

RESPONSE TO JORDAN

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I am grateful to Professor¹ Jordan for his kind words and for his comments on my work, and also to the editors of this journal for inviting me to respond. Professor Jordan makes a point of emphasizing love's sensitivity to the particularities of its object. I think this particularities point is a good one. I'm saddened, however, that I must infer from it, together with what's in the rest of his article, that Professor Jordan did not *love* my book. For he does not address many of its particularities, instead focusing on what – despite my not using the word – he sees as its emphasis on the *impartiality* of love, which emphasis appears to him to make the hiddenness argument vulnerable to an approach he wrote about in 2012.² Now, it could be that it's not just because he thinks he has this knockdown counterargument but because Professor Jordan thinks very little in the new book is really new that he discloses to the reader so little of its contents. But in that case I would note that other reviewers, looking closer, have thought differently.³

1 It is presumably politeness or respect that leads Jeff Jordan to call me 'Professor Schellenberg'. I shall follow his lead, intending both.

2 Jeff Jordan, 'The Topography of Divine Love', *Faith and Philosophy*, 29 (2012), 53-69.

3 See, for example, Adam Green's NDPR review, available at: <<http://ndpr.nd.edu/news/64186-the-hiddenness-argument-philosophys-new-challenge-to-belief-in-god/>> (Accessed 24 January, 2017)

However let's set such concerns aside, to focus on Professor Jordan's case against the hiddenness argument. I really do like his particularities point, which is central to that case. (I was not just saying that, a moment ago, to set up my own point.) But nothing he has said shows that I can't have that point and a successful hiddenness argument, too.

Professor Jordan starts his argument for a contrary view with Aquinas. We might wonder why we should assume that Aquinas got it right when talking about the nature of love, and also whether Professor Jordan has *read* him right. Eleonore Stump, at any rate, appears to disagree with Professor Jordan's exegesis here.⁴ And I myself have gone a somewhat different way, developing a view that emphasizes openness to personal relationship along with benevolence. This view is closer to Stump's view – and so, ironically, if Stump is right, closer to Aquinas's actual view – than the one Professor Jordan uses. Professor Jordan apparently assumes either that I'm mistaken in what I say about the nature of love or that the force of the alternative view, which he uses, is obvious. To avoid accusing him of begging the question against me, let's suppose that it is the latter rather than the former.

Let's suppose, further, that Professor Jordan is right about the force of his view about the nature of love, in order to see what follows. On his view, love includes *identifying* with at least many of the particular interests of the one loved. Since we should expect the relevant particular interests of created finite persons to be (at least to some extent) opposed to each other, we should conclude that God could not love *maximally* and *equally* all finite persons, as the hiddenness argument requires. That would entail identifying with *all* of their relevant interests, which, if some are opposed, can't be done. Or so says Professor Jordan.

Here some thought needs to be given to what exactly it is to identify with the interests of someone you love. Must someone who identifies with the interests of another in the relevant sense seek the *satisfaction* of those interests? Must she *care* about the satisfaction of those interests, and, if so, does *this* mean that she must seek their satisfaction? Must she *empathize* with the one who has these interests, and does *this* mean seeking their satisfaction? It ap-

4 See, for example, her detailed work on this topic in *Wandering in Darkness: Narrative and the Problem of Suffering* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

pears that Professor Jordan would reply here with a string of yeses, since he takes identification with the interests of another to require treating them as one's own. But the notion of 'identifying' with the interests of another can be taken in different ways, and even if intuition has us nodding when we hear it said that love involves such a thing as identification with the interests of those whom we love, it may leave us unsure when it comes to particular interpretations of this behaviour such as Professor Jordan's. I myself think it's not at all clear that his interpretation is the best or right one. I would say, for example, that you can express the attitude of caring about the opposed interests of two people if you're *sad* that they can't both be realized. And such caring seems to suffice for the love-relevant sort of identification. But then any of us, and any God as well, can identify with opposed interests, and Professor Jordan's problem is solved.

But let's go a little further with him, assuming that no such move can work. The first point I am inclined to make on that assumption is that it would be good to have more examples than he provides of what identifying with someone's interests, treating them as one's own in the way he emphasizes, would involve, so we can see more clearly just what is required here, and what is allowed. What, for example, do parents do in various relevant cases? If at time t a parent finds the relevant interests of her several children opposed, might she be moved to interact with her children, offering input that she hopes may generate *revised* and *compatible* interests at some time after t ? (Notice how openness to relationship is presupposed here.) Might she seek to make up for one child's loss, if the interests of several really are incompatible, at some time after t (notice that God has eternity), or make a decision favouring another child next time? And if she does one of these things, has she been identifying equally and maximally with the interests of all her children during all this time? It's far from obvious that our answer should be no.

But all such considerations are really beside the point. When formulating his proposition L, which says that God's love would be maximally extended and [for each recipient] equally intense, and attributing it to me, Professor Jordan forgets about the *possibility constraint* rightly included in all his previous references to what I have said about divine love. L, again, says that God's love would be maximally extended and equally intense, period. That is why it leads into the trouble Jordan is trying to stir up. But if L is to state a view

to which I am committed, it should say that God's love would be as fully extended and as unvarying in its intensity *as possible*. (This is still not something I've ever said, but let's overlook that for the moment.) Now, if Professor Jordan is right about love, then, given the possibility constraint included in it, it does not follow from the revised L that God's love would involve identifying in *complete* equality with everyone's interests, for, if he's right, this isn't possible! The revised L therefore isn't problematic in the way L is. So I am not committed to a defective idea of love, and Professor Jordan's criticism fails. Moreover, the revised L, even with the possibility constraint it includes, *will* imply that God would be open to relationship with everyone, since no similar impediment stands in the way of God satisfying this description, and God's love is more fully and equally extended if this description is satisfied than otherwise. The 'openness' condition is of course what the hiddenness argument emphasizes, and — now leaving even the revised L behind — is in fact all that it needs to emphasize about God's love to succeed.

What I've already said provides a sufficient condition for the failure of Professor Jordan's critique. But another, independent sufficient condition is also worth mentioning. This responds to the reasoning advanced by Professor Jordan when he considers whether the hiddenness arguer might solve the problem he has raised by focusing on the *best* interests of those whom God loves. What he says here, again — and even more conspicuously — wielding what I have called his particularities point, is that this approach (call it the best interests approach) treats the relevant interests of finite persons as *fungible* or interchangeable, and that real love, attentive to the particularities of the beloved, would never view them in this way. The best interests approach, we are told, is therefore inadequate.

I think this reasoning in response to the best interests approach is unsound because its first premise is false. The assumption behind that premise, notice, is that everyone's best interests are the same. Maybe they aren't. But suppose they are. Here is the really important response: best interests will be the same and so interchangeable *only at the level of type*. The best interests of every finite person might include, say, certain opportunities for happiness and virtue in the context of an ever-growing relationship with God. Consider again the latter, a relationship with God. When we speak of it, we speak of a certain *type* of thing. We're not talking about how such a relationship

would be experienced, at the token level, by Cheuk or Sonia, John or Jeff. So *let's* move to the token level. What we'll see, if we do, is enormous variation. For what a relationship with God would be for persons should be expected to *vary with their idiosyncrasies*. For example, Cheuk, practical and socially concerned, might feel God's stable encouraging presence while helping others. Sonia, more dreamy and introverted, might feel a connection to God while producing art, or have rich and dramatic mystical experiences. And so a sensitivity to particularities is after all possible if God wishes to stick to the best interests of finite persons when expressing love for them. God's love can vary from person to person at the token level even if not at the level of type, if we think of it in a way that is restricted to best interests. It follows that even were the response to Professor Jordan's critique I made above, in connection with the possibility constraint, unsuccessful (which I don't believe it is), his critique would still fail because of the applicability of this type-token distinction within the context of the best interests approach.