

## **DIVINE HIDDENNESS AND THE SUFFERING UNBELIEVER ARGUMENT**

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**Abstract.** In this essay, I propose two arguments from Thomas Aquinas's reflection on theism and faith to rebut Schellenberg's claim that divine hiddenness justifies atheism. One of those arguments, however, may be employed so as to re-propose Schellenberg's conviction, which is crucial to his argument, that there are 'non-resistant' or 'inculpable' unbelievers. I then advance what I call the *suffering unbeliever argument*. In short, the unbelievers mentioned by Schellenberg are expected to suffer because of their non-belief, which — as Schellenberg says — prevents them from achieving the greatest possible well-being. If they suffer, however, they cannot consider themselves *unbelievers*, since one cannot suffer from not having been given a certain good if one believes that the good in question has never existed. If they do not suffer, on the other hand, there is simply nothing for which they can consider themselves *inculpable* (and God *culpable*).

### **I. INTRODUCTION**

According to John Schellenberg, if God exists, he would be a perfectly loving being, and, consequently, would grant everyone an opportunity to have a reciprocal relationship of love with him. This should be the greatest good for us, given God's existence. To this end, God would make his existence so evident that there can be no reasonable or inculpable lack of belief in him. According to Schellenberg, however, there are those who do not believe though they do not resist divine revelation. They are 'inculpable', which implies that God is 'culpable', because, although he is omnipotent and omniscient, he does not provide them with the opportunity to believe and consequently achieve the greatest possible good. God, however, can only be seen as a perfectly good being; consequently, God does not exist.<sup>1</sup> In Schellenberg's view, therefore, the lack of sufficient evidence — not only rational but also experiential — is, in itself, proof of God's non-existence, although this has been acknowledged only in recent times.<sup>2</sup>

In the course of a two-decade debate on Schellenberg's formulation of the problem of divine hiddenness (hereafter: the DHA), a number of thinkers have objected — among other things — that there may be several reasons why God does not make his existence more evident. Some have pointed out that God may ensure our happiness and ultimate well-being in a way that is, at first sight, incomprehensible to us. For Paul Moser and Daniel Howard-Snyder, for example, 'the Jewish-Christian God hides at times for a range of reasons, not all of which seem clear to humans.'<sup>3</sup>

1 See J. L. Schellenberg, *The Wisdom to Doubt: A Justification of Religious Skepticism* (Cornell Univ. Press, 2007), 195f. It is debated to exactly which theism Schellenberg's view can be consistently ascribed. Schellenberg concedes that the claim that God should be perceived as all loving might be considered 'a claim only Christians have any reason to accept' (10). And J.J. Ross says that, as a Jew, he hesitates 'to follow the notion that God is 'perfectly loving' in the sense described by Schellenberg' (Jacob Ross, "The Hiddenness of God — A Puzzle or a Real Problem?", in *Divine Hiddenness: New Essays*, ed. Daniel Howard-Snyder and Paul Moser (Cambridge Univ. Press, 2002), 182). For the sake of argument, however, I shall assume Schellenberg's claim, as other authors have already done (see Travis Dumsday, "Divine Hiddenness and Special Revelation", *Religious Studies* 51, no. 2 (2015), 258 footnote 1).

2 See J. L. Schellenberg, "Divine Hiddenness", in *A Companion to Philosophy of Religion*, ed. Charles Taliaferro, Paul Draper and Philip Quinn (Blackwell, 2010), 509.

3 Daniel Howard-Snyder and Paul Moser, "Introduction: The Hiddenness of God", in *Divine Hiddenness: New Essays*, ed. Daniel Howard-Snyder and Paul Moser (Cambridge Univ. Press, 2002). These authors mention a list of possible explanations

In this essay, I propose to look at two arguments from Thomas Aquinas's reflection — one regarding theism in the first section and the other regarding the Christian faith in the second section — to rebut the DHA.<sup>4</sup> The latter, however, may be employed so as to re-propose Schellenberg's conviction, which is crucial to his argument, that there are 'non-resistant' or 'inculpable' unbelievers. I then advance what I call the *suffering unbeliever argument*.

In the first section, I consider Schellenberg's claim that a perfectly loving God, in order to give everyone the opportunity to enjoy a positive relationship with him, is expected to make his existence more obvious. Aquinas would certainly share the conviction that a totally loving God is expected to offer such an opportunity to all of us. However, Aquinas does not claim to determine what exactly an omnipotent and omniscient God should do to satisfy such an objective. His view, namely, that we can reasonably assess only the *necessary end* of God's operations, whereas the same cannot be said of the *means* that God chooses to that end, seems to be more consistent than Schellenberg's view with the conception of God as transcendent and superior to us.

In the second section, I appeal to Aquinas's thesis — which he draws from the Christian revelation — that God is expected to grant us readiness to believe the divine revelation, and not evidence for theism. This view seems to exhibit more consistency than Schellenberg's with the idea that God is expected to grant us a love-relationship with him. Aquinas's readiness to believe, in fact, is almost spontaneously relatable to a love-relationship, which implies trust and reliance, while the same cannot be said of Schellenberg's search for evidence, without which Schellenberg does not want to put confidence in God.

In the third section, I deal with a convincing objection that may be raised against Aquinas's thesis, which I have just mentioned: if God is expected to provide everyone with the readiness to believe, why are there inculpable unbelievers? This clearly re-proposes Schellenberg's argument, which is crucial to his thesis, that there exist reasonable or non-resistant unbelievers, namely, those who do not resist the belief that God exists, and nonetheless do not believe because of lack of sufficient evidence. In other words, God may be seen as culpable for not making them ready to believe; but God can only be conceived as perfectly good; therefore God does not exist. In reply, I propose what I call the *suffering unbeliever argument*. It shows that Schellenberg's view does not stand, no matter whether it focuses on the lack of evidence — as Schellenberg says — or involves the lack of readiness to believe — as it may be said on the basis of the Thomistic view which I have mentioned above. Given the assumption that God, if he exists, is the maximally great good, such unbelievers should suffer because of their non-belief, which prevents them from achieving their maximally great well-being. If they suffer, however, they cannot consider themselves unbelievers. It is in fact simply impossible for one to suffer from lack of something that one believes has never existed. On the other hand, if the unbelievers in question do not suffer, there is simply nothing for which they can consider themselves inculpable (and God culpable). I will elaborate on this while considering substantive objections, including the one that for Schellenberg the problem of divine hiddenness does not have any direct bearing on issues of suffering.

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of how God's existence and his hiddenness may be compatible with each other. Among them and especially noteworthy is an idea that traces back to Michael J. Murray, "Coercion and the Hiddenness of God", *American Philosophical Quarterly* 30, no. 1 (1993). It is the idea that, if God didn't hide, 'we would be coerced in a manner incompatible with love' (9). Another interesting response to the problem in question is the one that Schellenberg calls 'responsibility argument'. I will refer to this response, which was defended in Richard Swinburne, *Providence and the Problem of Evil* (Clarendon Press, 1998) and Travis Dumsday, "Divine Hiddenness and the Responsibility Argument", *Philosophia Christi* 12, no. 2 (2010), in footnote 24.

<sup>4</sup> Travis Dumsday has already provided a response to Schellenberg's formulation of divine hiddenness from the point of view of Aquinas's thought. (See Travis Dumsday, "A Thomistic Response to the Problem of Divine Hiddenness", *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 87, no. 3 (2013)). However, Dumsday limited himself to focusing on lack of evidence and consequent doubt as to God's existence; I will instead concentrate on the role of the readiness to believe in Aquinas's reflection. In the sequel — see footnote 22 — I shall explain why I believe that Dumsday's approach — although it does not lack merit — is insufficient to assess both Aquinas's reflection on faith and what can follow from it in response to Schellenberg's thesis.

## II. IS GOD EXPECTED TO GRANT US EVIDENCE?

According to Schellenberg, to form our conception of God as a perfectly loving being, we need to make use of what we believe belongs to the best in human love. Thus, he claims that

the best human love — the best love of parent or spouse or friend — involves seeking *meaningful personal relationship* with the beloved. It seeks a kind of *closeness* between itself and the beloved... The lover, being — as the best and truest lover must be — benevolently disposed toward the beloved, will also seek relationship *so that* she may offer opportunities for *explicit participation in her life*.<sup>5</sup>

For Schellenberg, God is expected to love in a way that is analogous to what was just described.<sup>6</sup> Accordingly, God should grant us an opportunity to enjoy a relationship with him, since ‘to be personally related to unsurpassable goodness is a great good in itself’.<sup>7</sup> This would make available ethical benefits, that is, ‘certain resources for dealing with the moral weakness endemic to humanity’.<sup>8</sup> To this end, God should provide us with evidence of his existence, namely, with propositions ‘that provide the basis for deductive and inductive inference’ as well as ‘nonpropositional, experiential evidence,’ in which the belief that God exists may be ‘directly (noninferentially) grounded.’<sup>9</sup> Yet, God hides, because there seem to be those who blamelessly do not believe that he exists. They miss an opportunity to attain their ultimate well-being, which is incompatible with the persuasion that God is a perfectly loving being. Consequently, it is reasonable to conclude that God does not exist.<sup>10</sup>

Schellenberg’s conception of God as the omnipotent and omniscient creator of everything coincides with Aquinas’s.<sup>11</sup> Given such a conception, however, Aquinas would argue that God can pursue our well-

5 J. L. Schellenberg, “What the Hiddenness of God Reveals: A Collaborative Discussion”, in *Divine Hiddenness: New Essays*, ed. Daniel Howard-Snyder and Paul Moser (Cambridge Univ. Press, 2002), 41. Schellenberg has recently noticed that his emphasis ‘on God being open to personal relationship instead of just exercising benevolence from a distance’ is in line with the view of love advocated by Eleonore Stump, *Wandering in Darkness: Narrative and the Problem of Suffering* (Clarendon Press, 2010), according to which love implies not only a desire for the good of the other but also a desire for union (see J. L. Schellenberg, “Divine Hiddenness and Human Philosophy”, in *Hidden Divinity and Religious Belief*, ed. Eleonore Stump and Adam Green (Cambridge Univ. Press, 2016), 17f., footnote 8).

6 It is worth noting that determining the nature of God’s love on the basis of an analogy with that of humans is not exempt from risk. Aijaz and Weidler warn that ‘we cannot be sure whether our insight into human love is complete’ (Imran Aijaz and Markus Weidler, “Some Critical Reflections on the Hiddenness Argument”, *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 61, no. 1 (2007), 8). Accordingly, they question Schellenberg’s connection between divine love and the seeking of a personal relationship (9ff.). Howard-Snyder and Moser point out that ‘we might revise this concept [the concept of perfect love] in such a way that our expectation of a loving personal relationship with God is refined somehow’ (Howard-Snyder and Moser, “Introduction”, 6). For them, ‘people who emphasize that God would do whatever it takes to prevent inculpable nonbelief frequently regard God’s love in analogy with parents who wish to comfort their young children in distress. Others, however, see God’s love in analogy with familiar adult love, where the lover primarily wants certain attitudes and behavior to accompany any reciprocation of love on the part of the beloved’ (7f.). Furthermore, the analogies in question should be accompanied by the awareness that, as Davies says, ‘God is not subject to moral obligations and has no need of human virtues’; in other words, he cannot be ‘sensibly thought of as either guilty or exonerable by human standards’ (Brian Davies, *The Reality of God and the Problem of Evil* (Continuum, 2006), 253).

7 J. L. Schellenberg, *Divine Hiddenness and Human Reason* (Cornell Univ. Press, 1993), 21.

8 Schellenberg, *Divine Hiddenness and Human Reason*, 18.

9 *Ibid.*, 33.

10 Notice that Schellenberg has recently formulated the problem of divine hiddenness in a way that does not openly refer to the concept of evidence. (See J. L. Schellenberg, *The Hiddenness Argument: Philosophy’s New Challenge to Belief in God* (Oxford Univ. Press, 2015), 103). However, it seems obvious that — in his view — the openness of God occurs insofar as evidence in its support has been offered. This is confirmed by the example that Schellenberg gives. A person who has been adopted wonders whether his/her biological mother is still alive; the latter is in the area and is told that the former asks about her, but does not let her biological child know that she is alive and nearby. This example emphasizes the role of evidence. The biological mother is expected to be open to a personal relationship with her child precisely by showing and making *evident* her existence and physical closeness.

11 Since this conception of God constitutes a starting point that is common to Schellenberg and Aquinas, I will accept it for the purpose of the argument. In any event, it is opportune to remark that ‘some thinkers hold that the attributes traditionally ascribed to God — simplicity, necessity, immutability, eternity, omniscience, omnipotence, creativity and goodness — are inherently incoherent individually, or mutually inconsistent’ (Michael Beaty, “Goodness”, in *The Routledge Companion to Philosophy of Religion*, ed. Chad Meister and Paul Copan (Routledge, 2013), 360).

being in ways that we do not always understand. As it has been said, ‘the exact details of God’s purposes are sometimes unclear to us, as we should expect given God’s transcendent superiority.’<sup>12</sup> Based on his robust metaphysical perspective, Aquinas would make this point particularly convincing. While wondering ‘whether whatever God wills he wills necessarily’, he differentiates between what is necessary ‘absolutely’ and what is necessary ‘by supposition’. On the one hand, God wills *his own goodness* in a way which is *absolutely* necessary:

The divine will has a necessary relation to the divine goodness, since that is its proper object. Hence God wills His own goodness necessarily, even as we will our own happiness necessarily, and as any other faculty has necessary relation to its proper and principal object, for instance the sight to color, since it tends to it by its own nature.<sup>13</sup>

On the other hand, God wills *any other thing* in a way which is necessary ‘by supposition’:

God wills things apart from Himself in so far as they are ordered to His own goodness as their end. Now in willing an end we do not necessarily will things that conduce to it, unless they are such that the end cannot be attained without them; as, we will to take food to preserve life... But we do not necessarily will things without which the end is attainable, such as a horse for a journey which we can take on foot... Hence... His willing things apart from Himself is not *absolutely necessary*. Yet it can be necessary *by supposition*, for supposing that He wills a thing, then He is unable not to will it, as His will cannot change.<sup>14</sup>

In this passage, Aquinas argues convincingly that the creator of everything wants necessarily to do good, since he is the good, namely, the end of everything. However, the necessity in question does not apply to the means God chooses to pursue the good. For Aquinas, God can prefer some goods to others, and can even will evils of ‘natural defect, or of punishment’,

by willing the good to which such evils are attached. Thus in willing justice He wills punishment; and in willing the preservation of the natural order, He wills some things to be naturally corrupted.<sup>15</sup>

The insufficient evidence that Schellenberg laments may be among the evils that were just mentioned.<sup>16</sup> At any rate, if the end that God is expected to pursue — not only according to Aquinas but also according to Schellenberg — is not mere possession of the evidence of his existence, but the communion of human creatures with him, an omnipotent God might pursue this by a mean other than evidence for his existence.

12 Paul Moser, “Cognitive Idolatry and Divine Hiding”, in *Divine Hiddenness: New Essays*, ed. Daniel Howard-Snyder and Paul Moser (Cambridge Univ. Press, 2002), 135. In the footsteps of Aquinas, Davies points out that, since God is not like anything we know, he should be regarded as incomprehensible (See Davies, *The Reality of God and the Problem of Evil*, 78). Of course, from this it does not follow that we do not know anything of him. Davies distinguishes two senses of the verb ‘to comprehend’, and concludes that, if taken as ‘to understand fully or adequately’, this verb cannot apply to our knowledge of God (see 79).

13 ‘Voluntas enim divina necessariam habitudinem habet ad bonitatem suam, quae est proprium eius obiectum. Unde bonitatem suam esse Deus ex necessitate vult; sicut et voluntas nostra ex necessitate vult beatitudinem. Sicut et quaelibet alia potentia necessariam habitudinem habet ad proprium et principale obiectum, ut visus ad colorem; quia de sui ratione est, ut in illud tendat’ (Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, second and revised edition, ed. the Fathers of the English Dominican Province (London: Oates and Washbourne, 1920) I, q. 19, a. 3).

14 ‘Alia autem a se Deus vult, in quantum ordinantur ad suam bonitatem ut in finem. Ea autem quae sunt ad finem, non ex necessitate volumus volentes finem, nisi sint talia, sine quibus finis esse non potest, sicut volumus cibum, volentes conservationem vitae... Non sic autem ex necessitate volumus ea sine quibus finis esse potest, sicut equum ad ambulandum, quia sine hoc possumus ire;... Unde... sequitur quod alia a se eum velle, non sit *necessarium absolute*. Et tamen necessarium est *ex suppositione*, supposito enim quod velit, non potest non velle, quia non potest voluntas eius mutari’ (Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 19, a. 3, emphasis added).

15 ‘... volendo aliquod bonum, cui coniungitur tale malum, sicut, volendo iustitiam, vult poenam; et volendo ordinem naturae servari, vult quaedam naturaliter corrumpi’ (Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 19, a. 9).

16 However, Christians are accustomed to thinking that — as Wainwright points out following Edward’s teachings — ‘even a fuller divine self-disclosure would be corrupted by us, and would thus not help us. What is needed isn’t more evidence or a fuller revelation but a new heart to appreciate the evidence and revelation we have’ (William Wainwright, “Jonathan Edwards and the Hiddenness of God”, in *Divine Hiddenness: New Essays*, ed. Daniel Howard-Snyder and Paul Moser (Cambridge Univ. Press, 2002), 104). With regard to Aquinas’s five ways, it has been said that for Thomas, ‘if such matters were accepted on the basis of evidence and arguments, ... would the believer lack the proper attitude towards them (as in the case of the demons)’ (Gregory Dawes, “The Act of Faith: Aquinas and the Moderns”, in *Oxford Studies in Philosophy of Religion Volume 6*, ed. Jonathan Kvanvig (Oxford Univ. Press, 2015), 66f.).

I say ‘might’ because Aquinas does not openly argue that the mean in question must either be evidence for God’s existence or lack of such evidence. In the next section, however, I will show that for Aquinas God allows us to have faith and achieve communion with him by granting us a readiness to believe and not evidence for his existence. In this section, I limited myself to showing that Aquinas’s view *may plausibly* offer a viable alternative to Schellenberg’s explanation for the hiddenness of God. In addition, since it emphasizes the fact that we are unable to rationally determine the mean mentioned above, this view appears to be more consistent with the transcendent superiority of God than Schellenberg’s claim that God must provide sufficient evidence that he exists.<sup>17</sup>

### III. GOD IS EXPECTED TO GRANT US A READINESS TO BELIEVE

After having shown that, from a theistic point of view, it is plausible to claim that God may allow us to attain a relationship with him and at the same time may permit insufficient evidence for his existence,<sup>18</sup> I intend now to offer a Thomistic response to Schellenberg’s argument, which arises from the Christian revelation.

Aquinas argues that God grants us a readiness to believe what he has revealed. Instead of providing evidence for his existence so as to allow us to attain communion with him, God makes our will ready to believe, from which follows that we can achieve communion with him. As Brian Davies has pointed out, for Aquinas God works ‘directly in us by grace, so as to make us God-like in our thinking and acting.’<sup>19</sup> The readiness to believe that God grants us includes reliance on him and trust in him, as it is implied by Aquinas’s definition of faith: ‘an act of the intellect assenting to the Divine Truth at the command of the will moved by the grace of God.’<sup>20</sup> Since the revealed truths are not evident,<sup>21</sup> the faithful are expected to believe them because of their trust in God and regardless of the presence or absence of conclusive arguments in support of the belief in question.<sup>22</sup> For Thomas, it is the love for God which God himself grants

17 As has been said, Aquinas ‘closely connects our noncomprehensive knowledge of God to our sense of God’s transcendence’ (Gregory Rocca, *Speaking the Incomprehensible God: Thomas Aquinas on the Interplay of Positive and Negative Theology* (The Catholic University of America Press, 2004), 29).

18 God may also have good reasons for putting different persons in different epistemic situations with regard to such evidence (see Laura Garcia, “St. John of the Cross and the Necessity of Divine Hiddenness”, in *Divine Hiddenness: New Essays*, ed. Daniel Howard-Snyder and Paul Moser (Cambridge Univ. Press, 2002), 85).

19 Brian Davies, *Thomas Aquinas’s Summa Theologiae: A Guide and Commentary* (Oxford Univ. Press, 2014), 239f. ‘It belongs to the essence of the highest good to communicate itself in the highest manner to the creature.’ (Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, III, q. 1, q. 1). Bauerschmidt appropriately concludes that God joins created nature to himself (see Federik Bauerschmidt, *Thomas Aquinas: Faith, Reason, and Following Christ* (Oxford Univ. Press, 2013), 180)

20 ‘Actus intellectus assentientis veritati divinae ex imperio voluntatis a Deo motae per gratiam’ (Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, II-II, q. 2, a. 9)

21 It is worth noting that the concept of *evidentia*, which Aquinas employs, only partly corresponds to that of *evidence*. Whereas the latter stands for any of those arguments that support a sentence at various degrees of probability, the former refers only to the evidence before which assent cannot be withheld. For Thomas ‘evident’, which he employs by analogy with the sense of vision, is a synonym of *known*. He makes use of a number of expressions, from ‘aliquid visum’ to ‘notum’ and ‘cognitum’; however, he always intends to mean ‘those things ... which, of themselves, move the intellect or the senses to *knowledge* of them [ad sui *cognitionem*]’ (Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, II-II, q. 1, a. 4).

22 I can now explain why I do not share Dumsday’s position that was mentioned above (see footnote 4). In light of Aquinas’s thought, Dumsday’s response to Schellenberg is that divine hiddenness is necessary so that the believer can have merit and then obtain salvation. This is a widespread belief, which I have already referred to in footnote 3. As pointed out by Terence Penelhum, ‘it is common for Protestant, as well Catholic, thinkers to say that there cannot be conclusive reasons for the commitment that faith involves, since if there were such reasons, there would be no freedom in the commitment and hence no merit in making it’ (Terence Penelhum, “The Analysis of Faith in St Thomas Aquinas”, *Religious Studies* 13, no. 2 (1977), 140). Accordingly, Dumsday and those who share the view that was just mentioned require hiddenness and doubt. For Aquinas, in contrast, the merit of faith is due to the readiness to assent to the Christian revelation that is moved by God, and not to the lack of evidence. Of course, it does not follow from this that I do not acknowledge the relevance of the lack of evidence to Aquinas’s reflection on faith. This lack, in fact, *unequivocally proves* that the assent to revelation ‘proceeds from the free will moved with grace by God’ (Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, II-II, q. 2, a. 9). For more on this, see Roberto Di Ceglie, “Faith, Reason, and Charity in Thomas Aquinas’s Thought”, *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 79, no. 2 (2016).

us, and not evidence for theism, that ‘makes the will ready to believe them [the revealed truths], even if they were unseen.’<sup>23</sup>

Moreover, Aquinas says that the readiness to believe enables the faithful to use reason to the best of their abilities so as to find evidence in support of what they already believe: ‘when a man’s will is ready to believe, *he loves the truth he believes*, he thinks out and takes to heart whatever reasons he can find in support thereof.’<sup>24</sup> This is confirmed by a well-known passage in which Thomas says that, if natural reason attains conclusions that deny the truths of faith, the argument developed is certainly wrong:

If... anything is found in the teachings of the philosophers contrary to faith, this error does not properly belong to philosophy, but is due to an abuse of philosophy owing to the insufficiency of reason. Therefore also it is possible from the principles of philosophy to refute an error of this kind, either by showing it to be altogether impossible, or not to be necessary.<sup>25</sup>

On the one hand, Aquinas maintains that any argument that denies the truth of Christian revelation, even if it appears to be rationally convincing, must be rejected as wrong.<sup>26</sup> On the other hand, such a conviction ends up highlighting the importance of the role that reason is expected to play, since Aquinas’s thesis is that, once certain arguments have been rejected because of their contrast with faith, reason must start anew from the beginning, ‘from its own principles’. In this way, Aquinas promotes the idea that, if, on the one hand, knowledge needs to be grounded in evidence, on the other hand, the search for evidence is to be promoted by the readiness to believe.

For Aquinas, therefore, the opportunity to successfully employ reason in support of faith is due to the readiness to believe. This seems to turn Schellenberg’s thesis upside down, since it appears that it is the readiness to believe that helps one find evidence for God’s existence and not the reverse. While wondering whether or not arguments for Christian belief diminish the merit of faith, Aquinas distinguishes two kinds of arguments:

Human reason in support of what we believe, may stand in a twofold relation to the will of the believer. First, as preceding the act of the will; as, for instance, when a man either has not the will, or not a prompt will, to believe, unless he be moved by human reasons... Secondly, human reasons may be consequent to

23 ‘Rationes demonstrativae inductae ad ea quae sunt fidei, praeambula tamen ad articulos, etsi diminuant rationem fidei, quia faciunt esse apparens id quod proponitur; non tamen diminuunt rationem caritatis, per quam voluntas est prompta ad ea credendum etiam si non apparent’ (Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, ST,II-II,2,10,ad2).

24 ‘Cum enim homo habet promptam voluntatem ad credendum, *diligit veritatem creditam*, et super ea excogitat et amplectitur si quas rationes ad hoc invenire potest.’ (Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, II-II, q. 2, a. 10, emphasis added). As Eleonore Stump and Brian Davies rightly point out in the beginning of *The Oxford Handbook of Aquinas*, Aquinas ‘was convinced... that Christian thinkers should be ready to dispute rationally on any topic, especially theological issues.’ (Brian Davies and Eleonore Stump, ‘Introduction’, in *The Oxford Handbook of Aquinas*, ed. Brian Davies and Eleonore Stump (Oxford Univ. Press, 2012), 4). This readiness to dispute shows that one takes care of those who are not (yet) able to firmly believe. As Crummett points out describing the core of the so called ‘responsibility argument’ (see footnote 3), ‘many religious traditions [the author refers especially to Christianity] suggest that we have been tasked with helping one another come to knowledge of and relationship with God, and that helping us fulfill this task is one of the major reasons God has established religious communities’ (Dustin Crummett, ‘“We Are Here to Help Each Other”: Religious Community, Divine Hiddenness, and the Responsibility Argument’, *Faith and Philosophy* 32, no. 1 (2015), 46).

25 ‘Si quid ... in dictis philosophorum invenitur contrarium fidei, hoc non est philosophia, sed magis philosophiae abusus ex defectu rationis. Et ideo possibile est ex principiis philosophiae huiusmodi errorem refellere vel ostendendo omnino esse impossibile vel ostendendo non esse necessarium’ (Aquinas, *Super Boethium ‘De Trinitate’*, ed. R.E Brennan (New York, NY: Herder and Herder, 1946), q. 2, a. 3).

26 According to Aquinas, while intellectual virtues are more certain than faith ‘relatively’ or ‘for us’ (*quoad nos*), namely, from the point of view of the subject of faith (*ex parte subiecti*), faith is more certain than reason ‘simply’ (*simpliciter*), namely, ‘on the part of its cause’ (*ex causa certitudinis*) (See Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, II-II, q. 4, a. 8). However, since Aquinas argues that the point of view of the cause plays a more decisive role, he concludes that ‘faith is more certain than any understanding [of principles] and scientific knowledge (*omni intellectu et scientia*)’ (Aquinas, *De Veritate*, q. 14, ed. J. V. McGlynn (Chicago, IL: Henry Regnery Company, 1953), q. 14, a. 1, ad 7). John Jenkins, while commenting on this passage, suggests that according to Aquinas ‘the faithful hold the articles of faith with greater conviction than the principle of non-contradiction’ (John Jenkins, *Knowledge and Faith in Thomas Aquinas* (Cambridge Univ. Press, 1997), 167f.).

the will of the believer. For when a man's will is ready to believe, he loves the truth he believes, he thinks out and takes to heart whatever reasons he can find in support thereof.<sup>27</sup>

This passage clearly emphasizes the role played by 'the love for the truth believed', namely, the love for God, granted by God to believers, which leads them to reflect on him and his works in order to attain as much evidence as possible.<sup>28</sup>

In conclusion, Aquinas's thoughts on the Christian revelation, and not only the ones on theism, seem to offer a viable alternative to the DHA. God may grant us the readiness to believe his revelation, God's existence included, as well as the readiness to find evidence in its support. This view seems to be more consistent (than Schellenberg's) with the conception of God as the perfectly loving being who is expected to help us attain communion with him. Such a communion should in fact imply trust and reliance, which is precisely what leads the faithful to unconditionally believe the divine revelation, and not the search for evidence mentioned by Schellenberg, in the absence of which he is not ready to place confidence in God.

It may be objected that God's existence is for Aquinas a non-revealed religious truth of reason belonging to natural or general revelation and the object of reason.<sup>29</sup> That is, every person should be able to recognise and believe that God exists, since there is plenty of evidence for God's existence (see e.g. Aquinas's five ways). And without believing that God exists it is logically not possible to believe that God is e.g. triune or incarnate. In other words, both Aquinas and Schellenberg agree that without the belief that God exists it is not possible to have faith in God and a personal relationship with him. (Unlike Aquinas, however, Schellenberg argues that there is not enough evidence for God's existence.) Thus, the only way to adequately oppose Schellenberg with Aquinas seems to be natural theology.

The objection at stake, however, is only partly correct. It is true that Aquinas believes that 'the last end must of necessity be present to the intellect before it is present to the will, since the will has no inclination for anything except in so far as it is apprehended by the intellect.'<sup>30</sup> This view is similar to Schellenberg's view that we cannot have access to communion with God without first believing that God exists. Unlike Schellenberg, however, Aquinas does not think that to believe in God one needs to deal with evidence for God's existence effectively. For Aquinas, in fact, 'the truth about God such as reason could discover, would only be known by a few',<sup>31</sup> since 'it presupposes many other sciences'<sup>32</sup>, which the vast majority of believers do not know. Rather, he says that everybody knows that God exists 'in a general and confused way',<sup>33</sup> from which follows that it is not even possible to state whether there is only one God: 'There is a common and confused knowledge of God which is found in practically all men ... But who or what kind of being, or whether there is but one orderer of nature, is not yet grasped immediately in this general consideration.'<sup>34</sup>

27 'Ratio humana inducta ad ea quae sunt fidei dupliciter potest se habere ad voluntatem credentis. Uno quidem modo, sicut praecedens, puta cum quis aut non haberet voluntatem, aut non haberet promptam voluntatem ad credendum, nisi ratio humana induceretur ... Alio modo ratio humana potest se habere ad voluntatem credentis consequenter. Cum enim homo habet promptam voluntatem ad credendum, diligit veritatem creditam, et super ea excogitat et amplectitur si quas rationes ad hoc invenire potest.' (Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, II-II, q. 2, a. 10).

28 For more on the relationship between faith, reason, and 'the love for the truth believed', see Roberto Di Ceglie, "Christian Belief, Love for God, and Divine Hiddenness", *Philosophia Christi* 18, no. 1 (2016).

29 More precisely, God's existence is one of those *revealed truths* that for Aquinas can also be attained by demonstration: 'Early, middle and late in his writings, St. Thomas speaks of a twofold knowledge of God, one that was achieved by pagan philosophers and which is based on knowledge of material things, another that results from God's revealing Himself to men' (Ralph McInerny, "On Behalf of Natural Theology", *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* 54 (1980), 64).

30 '... ultimus finis oportet quod prius sit in intellectu quam in voluntate, quia voluntas non fertur in aliquid nisi prout est in intellectu apprehensum' (Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, II-II, q. 4, a. 7).

31 Let me cite the entire sentence: 'Quia veritas de Deo, per rationem investigata, a paucis, et per longum tempus, et cum admixtione multorum errorum, homini proveniret' (Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 1, a. 1).

32 '... praesuppositis multis aliis scientiis' (Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, II-II, q. 2, a. 4).

33 Let me cite the entire sentence: 'Cognoscere Deum esse in aliquo communi, sub quadam confusione, est nobis naturaliter insertum' (Aquinas, *Summa contra Gentiles*, ed. Anton Pegis et al. (New York, NY: Hanover House, 1955), I, q. 2, a. 1, ad 1).

34 'Est enim quaedam communis et confusa Dei cognitio, quae quasi omnibus hominibus adest ... Quis autem, vel qualis, vel si unus tantum est ordinator naturae, nondum statim ex hac communi consideratione habetur' (Aquinas, *Summa contra Gentiles*, Bk. III, Chapter 38).

As a result, the objection at stake fails because, unlike Schellenberg, Aquinas does not say that, to believe in God, we need to achieve sufficient evidence for God's existence. He does not take the above-mentioned common and confused knowledge of God, which he seems to think is presupposed by faith, as sufficient evidence for the existence of God.<sup>35</sup>

Another objection may be that the work of grace commanding the will and the consequent readiness to believe, which I have shown so far is part of Aquinas's reflection, may coincide with some of the kinds of occasions treated by Schellenberg as evidence via religious experience. The DHA would consequently be confirmed. In fact, Aquinas's view of God as the main cause of the readiness in question would pave the way for Schellenberg's thesis that there are those who do not believe through no fault of their own. If God decides who will believe and who will not, then he must be faulted for the existence of non-believers.

In reply, let me point out that Aquinas's readiness to believe does not coincide with Schellenberg's experiential evidence that one can have via religious experience. Those who are granted the readiness to believe simply *want* to believe, whereas at the heart of the DHA are those whom Schellenberg names 'reasonable' unbelievers. They tried to find *plausible reasons* for God's existence, precisely because they could not rest content with a mere will to believe.

At any rate, in the next section, I will test the readiness to believe at stake by considering it a part of the DHA. As I explained above, this would reinforce the DHA, and could trigger a more effective response to it.

#### IV. THE SUFFERING UNBELIEVER ARGUMENT

Schellenberg's theory of 'non-resistant' or 'inculpable' unbelievers plays a fundamental role in the DHA.<sup>36</sup> If there really were people, who without any resistance on their part, neither believe in God nor achieve their well-being, God, who is omnipotent and omniscient, would be culpable for their failure. Since it is not reasonable to ascribe this to a perfectly loving God, it should be concluded that God does not exist.

Note that Schellenberg has recently pointed out that the employment of words such as 'culpable' and 'blameworthy' dates to the period when he began to develop the hiddenness argument. At that time, so he says,

what I had in mind was that given God's loving openness to relationship, no finite creature would ever fail to believe in God *without it being their own fault*. I was in fact thinking about resistance of God but I thought that such resistance, which would have to come in the face of evidence of a good and loving Maker to whom one owed everything, would clearly be blameworthy. ... I now see this focus on culpability and inculpability as a mistake.<sup>37</sup>

However, if the claim that God would be responsible for the failure of those who are non-resistant to believe becomes an argument for atheism, this is because such a responsibility represents an *evil* that cannot be ascribed to God, whom Schellenberg perceives as a perfectly loving being. If such a responsibility is a sort of evil, then those who are not responsible for their unbelief can appropriately be said to be 'blameless' or 'inculpable'.

<sup>35</sup> In this connection, let me point out that the notion of 'sufficient', as Schellenberg employs it, needs to be determined more precisely. On the one hand, it seems to correspond to 'undeniable', because evidence that is not undeniable gives rise to doubt, and, consequently, is expected to be refused by Schellenberg. On the other hand, Schellenberg states that he does not refer to 'incontrovertible reasons': 'the reasons for Divine self-disclosure suggested by reflection on the nature of love are not reasons for God to provide us with some incontrovertible proof or overwhelm us with a display of Divine glory' (Schellenberg, *Divine Hiddenness and Human Reason*, 212f.).

<sup>36</sup> For Daniel Howard-Snyder, Schellenberg's fundamental idea 'is that if there is a God, there are no reasonable non-believers, or inculpable non-believers, or non-resistant non-believers (all of these terms have been used); but there are, and so there's no God.' (Daniel Howard-Snyder, "Divine Openness and Creaturely Non-Resistant Non-Belief", in *Hidden Divinity and Religious Belief*, ed. Eleonore Stump and Adam Green (Cambridge Univ. Press, 2016), 126).

<sup>37</sup> Schellenberg, *The Hiddenness Argument*, 54f.



At any rate, I am now interested in replying to the question that arises from the Thomistic doctrine which I have dealt with in the last section. So the question is, why doesn't God provide everyone — especially those who do not resist him — with the readiness to believe described by Aquinas?<sup>38</sup>

In response, I intend to offer what I call the *suffering unbeliever argument*. My aim is to show that Schellenberg's thesis of inculpable or blameless unbelievers does not stand, whether it focuses on the lack of evidence — as it occurs in Schellenberg's reflection — or extends to the lack of readiness to believe — as I think it may occur in reply to the Thomistic view I have presented above.

Let us consider the line of reasoning adopted by Schellenberg: God, if he exists, is perfectly good and is consequently expected to offer us communion with him, which, given his existence, is the greatest good for us to achieve. To that end, we need to believe that God exists. However, there are those who do not believe because of lack of evidence (or lack of readiness to believe). They are therefore 'inculpable', 'blameless', which implies that God is 'culpable' and 'blameworthy', because, though he is omnipotent and omniscient, he does not provide them with the opportunity to flourish. Since God can only be seen as a perfectly good being, it is necessary to conclude that he does not exist.

In reply, let us focus on the fact that God, if he exists, is the maximally great good. As a consequence, the unbelievers in question are expected to suffer because of their non-belief, which prevents them from thriving. If they suffer, however, they cannot consider themselves unbelievers. In fact, one cannot suffer from not having been given a certain good if one believes that the good in question has never existed. On the other hand, if they do not suffer, and do not believe that an opportunity of flourishing has been denied to them, it is simply obvious that they cannot consider God culpable or blameworthy.

Two noticeable objections, however, can be raised against this argument. For the sake of clarity, I will divide their treatment into two sub-sections.<sup>39</sup>

#### IV.1 *Can those who suffer from lack of belief in God consider themselves unbelievers?*

A significant objection to my argument is that *one may suffer* from one's lack of belief in God and at the same time may not believe in God's existence. It seems that there are numerous ways in which people can and do hold religious belief to be good, even very good, while they themselves do not believe that God exists. There are the cases of non-believers who admire greatly the service commitment shown by and the sense of peace exhibited by religious believers. Some would like to be believers, but they just can't quite seem to achieve the state, even though they've attempted by practicing many spiritual practices for years. Thus they don't believe that God exists and nevertheless find the belief in him extremely desirable. As a result, the argument that one cannot suffer from a lack of belief in God if one does not believe that God exists fails.

In reply, let me first notice that, according to this objection, the unbelievers in question find the belief in God extremely desirable because they see extremely desirable dispositions and actions that *some* believers hold and perform, respectively. These unbelievers, however, are likely to also ascribe non-commendable qualities and reprehensible actions to *other* believers. Without going too far back in history, recent scandals — especially the ones related to sex-abused children by some clerics — obviously testify that those who are (or at least declare to be) believers not necessarily exhibit admirable commitments to doing good individually as well as socially. (Furthermore, unbelievers tend more often than not to *accuse* believers of not being coherent with the high spiritual and moral teaching that they — the believers — declare to follow. Not surprisingly, such a lack of coherence is frequently included by unbelievers among

38 A response traditionally advanced is the one that may be called 'flawed unbelief' view, according to which religious unbelief signals a cognitive and/or moral flaw in the non-believer. For more on this, see John Greco, "No-fault Atheism", in *Hidden Divinity and Religious Belief*, ed. Eleonore Stump and Adam Green (Cambridge Univ. Press, 2016). (Of course, the DHA frontally opposes this response, since it affirms the existence of non-believers who are inculpable and reasonable.) I intend to go a different route.

39 What follows is a series of objections and counter-objections, which anonymous reviewers for this journal have put forward. I warmly thank them, since their suggestions — not only in regard to this section of the essay — were so helpful that in some cases I employed them almost literally.

the reasons that prevent them from believing.<sup>40</sup>) As a consequence, the unbelievers in question don't have sufficient evidence to attribute *to the belief in God* the commitment to the good that some believers exhibit and that they — the unbelievers — admire.

As a counter-reply one may claim that the unbelievers here under consideration don't admire some dispositions and attitudes that some believers show. Rather, they admire *the religious belief in itself*. In this way, my response that believers may act not only admirably but also deplorably would be neutralized, because our unbelievers look at the belief in itself, not at the believers.

In response, I notice that, at least in the case of the Christian belief, it is hard for unbelievers to say in what exactly the belief in question consists. Believers simply defer to sources of authoritative teaching — first of all the Bible or, more precisely, those books that the denominations to which they adhere authoritatively consider part of the Bible — and are ready to see as Christian belief that which those sources define as such.<sup>41</sup> Nothing comparable can be said of unbelievers. They may enthusiastically adhere to some aspects of the belief in question — the equal dignity of all human beings, for example — and may equally strongly reject others such as authority and obedience, to which especially some denominations — Catholicism, for example — ascribe a crucial role in the life of the believers. Ironically enough, if the unbelievers in question accepted a determined conception of the belief established by one or more Christian denominations, then they would adhere to fundamental dogmatic expressions of the relevant Churches, which would obviously contradict them as unbelievers.

Another reply to the objection that those who do not believe in God may nonetheless find the belief in God extremely desirable and suffer from its lack can be offered by making use of an example: Rick suffers from an illness and looks for the relevant medicine. Let me rephrase the example to make it fit the objection under consideration: Rick suffers from the lack of a medicine for his illness even if he believes that this medicine does not exist. (Needless to say, the medicine corresponds to the religious belief as caused by God, health corresponds to the desirable goods that are expected to accompany the religious belief, and the healing power of the medicine corresponds to the religious belief's being cause of the abovementioned benefits.) In reply, let me develop this example as follows. Rick desires to recover from his illness as his friend Erika did. She told him that a medicine restored her health, but the medicine in question does not work with Rick. Rick sought to understand how the medicine in question made Erika recover from her illness, but no convincing explanation emerged. The mere temporal coincidence between Erika's taking medicine and her recovering combined with the fact that the medicine at stake did not work in Rick's case led Rick to doubt that it was really this medicine that allowed Erika to recover. In conclusion, Rick doesn't have the belief in the healing power of the medicine in question, which is another way to say that this medicine, in his case, simply is not a medicine. This, however, is of no importance to him. In fact, it is *health* the good he yearns for, and *not that particular medicine*. He may recover from the illness in question by taking a different medicine or even without taking any medicine at all. Turning back to our discussion, this example helps us to see that believers don't bring sufficient evidence in support of the claim that the belief in God causes such admirable attitudes. As a result, the unbelievers

40 Hume, Freud, Russell and, in our time, Harris can be numbered among famous unbelievers who have argued that believers suffer from moral as well as intellectual flaws. Hume placed in the same boat 'Stupidity, Christianity, and Ignorance' and saw all three as limits into which the English nation was 'relapsing fast' (David Hume, *The Letters of David Hume*, ed. John Y.T. Greig (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1932), vol. 1, 498). According to Freud, religion is a psychological disease, 'the universal obsessional neurosis of humanity' (Sigmund Freud, *Future of an Illusion* (Hogarth Press, 1927), 43). For Russell, religion originated in barbaric ages and 'has been and still is the principal enemy of moral progress in the world'. It is therefore 'no wonder if cruelty and religion have gone hand in hand' (Bertrand Russell, "Why I am not a Christian". In *The Basic Writings of Bertrand Russell*, ed. Robert E. Egner and Denonn, Lester E. (London: Allen and Unwin, 1961), 595f.). Finally, Harris seems to sum up all of these attacks on religion and especially to the Christian faith by saying that it is now necessary 'to demolish the intellectual and moral pretensions of Christianity' (Sam Harris, *Letter to a Christian Nation* (Knopf, 2006), ix).

41 For Aquinas, 'as regards the primary points of articles of faith, man *is bound* to believe them'. In regard to 'the other points of faith, 'man is not bound to believe them explicitly, but only implicitly, or to be *ready to believe* them, in so far as he is prepared to believe *whatever is contained in the Divine Scriptures*. Then alone is he bound to believe such things explicitly, when it is clear to him that they are *contained in the doctrine of faith*' (*Summa theologiae*, II-II, q. 2, a. 5, emphasis is mine).

don't have any good reason for believing that the cause of the states they desire and whose lack they suffer is the one that the believers mention. Therefore, the unbelievers are not expected to suffer from lack of belief in God.

Someone may modify the objection to which I have just replied and advance a counter-reply. The medicine mentioned above may be generally effective, but didn't work with Rick because of his unique physiological characteristics. In other words, unlike before, he now believes in the healing power of the medicine in question and nonetheless he suffers from the fact that it does not work with him. A response to this objection is straightforward. As I have already said, the healing power of the medicine corresponds to the beneficial effect provided by the belief in God, and 'taking the medicine' corresponds to the act of believing in God. I said that the medicine doesn't work with Rick, which presupposes that he has taken the medicine, that is, he believes in God. But this obviously contradicts the fact that he is an unbeliever, from which follows that this objection falls into contradiction.

*IV.1 Can those who do not suffer from lack of belief in God consider God culpable and, given the DHA, inexistent?*

The second objection I intend to consider runs as follows: one *may not suffer* from lack of belief in God and nonetheless such a lack is something evil if God exists. My friend Marc, for example, has never been a believer. He doesn't even conceive of what religious belief is and what benefits the relationship with God may bring with it. He, therefore, does not suffer from not being a believer, though it remains true that, if God exists, there are goods whose lack in his life is an evil that God should not permit.

Consider also the following case. I have a child out there in the world. That child would benefit from having a father active in her life. She does not know that I exist, and has every reason to believe that I am no longer alive. I might therefore be thought to deprive her of goods, even if she never believed I existed. So she may suffer a deprivation even if she is not aware of it.

Before replying to this objection, let me notice that, in line with it, Schellenberg agrees that hiddenness need not (and often does not) cause any subjectively experienced suffering on the part of unbelievers. But he thinks that this in no way weakens the DHA and that to think otherwise may be to confuse the DHA with the problem of suffering. Therefore, such a confusion should accurately be avoided, as Schellenberg has argued in several places.<sup>42</sup> The DHA does not seem to have any direct bearing on issues of suffering. As Schellenberg points out,<sup>43</sup> there are possible worlds in which the problem of divine hiddenness is a good argument for atheism but not the problem of evil, and vice versa.

The objection under consideration is precisely aimed at showing that the DHA cannot be confused with the problem of suffering. As has been said, for Schellenberg 'there is at least one type of nonbelief which clearly does not involve any form of pain or suffering. Here Schellenberg is thinking of a so-called isolated nontheist who has never mentally engaged with or heard of the idea of God.'<sup>44</sup> Marc and the child mentioned above are expected to exemplify this kind of non-theist.

However, this type of unbelief does not include the example of the child mentioned above. She is well aware of what s/he was not allowed to have. S/he has evidence of the existence of families. She sees what happens between parents and children and all the enjoyable goods that a father may grant to a child. As a result, this viewpoint does not apply to our discussion. This discussion regards those who are *unaware* of the goods of which they have been deprived and are not in a condition to suffer from such deprivation. From now on, therefore, I will only consider Marc's case.

<sup>42</sup> He argues that, although various interesting relations can be seen between the hiddenness problem and the problem of evil, 'none suggests that the former ... is subsumable under the latter' (J. L. Schellenberg, "The Hiddenness Problem and the Problem of Evil", *Faith and Philosophy* 27, no. 1 (2010), 60).

<sup>43</sup> For a similar point, see Peter van Inwagen, "What is the problem of the hiddenness of God?", in *Divine Hiddenness: New Essays*, ed. Daniel Howard-Snyder and Paul Moser (Cambridge Univ. Press, 2002).

<sup>44</sup> Veronika Weidner, *Examining Schellenberg's Hiddenness Argument* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 86.

Let me distinguish between what can be said from the viewpoint of the unbeliever — Marc — and that which an external observer can say. Marc is not aware of what he could enjoy had he a relationship with God. As a consequence, he has no reason for suffering and for blaming God.

An objection may be that, on closer inspection, he does suffer, in the sense that he suffers ‘implicitly’. In other words, while some goods are in fact available, Marc hasn’t an opportunity to enjoy them. His implicit suffering is therefore a form of deprivation, regardless of the fact that he is unaware of it.

A reply should first point out that the concept of ‘implicit suffering’ seems a bit arbitrary. According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, the concept of suffering ‘implies conscious endurance of pain or distress’.<sup>45</sup>

For the sake of argument, however, let me accept the idea that Marc suffers implicitly. This, in fact, allows me to argue that such suffering can only be seen *by an external observer*. In fact, that Marc suffers ‘implicitly’ is equivalent to say that he is *unaware* of the fact that something good, which he might have enjoyed, was denied to him. It is only from the observer’s viewpoint, therefore, that what occurs to Marc can be said to be evil.

The observer in question, however, can consider Marc’s lack of religious belief a form of unfair deprivation only on the basis of the belief that God exists. Let me remind the reader of the objection here under consideration that Marc may not suffer (explicitly) for his lack of religious belief, and nonetheless such condition remains a deprivation that God, *if he exists*, should not permit. In other words, *if* God exists, then considering the condition in question a deprivation makes sense. Something analogous can be said of the case of my imaginary child mentioned above. Something unfair is perpetrated against her only to the extent that I — her father — am alive and nonetheless let her grow up without a family.

Let me add that what I have just argued is grounded precisely in the DHA, according to which it is God’s existence that renders the lack of religious belief a form of evil. Since God cannot be culpable for this evil — so the DHA runs — then God does not exist, from which also follows that the evil in question disappears or, more clearly, what was considered evil in conjunction with God’s existence can no longer be seen as evil. The conclusion of the DHA is that God does not exist, from which follows that the lack in question can no longer be seen as a form of deprivation. Therefore, the objection here under consideration falls into contradiction. If God does not exist, it cannot be said that those who do not believe in him suffer from a form of deprivation.

## V. CONCLUSION

In this essay, I have opposed the DHA with two arguments from Aquinas’s theism and Christian doctrine. From one of these arguments, however, a possibility to confirm the DHA has emerged. For Aquinas, God grants the prospective believers a readiness to believe, which is why Aquinas sees God as the main cause of faith. I have argued that such a readiness does not coincide with the evidence via religious experience that, among other types of evidence, Schellenberg says God is expected to give to us. The concept of readiness to believe, however, can be employed to confirm the DHA. It poses the question why God permits unbelief and how this can be ascribed to a perfectly loving being. In reply, I have developed the *suffering unbeliever argument*. If this argument is correct, then the DHA does not stand, no matter whether it focuses on the lack of evidence — as Schellenberg says — or involves the lack of readiness to believe — as it may be said once the Thomistic view of such readiness is used to confirm the DHA. I have addressed various objections to salvage my argument. My conclusion remains that, on the one hand, the unbelievers who suffer from their unbelief cannot consider themselves unbelievers, and, on the other hand, that the unbelievers who do not suffer do not have plausible reasons for believing that they are inculpable whereas God is culpable and, given the DHA, is inexistent.<sup>46</sup>

<sup>45</sup> See <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/suffering> (consulted July 25, 2019).

<sup>46</sup> Many thanks go to two anonymous reviewers for this journal. I found their comments very useful, especially with regard to Section 4 (see above footnote 39).

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