undermining the necessity of L1 in an analysis of love), so can God's relationship to us.²⁵

Schellenberg's reply to this sort of strategy has been to remind us that where it is God who is doing the loving, we have to consider what the *perfect love of an ultimate creator* would require us to expect from God, and accordingly we should suppose that if a perfectly loving God had the choice of creating finite persons to whom God could remain open and for whom God could ensure non-resistant belief in his existence, and if the interests of a loving relationship were better served by doing so, then a perfectly loving God would necessarily do so.²⁶ In response, the Plantingian defender might then try to double down on the idea that in the human case we are applying to God, the love relationship could not be improved, perhaps because in creating, God could not or would not set things up to improve the situation or because we can find cases of human love to apply to God in which securing the beloved's belief in the lover's existence would not necessarily be a better or more perfect way to initiate the personal relationship in question.²⁷

Another example of an anthropological Plantingian defense is Michael Rea's recent argument that perfect love cannot be identified with any maximal or idealized version of human love.²⁸ On Rea's view, perfect love would still require the appropriate balancing of another's interests with one's own, and sometimes being a perfect lover requires that we close ourselves to seeking personal relationship with others for the sake of preserving our own personhood. Appropriating an influential argument of Susan Wolf, Rea claims that if "moral sainthood" always demands the sacrifice of one's own interests for the sake of another, then moral saints are not perfect agents, whether they are human or divine.²⁹ The love of a perfect agent, therefore, would only seek to be open to relationship with non-resistant non-believers if this did not require the sacrifice of that agent's own interests. But it is at least possible that in some cases there are conflicts between God's pursuit of God's own projects or interests and remaining open to some non-resistant non-believers. Therefore, as a perfect agent, God possibly prefers to

²⁵ See Daniel Howard-Snyder, "Divine openness and creaturely nonresistant nonbelief," in *Hidden Divinity and Religious Belief*, 126-38.

²⁶ Schellenberg, *The Hiddenness Argument*, 45-48; "Divine Hiddenness and Human Philosophy," 29-30.

²⁷ Howard-Snyder pursues responses along these lines in "Divine openness and creaturely nonresistant nonbelief," 134-136.

²⁸ See Rea, "Divine Love and Personality," chapter 5 of *Divine Hiddenness* (Oxford University Press, forthcoming). Subsequent references are to a pre-publication draft, pages 1-33.

²⁹ Susan Wolf, "Moral Saints," *Journal of Philosophy* 79/8 (August, 1982): 419-39; Rea, "Divine Love and Personality," 11-18.

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preserve God's own personhood by remaining closed to relationship with such persons.³⁰ If so, then L1 is false. Notice, though, that like Howard-Snyder, Rea derives his counter-example by appealing to possible requirements on the preservation of personhood derived from the human case and applied to the divine case. The love of perfect human persons can possibly permit closure to personal relationship, and so too might perfect divine personhood.³¹

We can imagine Schellenberg responding by claiming that the morally permissible conflicts of interest between divine and human persons are constrained by what we owe to one another. Perfect parental love may permit, say, refusing to satisfy my child's interests and well-being when, upon my return from a stressful day at the office, I need to rest for a moment alone before commencing to play with her. But given that I have adequate resources and opportunity, and in the absence of any discernible benefit she might derive, there are no interests of mine that could morally justify my refusing to feed her to the point of her starvation. Similarly, given the asymmetry of power and dependence between God and God's creatures, and the divine choice whether to create any finite beings whose good requires relationship with God or not, it seems as if we have better reason than not to regard it as a morally irresponsible defect of a loving God to neglect the basic good of God's creatures for the sake of other divine interests, known or unknown.³² And likewise, I am sure that there are strategies that are open to

³⁰ "It is not that having distinct interests, projects that further those interests, and a personality expressive of them are necessary conditions on personhood. Rather, the idea is that these things comprise a central aspect of who one is, and lacking them is a deficiency that somehow diminishes one's personhood. If this is right, then the view that God is maximally devoted to human welfare is inconsistent with the idea that God is genuinely and perfectly personal: it implies that either God is perfect but not really or fully personal, or God is personal but importantly deficient as a person" (Rea, "Divine Love and Personhood," 13-14).

³¹ Thus, while Rea attempts to differentiate divine love from human love, the difference turns out to be in respect of the *idealization* of human love, rather than an explication of any difference in the *kind* of love God exhibits from the sort humans exhibit. Instead, Rea's defense appeals to self-preservation in one's projects and interests as a common constraint on both perfect human and perfect divine personhood. As per Wolf, moral sainthood "seems to require either the lack or denial of the existence of an identifiable personal self" (Wolf, "Moral Saints," 424), and this is true, Rea supposes, "regardless of whether the 'self' in question is human or divine" (Rea, "Divine Love and Personality," 13).

³² I owe this line of criticism to Jordan Wessling. See his "Michael Rea on Love and Divine Personality" <http://analytictheology.fuller.edu/michael-rea-love-divine-personality/> (February 2, 2017). Wessling asks us to "[c]onsider a relevantly analogous case were a human accumulates twenty cats, knowing full well that he cannot care for them. We would fault him not for occasionally choosing his own interests over the cats but for taking them into his care when he knows he hasn't the resources to meet their most basic needs. Such a person hardly loves the cats... Yet here we are, in a world filled with people who seek God with no response. Doesn't this provide *some* evidence against the existence of a loving God? It's difficult to confidently answer 'no.'"

The stronger response available to Schellenberg is just that the problem of moral sainthood in the context of moral obligations to dependents necessarily demands one's failure to meet one's moral obligations to *both* oneself *and* to one's dependents. Avoiding the introduction of a deficiency in one's personhood in such situations requires settling the dilemma by preferring to satisfy one's obligation to

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Rea to reply.

But surprisingly few Plantingian defenders have attempted to show that L1 or L2 fail, not on the basis of what a perfectly loving divine person might have in common with any instances of human loving persons, but rather on the basis of what *differentiates* divine personal love from human personal love. This would be to give a properly *theological* Plantingian defense rather than an anthropological one. A theological Plantingian defense aims to adduce a possible scenario that undercuts the alleged necessity about love claimed by L1 or L2, but the grounds for the relevant counterexample are not derived by generalizing from the case of human personal relationships and applying what we find there to the divine case. Instead, I will grant that it might well be the case with respect to human love that such love necessitates openness to personal relationship with the beloved and, further, that such an openness necessitates that the lover ensures that the beloved believes in the lover's existence.

My claim, however, is that things stand differently in the case of divine love. While I will grant L1 with respect to God, that perfect love necessarily requires some kind of expression of openness to personal relationship, I shall deny L2 only in the divine case. Whereas a perfected form of loving relationship that humans enjoy with one another might necessitate that the lover always ensures that the beloved believes in the lover's existence whenever morally or metaphysically permissible, the perfected form of loving relationship that God enjoys with humans does not require this. It is at least possible that there is a unique kind of personal relationship that can only be initiated and sustained with humans by God *qua* God, wherein God's openness to personal relationship with humans is precisely an openness to this unique sort of personal relationship. Further, it is possible that non-resistant non-believers in the proposition that God exists can make a start on this kind of personal relationship with God just as well (or, in some cases, perhaps better) than can non-resistant believers in God's existence. If we can

oneself over one's obligation to one's dependent. But, *ex hypothesi*, God is not merely perfect in personhood but also an essentially *morally perfect* person. For a person such as that, a failure to meet a genuine moral obligation (even an exculpating failure) is by definition impossible. God must therefore refuse to create a world in which God is required to morally fail to meet God's obligations to finite persons, even if doing so has the exculpating justification that it is for the sake of preserving divine personhood. If an essentially morally perfect God who is also perfectly loving exists, there should be no such thing as dependents to whom God fails to meet God's moral obligations, and this includes God's obligations to remain open to those non-resistant non-believers that God creates as objects of divine love. If a perfectly moral and loving God chooses to create a world, it must therefore be one without a conflict of interest between God's obligations to Godself and those created for divine love. Creating a world in which no such conflict arises would not thereby make God a merely "opportunistic" saint (contra Rea, "Divine Love and Personhood," 15), because given the moral perfection of the divine nature there would simply be no alternative worlds open to God to create. Nor is this to beg the question against the notion of perfect love, but rather to point out that for any person who is *both* morally perfect and perfectly loving (such as God), that person's moral perfection constrains the ability to express perfect love.

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describe a scenario on which this is merely possible then we would have a properly theological rather than an anthropological Plantingian defense sufficient to undercut the hiddenness argument.

So what type of personal relationship might God uniquely intend for humans, the best kind of initiation into which would not necessarily require their belief in God's existence? On at least one possible way of articulating a Christian conception of God's relationship to humanity, given in Genesis 1:26, God creates humanity for the intended purpose of *imaging* God. In the remainder of the paper, therefore, I will spell out divine image-bearing as a distinctively divine form of loving relationship that forms the paradigm of the conscious reciprocal interactive relationship between God and humans. I will argue that this kind of divine-human love relationship is both distinct from human relationships of friendship, spousal love, or parenthood, and that God's manifesting openness to the personal imaging relationship is compatible with permitting the beloved's non-resistant non-belief in God's existence, whether or not non-resistant non-belief turns out to be compatible with any perfected version of those human love relationships.

3. Divine Love as Imaging

On one reading of the possible world depicted in the *Genesis* account, God makes the whole of the created order and acts as a beneficent ruler over the creaturely domain.³³ God makes the human creature to *resemble* or *mirror* God's beneficent rule over the created order.³⁴ In other words, to have a human nature is to be the sort of thing that God intends to be in some respect like God in cultivating, nurturing, caring for, and delighting in creation. But humans are still creatures, they are not just little versions of God but rather creaturely resemblances of God *qua* providential ruler.³⁵ It is for this reason that God makes humans to exist as a society, because mirroring God's providential care for

³³ Commenting on *Genesis* 1's opening line, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (1:1, Revised Standard Version. All subsequent biblical translations are taken from the RSV), Bill Arnold notes, "There can be no victory enthronement motif because God's victory was never in doubt; rather God has never *not* been enthroned...he has simply never been *less than* sovereign." See *Genesis: New Cambridge Bible Commentary* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 32.

³⁴ "Let us make man [sic] in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth. So God created man [sic] in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them" (*Genesis* 1:26-27).

³⁵ Arnold again remarks, "The image of God is about the exercise of rulership in the world. While it may be objected that an entire species of humans cannot stand in God's place as an individual kind, it seems likely that the office of God's representative has been 'democratized' in 1:26-27" (Arnold, *Genesis*, 45).

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creation confronts creatures with a coordination problem that God does not face.³⁶ It is also for this reason that God endows humans with capacities for rational, moral, and social growth, because these are necessary capacities for resembling God within creaturely limits. So, at a minimum, God's relationship to humanity is intended as a relationship of inviting something creaturely to resemble something divine. Imaging in this sense therefore exhibits both a kind of symmetric relationship to God and a kind of asymmetric relationship to God. It is symmetrical insofar as humans are persons who, like God, are constituted as minds and wills, and like God are capable of employing mind and will to serve the best interests of creation.³⁷ But it is asymmetrical insofar as human persons are also creatures who depend upon divine judgment to care for creation as God cares for it, and insofar as humans are creatures alongside the rest of creation, receiving divine care as well as channeling it.³⁸

So humans are divine images whose highest good is to so resemble the divine mind and will within their creaturely limits, and to do so well rather than badly. The principal way in which God engages humans to cultivate this resemblance relation is by way of the goodness and beauty of creation itself.³⁹ As many theologians of the early Christian church taught the significance of the creation account, the inherent value of the

³⁶ A 'democratized' human rule that approximates God's care over the whole of the human domain requires localization at the site of that rule, and this is why the *Genesis* narrative issues the command to "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth" (1:28) before issuing the command to "subdue" and "exercise dominion" over it.

³⁷ Thus, the depiction of the human as not merely formed from "the dust of the ground" but also as having the "breath" of divine life breathed into him (*Genesis* 2:7). God is represented as equipping humans for their vocation of mediating God's own rule through granting and guiding powers of mind and will that approximate those exhibited by God in creation. Thus, just as God spoke the world into being, God commands Adam to speak the names of the animals, and "whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name" (2:19).

³⁸ The *Genesis* narrative displays the symmetry of human fellowship with divine rule in naming the animals as a kind of cooperation of God's creative act of speaking and in keeping and tilling the garden on God's behalf (2:14, 19). It displays the asymmetry of human dependence on God in the requirement God imposes on Adam to refrain from eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in the center of the garden (2:17). The significance of the prohibition seems to be that the power of creaturely governance God shares with humans cannot be exercised according to judgments about good and evil derived autonomously from God, but must rather be exercised with recognition that such judgments can come from God alone. See Arnold, *Genesis*, 59.

³⁹ This way of reading the significance of God's self-reflection in the act of creation is a pervasive feature of the early Christian theological tradition. For example, consider the fourth-century church father Gregory of Nyssa, expanding on his brother Basil of Caesarea's commentary on *Genesis* in "On the Making of Man," trans. Henry Austin Wilson, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, vol. 5, second series (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 398: "For since the most beautiful and supreme good of all is the Divinity Itself, to which incline all things that have a tendency towards what is beautiful and good, we therefore say that the mind, as being in the image of the most beautiful, itself also remains in beauty and goodness so long as it partakes as far as is possible in its likeness to the archetype."

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world is presented to humans as manifestations of God's presence to us,⁴⁰ and such manifestations are given to us for our cultivation of divine image-bearing. When we respond appropriately to the manifestations of God's goodness and beauty in creation, we thereby partner with God in the formation of our minds and wills to achieve greater resemblance to God.⁴¹ In doing that, moreover, humans enjoy a kind of communion with God, a kind of intimate sharing in the divine mind and will, so that we may come to find God uniquely formed within our own individual personhood.⁴²

Does divine imaging count as a loving personal relationship? It seems to me that by Schellenberg's lights it counts as a personal relationship, insofar as it counts as a conscious and reciprocal relationship between a divine and a human agent, and it counts as a love relationship insofar as it is one that God values for its own sake.⁴³ Moreover, we can see that it is a relationship in which God values each individual person for their own sake, since each individual's mode of bearing the divine image is the unique way of manifesting that person's humanity.⁴⁴ It also counts as a kind of love relationship according to a traditional analysis on which love involves both union with the beloved and the pursuit of the interests or highest goods of the beloved for its own sake.⁴⁵ Imaging in this sense thus exhibits a loving personal relationship of love when instantiated by God toward humanity. However, it does not similarly count as an instance of love when instantiated by humans in their relationships with one another. When we

⁴⁰ Again, Gregory of Nyssa, in "The Second Book against Eunomius (Translation)," trans. Stuart George Hall, in *Gregory of Nyssa: Contra Eunomium II*, ed. Lenka Karfiková, Scot Douglass, and Johannes Zachhuber (Leiden: Brill, 2004), Book II, §§222–24: "And because as the Apostle says, 'His eternal power and divinity is seen, perceived from the creation of the world,' therefore the whole creation, and above all the ordered display in the heavens, by the skill revealed in generated things demonstrates the wisdom of their Maker. What he seems to me to want to explain to us is the evidence of visible realities that what exists has been wisely and skillfully prepared and abides forever by the power of the Governor of the universe. The very heavens themselves, he says, by displaying the wisdom of their Maker, all but utter sound as they cry out and proclaim the wisdom of their Designer, though without sound. One may hear them instructing us as if in speech, 'As you look to us, you men, to the beauty and the greatness in us, and to this perpetually revolving movement, the orderly and harmonious motion, I always in the same paths and invariable, contemplate the one who presides over our design, and through the visible beauty let your mind rise to the original and invisible Beauty. For nothing in us is ungoverned or self-moving or self-sufficient, but every visible thing about us, every perceptible thing, depends upon the sublime and ineffable Power'" (107-108).

⁴¹ For a more careful defense of the coherence of this idea, see the account I offer, which is also an attempt to retrieve and contemporize the picture I find articulated in Gregory of Nyssa, in Chapter 9 of Sameer Yadav, *The Problem of Perception and the Perception of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015), 394-432.

⁴² See Yadav, *The Problem of Perception*, 449.

⁴³ Schellenberg, "Divine Hiddenness and Human Philosophy," 19.

⁴⁴ That is, goodness and beauty responsiveness can be both objective and person-dependent. See Yadav, *Problem of Perception*, 424-26.

⁴⁵ See Rea's summary of divine love as willing union with us and desiring our good ("Divine Love and Personality," 5).

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attempt to reproduce our own image in one another as such, it does not count as seeking one another's highest good, nor as valuing another for her own sake. God is the only one whose mode of agency merits being reproduced in the human person.⁴⁶ Imaging is therefore a uniquely loving personal relationship that is instantiated in God's love for us. It is only instantiated in our love for one another insofar as humans can become divine means or vehicles for forming us into the divine image.⁴⁷

The relevant question for Schellenberg's argument on this picture is whether it is possible for God to be open to being imaged in a non-resistant non-believer. In order to be perfectly loving, does God's openness to imaging the divine self in the human person necessarily require God to ensure that the beloved believes that God exists? Howard-Snyder observes that it is possible to be aware of a thing *de re* (i.e., to register its presence) without knowing or even believing that you are aware of it *de dicto* (i.e., without being able to conceptually or propositionally identify that which is present to you): "You can be aware of Jimmy Carter without being aware that Jimmy Carter is the one you are looking at."⁴⁸ Similarly, it is possible for humans to be aware of God's presence and agency within creation that calls to us to resemble God in mind and will, without being aware *that* the various manifestations of goodness and beauty in creation are God's call to you. As William Wainwright puts it:

If I don't believe that God exists, I can't respond to God *under that description*. It doesn't follow that I can't respond *to God*. In the *Symposium*, Plato argues that our response to goods is (or can be) a response to *the Good*. According to traditional Christianity, however, *God* is the Good.⁴⁹

Moreover, it is possible to consciously recognize oneself as engaged in moral or

⁴⁶ As Jesus puts it in *Mark* 10:18: "Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone." See also Augustine, "The Nature of the Good (*De Natura Boni*)," in *Augustine: Earlier Writings*, ed. and trans. J. H. S. Burleigh (London: Westminster John Knox Press, 1953), 326-48.

⁴⁷ Expressions of human love for one another are thus instances of the love of God "shed abroad in our hearts" (*Romans* 5:5).

⁴⁸ Howard-Snyder, "Divine openness and creaturely nonresistant nonbelief," 138. See also Trent Dougherty and Ted Poston, "Divine hiddenness and the nature of belief," *Religious Studies* 43/2 (2007): 183-98, 185.

⁴⁹ Wainwright, "Jonathan Edwards and the Hiddenness of God," in *Divine Hiddenness: New Essays*, 113. There is no one way to defend a platonistic conception of creaturely sharing in divine goodness of the sort Wainwright here attributes to Edwards. For that conception is not itself a substantive metaphysical thesis but rather the consequence of some such thesis. For various different ways of spelling out and defending a metaphysics of value that can accommodate the relevant kind of sharing in divine goodness, see, e.g., Robert Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); Mark Murphy, *God and Moral Law: On the Theistic Explanation of Morality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); and Yadav, *The Problem of Perception and the Experience of God*, 393-456.

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spiritual formation without recognizing that that one is consciously engaged in a reciprocal relationship with God. There can be what Wainwright calls an “extensional equivalence” in the conduct and intentions of one’s responsiveness to the manifestations of divine goodness and beauty in the world.⁵⁰ In the early Christian commentary tradition, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Solomon were read successively as a training manual to move us from a merely *de re* acquaintance with God via creaturely gifts to a *de dicto* recognition that it is indeed nothing in creation per se, but only God who is being formed in our souls by way of our engagements with creation, thus initiating a more mature pursuit of intentional relationship with God that is both *de re* and *de dicto*.⁵¹ If it is possible that a perfectly loving God can be open to the personal relationship of imaging by way of ensuring for his beloved a merely *de re* awareness of his existence, then L2, and hence H2, would be false.

So, on this picture, it is at least possible for God to be open to personal relationship with every human without ensuring their belief that God exists. But we might still consider the idea that it would be *better* if there were no non-resistant non-believers. This is just how Schellenberg responds to Plantingian defenses about the possibility of divine closure or divine tolerance of non-resistant non-belief. He suggests that since God is the one who set up the world in the first place, a loving God who aims at relationship with his human creatures could choose to set it up with no non-resistant non-believers in the proposition that God exists—i.e., such that God’s openness to personal relationship ensures that no one ever lacks both *de dicto* and *de re* awareness of God.⁵² Alternatively, a perfectly loving God could allow for merely *de re* awareness of God’s existence but set things up such that there are no non-resistant non-believers whose *de re* awareness fails to develop into a *de dicto* awareness of God’s existence. The idea is that since any loving relationship is clearly better served by having both a *de dicto* and a *de re* awareness of the lover than by having a merely *de re* awareness, God could not create a world that includes for some people a merely *de re* awareness and still remain a perfect lover.⁵³ In that case, divine love manifest as imaging would not prove any exception to L2.

But we can question the idea that God’s desire for an imaging relationship with humans is better served by making a world without any merely *de re* awareness of God. Suppose, for example, that every possible world in which God creates free humans

⁵⁰ Wainwright, 114.

⁵¹ See Martin Laird, “Under Solomon’s Tutelage: The Education of Desire in the *Homilies on the Song of Songs*,” *Modern Theology* 18, no. 4 (October 2002): 507-525.

⁵² Schellenberg, *The Hiddenness Argument*, 45-46.

⁵³ The idea is that God should be able to achieve within a relationship characterized by *de dicto* belief in God anything that could be achieved with a merely *de re* awareness of God. See Schellenberg, “Divine Hiddenness and Human Philosophy,” 29.

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involves a Fall from God's original intention of imaging Godself in humanity.⁵⁴ Suppose, further, that the Fall in question damages human minds and wills in such a way that *de dicto* awareness of God adds nothing to their capacity or inclination to embark upon a personal relationship of divine image-bearing with God. That is, a *de dicto* awareness might prove an obstacle for the fallen person's motivation to move from mere non-resistance to a reciprocal openness to the God who desires relationship with that fallen person. It might be, for example that, *post-lapsum*, one must first become seduced by the enjoyment of a merely *de re* encounter with divine self-manifestation under a non-divine guise. That encounter could be better suited to priming the beloved with an appropriate kind and degree of asymmetric dependence upon God that would enable her to form a proper *de dicto* belief in God—one that is most conducive to a more intentional pursuit of symmetric relationship to God as image-bearer. That is, it might be that an anonymous *de re* personal acquaintance primes one for intimate *de dicto* personal acquaintance.⁵⁵ If that is a possible state of affairs, then it might be that God's perfect love for humanity is not any better served by a universal *de dicto* belief in God's existence. It still may well be the case that ensuring belief in the lover's existence is a preferable situation in various other kinds of personal relationships, like filial love, spousal love, or parental love. But that is not necessarily true of the imaging relation, and on a sufficiently well-worked out theology of God's relationship to humanity we can see how L2's *de dicto* requirement for openness to personal relationship might be false. It would therefore appear that L2 is possibly false in the divine case, and at best merely possibly true. But then we have to emend H2 to read, "If God is perfectly loving then, possibly, God ensures that there are no non-resistant non-believers." But clearly, without the force of necessity in place, the empirical premise 3 fails to contradict anything we *must* expect of divine love, and the conclusion that a perfectly loving God does not exist does not follow.

However, the above reply would only be sufficient to defeat L2, and thus provide a Plantingian defense against H2 if a perfectly loving God would not *also* desire other, non-imaging forms of personal relationship that *would* benefit from there being non-resistant non-belief in God's existence *de dicto*. So Schellenberg might concede that God is open to the uniquely divine loving relationship of imaging but hold that a perfectly loving God must *also* be open to, say, the divine analogue of human filial, spousal, or parental love, where these analogues must satisfy L2. After all, the very same scriptural witness that leads us to develop the image-bearing possibility also supposes that God

⁵⁴ See, for example, chapter 7 of Plantinga, *God Freedom and Evil*, on "transworld depravity," 49-53.

⁵⁵ This is something like the point Howard-Synder makes, but with the crucial difference that "intimate *de dicto* personal acquaintance" is for me cashed out in terms of a conceptual or propositional knowledge of God's imaging in one's person, not in terms of the kind of intimacy characteristic of human relations of parental, filial, or spousal love.

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wishes to befriend us,⁵⁶ that God is a jealous lover,⁵⁷ that God is our heavenly Parent.⁵⁸ I do not think that is a promising line to take, for at least two reasons. First, there is no reason to suppose that a perfectly loving God is under any obligation to love creatures in every way it is possible to love creatures, only that God intends some sort of loving personal relationship with them. Second, on the picture I have been presenting, God's desire for union with us and for our highest good are suited to our nature, the kind of things we are, as (*ex hypothesi*) divine image-bearers. Accordingly, we can hold that it is possible that the personal relationship God desires for us is not filial, spousal, or parental love, but only imaging love.

Still, this may not be a terribly satisfying line to take for those espousing the very Abrahamic faiths from which an imaging defense derives. As a proponent of the scriptural witness in question, I think a further reply is available, according to which these other forms of love are not to be taken literally, but precisely as metaphors for the imaging relation. Speaking particularly about the Hebrew Bible or Christian Old Testament, when Scripture uses filial and spousal language to describe God's love for us, it intends to display the symmetric relation between God and us as creaturely resemblances of God who thereby enjoy a kind of fellowship, joint attention and vocation, and intimate co-naturality with God.⁵⁹ When Scripture uses parental language to describe God's love for us, it intends to display the asymmetric relationship of dependence upon God that belongs to our bearing the divine image.⁶⁰ So in conveying the divine desire for filial, spousal, and parental union with us, God is conveying different dimensions of the same divine desire for being imaged in us.

We might go further and say that inter-human relationships of filial, spousal, and parental love are not only means of achieving the creaturely solidarity and cooperation required to care for God's creation in resemblance to God. They are in fact creaturely ways of imaging the image-bearing relation. The Platonists thought that when we desire sexual union with a lover, for example, we are just mistaking the immaterial beauty we perceive for its material instantiation, and therefore trying to unite with it in the wrong

⁵⁶ Abraham, we are told, "was called the friend of God" (*James 2:23*).

⁵⁷ "I will betroth you to me forever; I will betroth you to me in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love, and in mercy" (*Hosea 2:19*).

⁵⁸ "Have we not all one Father? Has not God created us?" (*Malachi 2:10*) and "Father of the fatherless and protector of widows is God in his holy habitation" (*Psalms 68:5*).

⁵⁹ Thus, in passages concerned with God as friend or jealous lover, the context reveals that what is at stake is covenantal commitment to the peculiar sort of partnership with God's people in which they display God's justice, mercy, faithfulness and love in care for one another, their fellow creatures, and the environment.

⁶⁰ Thus, in passages concerned with God as parent, the context reveals that what is at stake is human dependence upon divine judgment regarding the parameters of proper responsiveness to the divine call to goodness and beauty, which is mediated in the world.

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way.⁶¹ But maybe the picture is rather that when we engage in any kind of loving human relationship, we are engaged in a creaturely analogue of God's own free desire to be reproduced in another. More radically, perhaps one way that Christians should interpret the significance of God's incarnation as Jesus of Nazareth is to regard him as a creaturely analogue of a free divine desire that we be reproduced in God's image.

4. Conclusion

The suggestion that it is possible to construe God's love for us strictly as a *sui generis* relation of imaging divine goodness and beauty within us raises important questions about its existential and theological viability. But while important, those concerns are immaterial to the primary thesis I have advanced here, which is just that it is conceptually, logically, and metaphysically possible that perfect divine love for humanity is the kind of love expressed by the relation of divine image-bearing. If that is so, then there might well be non-resistant non-believers to whom God stands in perfect loving relations in God's openness to being imaged in them, whether or not they stand in a state of belief with respect to the proposition that God exists, and Schellenberg's deductive argument from hiddenness fails for lack of support of H2. One of the benefits of taking this theological route for a Plantingian defense, as opposed to the anthropological route pursued by, for example, Howard-Snyder's or Rea's analogies of human closure to relationship, is that it offers a principled way of appealing to sameness and difference in comparing human agency and personhood to divine agency and personhood.

On the one hand, we ought to expect that God's agency and personhood transcends the sorts of agency and personhood humans value in our relationships to one another, while on the other hand we ought to expect that God's agency and personhood is in some way immanent to what we value in our relationships to one another. The imaging relation satisfies both of these intuitions at once.⁶² Further, creating space for this distinctively theological defense against the problem of hiddenness has the

⁶¹ This is the Platonic insight that we found Wainwright observing above from the *Symposium*. But whereas the Platonic picture did not characterize the manifestations of the Good and our engagements with it as *personal*, the particular Christian development of the Platonic picture did. A theology of divine image-bearing of the sort I have adumbrated here was precisely the result of that development.

⁶² My worry about Rea's approach in *Divine Hiddenness*, on the other hand, is precisely that it seems to me to satisfy at most one of these intuitions. For, in his "two pronged" approach, he first argues in chapter 4 ("Divine Transcendence") for the thesis that divine love might transcend human love and as a result might not be identifiable in terms of our filial, parental, or spousal frameworks for thinking about love. But it seems to me that this functions as a purely negative gesture, without any substantial picture of what it might therefore mean for God to have a personally loving relationship with humans. Then, in chapter 5 ("Divine Love and Personality"), he offers his anthropological defense against moral sainthood as an *alternative* to his development of the transcendence intuition, for those who would prefer to bracket the consideration of God's love as categorically different from ours. The imaging defense, on the other hand, specifies both the difference and the sameness that we should expect from the notion of a transcendent *and* personally loving God.

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unexpected consequence of supplying us with possible reasons to prefer some theisms over others. Those of us who understand divine love in terms of imaging can wield Schellenberg's argument against those theists who characterize divine love strictly in terms of human love. We can use it to argue that if a perfectly loving God exists, either that perfectly loving God has made us in the divine image, or else God does not exist for just the reasons Schellenberg adduces precisely by relying on an anthropologically grounded analysis of divine love.⁶³

⁶³ In other words, the replies that I have offered on behalf of Schellenberg against e.g., Howard-Snyder or Rea can also be wielded by the Theological Plantingian Defender who advocates an imaging defense against all manner of Anthropological Plantingian Defenders.