

DIVINE HIDDENNESS AND PERFECT LOVE

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At the onset of an online debate with John Schellenberg years ago, I offered this judgment about his divine hiddenness argument:

John Schellenberg has presented an argument noteworthy in several respects. One interesting respect is that his 'Divine Hiddenness' argument is a philosophically interesting innovation in a debate that has raged for millennia. Innovation in philosophy, especially an interesting innovation, is not an easy task, but Professor Schellenberg has accomplished it.¹

Well, it has been some twenty years since *Divine Hiddenness and Human Reason* was published and much philosophical ink has been spilt in attacks and defences of the Hiddenness Argument (HA). With his most recent book, *The Hiddenness Argument: Philosophy's new challenge to belief in God* (Oxford University Press, 2015), Professor Schellenberg seeks to export the HA to a wider audience by making the argument accessible to those with little exposure to philosophy and even less tolerance for the technical jargon employed by academics. While not as noteworthy as his 1993 book, *The Hiddenness Argument* provides an accessible and up-to date presentation of Professor Schellenberg's Hiddenness Argument.

¹ See our 2007 exchange in 'God or Blind Nature: Philosophers debate the evidence (2007-2009)' edited by P. Draper, available at: <<http://infidels.org/library/modern/debates/great-debate.html>> (accessed 23 March 2016).

There are a few changes between the 1993 version of the HA and the 2015 version. One change is that the 2015 model employs the idea of finite persons rather than humans. The theistic God, Professor Schellenberg thinks, could have brought about persons other than human persons. The idea here is that any need for divine hiddenness due to the nature of humans could have been avoided if God had brought about another kind of finite person. A second change has to do with the explicit introduction of what Professor Schellenberg calls ‘pre-doubt’ – the lack of theistic belief among those who lived in the distant past, long before the advent of monotheism – as a case of non-resistant doubt.² Another change is that Professor Schellenberg’s idea of ultimism now plays a role in the discussion, which it did not in 1993. Ultimism is the idea that there is a reality which is ultimate as regards the nature of things and the nature of value, which is of supreme importance for humans. If ultimism is the case, then metaphysical naturalism is false. The HA is an argument contra one version of ultimism: theism. Theism is an elaboration of ultimism, which implies that the ultimate reality is a personal reality. God is a person according to theism. One discussion missing in *The Hiddenness Argument* concerns how a reality could be ultimately valuable without involving personhood. Among the most basic and important distinctions in ethical theory is that between persons and mere things. The former has a morally exalted status, which is lacking in the latter. I would find it surprising that the religiously ultimate fact about the universe, assuming there is one, would be impersonal, even while acknowledging that millions of Buddhists may not find it so surprising. At places Professor Schellenberg employs the Anselmian manoeuvre of arguing that God, qua perfect being, would have a certain property as instantiating that property is great-making.³ It is hard to see that personhood is not a great-making property.

While the new book is about half as long as his first book, the latest version of the HA is a bit more complex:

- (1) if a perfectly loving God exists, then there exists a God who is always open to a personal relationship with any finite person. And,

2 I thank Professor Schellenberg for bringing these points to my attention.

3 See, for instance, *The Hiddenness Argument: Philosophy’s new challenge to belief in God*, 39, 99 & 106.

(2) if there exists a God who is always open to a personal relationship with any finite person, then no finite person is ever non-resistantly in a state of nonbelief in relation to the proposition that God exists.

And,

(3) if a perfectly loving God exists, then no finite person is ever non-resistantly in a state of nonbelief in relation to the proposition that God exists. But,

(4) some finite persons are or have been non-resistantly in a state of nonbelief in relation to the proposition that God exists. So,

(5) no perfectly loving God exists. And,

(6) if no perfectly loving God exists, then God does not exist. Therefore,

(7) God does not exist.⁴

In its 1993 incarnation the HA ran:

(i) If there is a God, he is perfectly loving. And,

(ii) if a perfectly loving God exists, reasonable nonbelief does not occur. But,

(iii) reasonable nonbelief occurs. So,

(iv) no perfectly loving God exists. Therefore,

(v) there is no God.⁵

Both versions employ as premises propositions about a perfectly loving God. And with that constancy, I argue below, the latest version of the HA, as well as the earlier one, is unsound. Any premise asserting or implying that God is perfectly loving in the sense required by Professor Schellenberg is

4 *The Hiddenness Argument: Philosophy's new challenge to belief in God*, 103.

5 *Divine Hiddenness and Human Reason* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 83.

false for the simple fact that the idea of a being perfectly loving, like that of an omnipotent being controlling the actions of an agent who enjoys significant freedom, is a concept impossible to exemplify. To see this, let's first get clear on Schellenberg's concept of perfect love.

ALL WE NEED IS LOVE

Professor Schellenberg nowhere provides an analysis or definition of his concept of perfect love. But among the various scattered remarks he provides about the concept, one can glean three characteristics that Professor Schellenberg attributes to divine perfect love. The first is that:

(A): perfect love is the greatest and deepest kind of love.

As he writes, 'Perfect love... is here taken to be the best, the greatest, the deepest love that could possibly be realized in God. It's ultimate love.'⁶ Proposition (A) implies that God's love for humans is the deepest possible. It is not a shallow or generic love. A perfect love is as deep or as intense as possible. It is not just a surface feature but extends down to the marrow. So, God loves all other beings in the deepest way possible. The second is that:

(B): perfect love implies impartiality and love for all finite persons.

As Professor Schellenberg puts it: 'the truth of *a perfectly loving God exists* brings with it the truth of *there exists a God who is always open to a personal relationship with any finite person*' (39 and 44). Proposition (B) implies that God loves all humans equally and manifests no preferential concern or love directed toward some, but not others. It follows from (A) and (B) that a perfect love requires loving all finite beings in the deepest way possible. The third is that:

(C): the parent and child relation provides an appropriate model for the divine love of persons.

Again, 'if... God has brought into the world finite persons capable of relationship with God and indeed fulfilled only by it, then something very like

⁶ *The Hiddenness Argument: Philosophy's new challenge to belief in God*, 39 & 42. Citations to this work are hereafter in textual parentheses.

the parent-child relation exists between God and finite persons' (99; see also 109).⁷ This proposition asserts that we can understand God's love for persons via the relation between loving and exemplary human parents and their children. According to (A)-(C), God perfectly loves, so God equally loves every human, and loves them in the deepest way possible. With (A)-(C) as our guide, we might capture the Schellenberg concept of perfect love with the following principle:

(L): If God exists then God's love must be maximally extended and equally intense.

According to (L), God's love must be directed toward every human as its object; and must be as deep as possible with every human an equal recipient. Every human, then, is loved by God to the same significant degree. So, the divine love must be maximally extended, maximally intense, and maximally deep. But even with these dimensions in hand, we still need to know something of the nuts and bolts of divine love. Thomas Aquinas understood love as a uniting and binding force:

... to love a person is to wish that person good. Hence, inasmuch as we love ourselves, we wish ourselves good; and so far as possible, union with the good. ... And by the fact that anyone loves another, he wills good to that other. Thus he puts the other, as it were, in the place of himself; and regards the good done to him as done to himself. So far love is a binding force, since it aggregates another to ourselves, and refers his good to our own.⁸

7 *Summa Theologica*, Iae, Q 20, A. 1. See also, *Summa Theologica*, Iae, Q. 20, A.3.

8 A word about the claim that the human parent-child relation is an appropriate model of the divine-human relation. Not all theistic traditions accept the idea that God may be considered the universal father of all. For instance, Islam, I am told, rejects the idea that God could be the heavenly father of humans. My correspondent, Abdulkadir Taniş, a Philosophy doctoral student at Ankara University, reported via email (2/3/2016) that: 'Islam doesn't accept the analogy because the oneness of God/Allah is very significant for Islam. First, the analogy implies God can have a son or so on. Second, Muslims knew the importance of Father idea in Christian tradition in Muhammed's time. For these reasons, Islam rejects the Father analogy. And in many verses of *Qur'an*, it has been emphasized that God cannot have a son, or that He cannot be a father. For example, the *Qur'an* says: 'Say: He is Allah, the One. Allah is eternal, absolute. He begetteth not, nor He is begotten and there is none like unto Him' (112:1-4)'. Quoted with permission.

Taking our cue from Aquinas, we will understand the relevant sense of love as having at least two conceptually necessary features: the first is the lover desires good for her beloved. This feature we might understand as the lover having a disinterested or selfless concern for her beloved – that her beloved flourish or do well. In short, the first feature might be seen as a deep desire that the interests of one's beloved are advanced, not for one's own sake but for the sake of the beloved. Indeed, we should think of this first feature as not just desiring that those interests are advanced but also as seeking to advance those interests when feasible.

The second feature is the lover putting the beloved, as Thomas says, 'in the place of himself'. This we might understand as taking the beloved's interest as one's own, or identifying with the interests of the one loved.⁹ Of course, given the first feature, it follows that the lover would identify with no interest incompatible with the beloved's well-being. The first feature, then, serves as a check on the second, since love does not require identifying with interests harmful or destructive or immoral. There may be other features characteristic of love, desiring a relationship with the beloved perhaps, or willing the best for one's beloved, but these other features, if such there be, are not relevant to our discussion.

Recognizing those two features of love reveals a third feature: the more interests one identifies with, and the greater the concern for one's beloved, the deeper one loves the beloved. Identification and concern provide a kind of proportional matrix for measuring the depth or intensity of love, as an increase in identification and concern generates a deeper love. A deep love implies a great concern for the beloved and an extensive identification with the beloved's interests. An interest of a person is something the person cares about, or something the person should care about.¹⁰ Identifying with an interest we might understand as, roughly, caring about what one's beloved cares about because one's beloved cares about it, or caring about what one's beloved

9 This characterization of love is influenced by the analysis of love found in Harry G. Frankfurt, *The Reasons of Love* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004), 79-80.

10 Could there be interests a person should care about even though they are not among her best interests? If there could be, then understanding best interests as interests one should care about would be a necessary but not sufficient property.

should care about because one's beloved should care about it.¹¹ Different persons, of course, have different interests some of which are incompatible. Two interests are incompatible just in case attempts to bring about one of them require that the other be impeded.

Of course, not all of one's interests are equal. Some interests one has are rightly counted as one's best interests – what a person should care about, whether or not she knows those are her best interests, and whether she even in fact cares about those interests. Best interests are those one would acknowledge if one were fully rational and fully informed.¹² But persons have interests which are not counted among their best interests – what one cares about even though full information and full rationality would not necessitate their acknowledgment. A person might care that A.S. Roma win even though that interest is not ranked among one's best interests. These less than the best interests we might call a person's mere interests. Mere interests are real interests but are not properly counted among a person's best interests.

With Aquinas' characterization in hand, two aspects of Professor Schellenberg's idea of perfect love seem especially salient (see propositions (A) and (B) above). The first is equality – that every person is the object of the love. So, a perfect love is directed to each and every person. The second is the depth or degree of the love. Now, think back to the two conceptual features of love: the more one identifies with the interests of another, and the more concern one has for that person, the deeper one's love for that person. A perfect love, in the sense required by Professor Schellenberg, then, is characterized by maximal concern and identification with all and for all. Flowing out of perfect love would be divine impartiality – God would treat his beloveds the same. Of course, arguably, if a certain finite person had a need warranting deviation from impartial treatment, a loving God would presumably meet that need if he could. But perfect love provides the rationale for why God would be open

11 Does intensity of the identification play a role more critical than mere identification – wholeheartedly taking as one's own as opposed to just taking as one's own? It is far from clear that identifying with an interest is a degreed concept, as one either identifies with an interest or not. In any case, I set this worry aside.

12 Could a person be fully rational and fully informed and yet have warped or skewed desires? If so, then one's best interests are those one would have if one's desires were as they should be.

to a personal relationship with any and all finite persons, as God would love and desire good for each, and would thereby be open to a personal relationship with each.

While many theists employ the language of perfect and unsurpassable love, it is far from clear that theism requires the concept of a perfectly loving God as Professor Schellenberg understands the concept.¹³ Does theism entail proposition (L)? It seems clear that it does not since if $p \ \& \ q$ do not imply r , then p does not imply r ; and expansions of theism, such as Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, need not entail (L).¹⁴ For instance, a venerable Christian theological tradition populated with names like Paul, Augustine, Thomas, Luther, and Calvin, asserts that divine love and grace are divine gifts, which are not uniformly distributed.¹⁵ In addition, it is a common claim of theists that God is perfectly good, and by that they mean not just that God loves, but that God is morally just. God's love, then, would have to be calibrated to a degree compatible with the other properties essential to divine perfection. Calibration suggests a degree less than maximal. But set aside these worries, as there is reason to think that the HA is unsound.

13 For an example, see Thomas Talbott, 'The Topography of Divine Love: a response to Jeff Jordan,' *Faith & Philosophy*, 30 (2013), 302-316.

14 William Rowe has a helpful distinction between restricted theism and expanded theism, which provides an idea of how we might understand an expansion of theism:

'Expanded theism is the view that [God] exists, conjoined with certain other significant religious claims, claims about sin, redemption, a future life, a last judgment, and the like. (Orthodox Christian theism is a version of expanded theism.) Restricted theism is the view that [God exists], unaccompanied by other, independent religious claims.'

See his 'The Empirical Argument from Evil' in *Rationality, Religious Belief, & Moral Commitment*, eds R. Audi and W.J. Wainwright (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1986), 239.

15 Professor Schellenberg comments on a different aspect of this tradition in his *Divine Hiddenness and Human Reason*, 74-82. In *The Hiddenness Argument*, Schellenberg asserts that perfectly loving is great-making (see 106), and worship-worthiness requires then that God be perfectly loving.

WHY THE HA IS UNSOUND

Premise (6) is an indispensable premise of the HA, as is premise (i) of the 1993 version. Both are also false. To see this, consider that each of premises (6) and (i) must entail (L) if their respective versions of the HA are valid. Premises (1)-(4) make claims about all finite persons who ever have lived, or will live, or could have lived, so it is clear that a maximal extension to all is needed. Premise (1) makes clear that the divine love is deep as God would seek a personal relationship with every finite person. Finally, no variation in that love is permitted if the reasoning of (1) - (6) will result in (7). Proposition (L), then, is the mortar helping to hold the bricks of (1) - (6) in place.

But (L) is false. Why is (L) false? Different people have different interests; and, since love has as a necessary constituent identifying with the interests of one's beloved, then there will be an in-principle obstacle to loving equally and maximally all people, as no rational agent can identify with, or take as his own, interests known to be incompatible. If love includes identifying with the interests of the beloved, then it is not possible to love every person equally and maximally given that persons have incompatible interests. If Jones takes as his own your interests, he cannot identify with any known interest incompatible with yours. Suppose Smith's interests conflict with yours. It would not be possible for Jones to identify equally and maximally with your interests and with the interests of Smith, so Jones cannot love Smith as much as he loves you. And this is not just a practical matter, or a matter of limited resources. If God were to love certain persons, and thereby identify with their interests, then God could not identify with any known incompatible interests had by others. In other words, even God cannot love every human in the deepest way.

In response, one might invoke the distinction between best interests and mere interests, alleging the former as the relevant consideration. With that distinction in hand, perhaps we could pare the stock of relevant interests persons have down to a compatible few. Yet, even with the distinction between best interests and mere interests, we find an obstacle still, as whatever compatibility this paring provides is achieved at the cost of plausibility. If God loves individuals as regards their particularity and singularity, and not just as bearers of universal features, then advancing or identifying with a thinned set

of best interests found among all hardly seems a sufficient fit, as neither our beloveds nor their cares are fungible. So, if divine love relevantly resembles even if it far surpasses the love characteristic of the best of human parenting, then simply meeting only those best interests of a beloved child interchangeable with those of any other child falls short of the mark. Indeed, human parenting at its best involves not just caring about what one's child should care about, but also caring about what one's child cares about because he cares it. We would expect, then, like a loving human parent seeking to advance not only the best interests of a beloved child but also the child's mere interests, that God would seek the same. But, again, different people have different interests and it is not possible for a rational agent to take as her own interests known to be incompatible.

But let's set aside the issue of whether the best interests of all persons are compatible as it is dispositive to note that any love which identified with only those interests of its beloved interchangeable with those of every other person would treat its beloved as a fungible.¹⁶ Suppose, for example, that being happy (in Bentham's sense) is the sole best interest of every person, and that seeking that for all was possible. Could one identify with this single best interest of every person? Perhaps so, but if that is the only interest one identifies with, then it is hard to see how one could be said to deeply love others, since, arguably, the more interests one identifies with and the greater the concern for one's beloved, the more deeply one loves that beloved. So, if one identified only with interests common to all, one would not love others in the deepest way.

Additionally, any love which only identified with interests common to all faces another problem. To see this, suppose that God identified only with those interests common to all finite persons. If this were so then God would not love those individuals as regards their particularity. In effect, God would treat those individuals as interchangeable if God identifies only with those interests identical with the interests of all others. So, if God identifies only

16 The problem being developed here differs from the 'fungibility objection' to appraisal accounts of love (Concisely put: an appraisal account holds that love is an appreciation of the valuable qualities exemplified by one's beloved – which seems to suggest that others could exemplify those qualities to the same or even greater degree). On the fungibility objection to appraisal accounts, see B.W. Helm, *Love, Friendship, and the Self* (Oxford: OUP, 2010), 24-34.

with those interests common to all, then God does not deeply love persons, or God does not love individuals as regards their particularity.

Moreover, recall that human parenting at its best involves not just caring about what one's child should care about, but also caring about what one's child cares about. The best human love identifies not just with the beloved's best interests but also with the beloved's mere interests. The two constituent features of love, as noted, entail that love does not require identifying with interests harmful or destructive to the beloved. But, of course, one can have interests which are not among one's best interests and which are neither harmful nor destructive. Suppose a parent had two children both of whose best interests the parent seeks to identify with, as best he can, and seeks to advance. But the parent also identifies with and seeks to advance the mere interests of one child, but not the other. This favoritism or deeper identification with one child over the other could not be squared with the claim that the parent equally loves both. So, holding that the deepest love identifies only with the best interests of others, and that the best interests of each are fungible with those of every other, has the odd result of the deepest love falling short of that love characteristic of the best of human parenting. And, further, no one can credibly hold that the mere interests of persons do not conflict, as there clearly are zero-sum situations the winning of which is among the interests of persons – going to the event is a mere interest of both Smith and Jones, let's suppose, but as there is only one ticket remaining, they both cannot attend.

But could one treat the interests of others as fungible while at the same time not treating those individuals as fungibles? Could God, for instance, love individuals as regards their particularity, while identifying only with those interests common to all persons? Not if we understand love as, in part, identifying with the beloved's interests. No one could identify only with those interests of Jones common to all others and yet love Jones as a particular individual. One could of course deny that love has as a conceptual part the identification by the lover with the interests of her beloved, as one could love another without knowing the particulars of the beloved: 'I love my baby' a newly pregnant woman might truthfully say, even though the pregnancy is but a month along.

Even if it is true that one could love without identifying with the interests of the beloved, it is hard to see how one could deeply love another without

knowing and identifying with her interests, as deep love implies an intimate acquaintance with the beloved. In short, love involves identifying with the beloved's interests and not just with the beloved's best interests only, even though one's best interests are of greater import than are one's mere interests.

That a deep love focuses, at least in part, on the particularity and singularity of individuals explains why a universal and impartial love, with no variance, cannot be the deepest kind of love. The deepest love involves a kind of exclusivity and does not devalue the beloved by treating her, in effect, as a fungible. So, even God cannot love every person in the deepest way, as no one in-principle can fully identify with every person's interests.

One might object that the foregoing may work if we understand persons as human persons but God surely could have created finite non-human persons, such that those non-human but finite persons have no interests, best or mere, which conflict. This objection assumes much that is far from clear. Could there be finite persons in any rich or interesting sense, capable of personal relationships, which have no interests, mere or best, which could conflict? It is far from clear that there could be as the idea of complex finite persons who are interchangeable or fungible in every relevant sense seems dubious. Perhaps it is my impoverished imagination but I just do not see how that could be. Indeed, improvising on a comment made by J.S. Mill in another context captures the problem with this objection: finite persons are not like sheep; and even sheep are not indistinguishably alike — is it easier to fit finite persons with a life than with, say, a pair of shoes? Or, are finite persons more like one another in their whole physical and spiritual conformation than in the shape of their feet?¹⁷

With the foregoing, we have good reason to deny (L). And with good reason to deny (L), we have good reason to reject premise (6) of the 2015 model of the HA as well as premise (i) of the 1993 model. The HA, whether old or new, is unsound.

17 See J.S. Mill's chapter III, 'Of Individuality, As One the Elements of Well-being' in his 1859 book, *On Liberty*.

SALVAGE OPERATIONS

One might seek to salvage (L) by objecting that humans surely identify fully with their own interests; yet some of an individual's interests have to be traded-off in light of the individual's inability to fully realize them all in the actual world. So the fact that a divine being could be constrained such that that being could not realize everyone's interests seems no less a challenge to God's ability to identify with everyone's interests than the fact that a human cannot fully realize all of her interests and yet she can fully identify with all of her interests; or so one might argue.

This objection however equivocates on the idea of fully identifying with an interest. In one sense it is true every human fully identifies with each of their own interests. But that sense is hardly relevant. In the relevant sense it is not true that every human fully identifies with each of their best interests, let alone with all of their interests. One should care about one's health, for instance, but there are smokers. Given the wide phenomena of self-destructive actions and self-hatred, it is clear enough that many humans do not fully identify with each of their interests.

A variant of the former objection would hold that one can fully identify, in the relevant sense, with each of several conflicting interests. So, for instance, one may fully identify with the interests of being a conscientious scholar and of being a loving parent; but there are times when those interests conflict. Even so, one might argue, deciding on this occasion to play with one's children rather than reading a philosophy paper does not mean that one no longer fully identifies with both interests. And if that is so, then God's inability to realize everyone's interests seems no more a challenge to God's ability to fully identify with everyone's interests than the fact that a human cannot concurrently realize all of her interests and yet she can fully identify with all of them; or again, so one might argue.

The problem with this objection is that it mistakes not being able to realize interests on certain occasions, with those interests being incompatible. The failure to realize certain interests on this occasion or that may be due to practical limitations such as insufficient time or resources or knowledge and not due to a logical limit. Practical limitations however do not generate logical incompatibilities. Two interests are incompatible just in case attempts to

bring about one require that the other be impeded; and it is clear enough that realizing the interest of being a loving parent does not require that one not be a conscientious scholar.

Perhaps one might agree that no being can love all other beings in the deepest way, and so even a perfect being's love must vary if the perfect being were to love any finite person in the deepest way. But, one might argue, whatever the variation, a perfect being would nonetheless seek a personal relation with every finite person. So, the HA retrofitted with a concept of love different than that employed by Professor Schellenberg might still support the charge that non-resistant non-belief provides strong evidence contra God, or so one could argue.

Retrofitting does not rescue the argument since the impossibility of God loving every other being in the deepest way means a loss of impartiality as well. If there is variation in the degree of divine love – if God loves some more than others – then our reasons for supposing that God would seek the same for each finite person evaporate, as lovers do not act impartially between their dearests and others.¹⁸ Professor Schellenberg has given us no reason for thinking that a variable divine love must always be open to a personal relationship with every finite person, apart from the now discredited claims of (A)-(C) associated with the Schellenberg sense of perfect love. Additionally, one cannot just jettison premise (6), and in its place offer a principle along the lines of (M) as a patch on the HA:

(M): for any perfect being B, if B is loving then there exists a God who is always open to a personal relationship with any finite person.

Such a substitution is unavailable as the characteristic claim of Professor Schellenberg's HA involves his concept of perfect love (as Professor Schellenberg puts it, his HA starts 'from above' and not below, see 74-75). To replace perfect love with some other sense of love, or, for that matter, with perfect

18 In contrast to classical paganism, the claim that God was loving was an innovation of early Christianity (see Larry Hurtado, *Why on Earth Did Anyone Become a Christian in the First Three Centuries?* (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 2016), 124-26). The further idea that God might love some more than others is not novel. In the Christian tradition, for instance, Thomas Aquinas in his *Summa Theologica*, Iae, Q. 20, A.3. & A.4, argued that a loving God can love some more than others. Of course, even before Thomas, Paul held that God's love was not equally distributed to all humans. See his *Epistle to the Romans*, chapter 9.

justice or perfect morality, would forfeit what Professor Schellenberg sees as the indispensable original insight of his version of the HA.¹⁹

Finally, we might ask: if God lacks perfect love in the Schellenberg sense would that diminish the worship-worthiness of God? It is hard to see that it would, as the argument is not just that God does not perfectly love, but that it is impossible for any being to love every other being in the deepest way possible. If the ‘failure’ of God to control the actions of those who enjoy significant freedom implies no diminishment of worship-worthiness, then likewise the ‘failure’ of God to love all maximally and equally seems just as benign. These ‘failures’ are not genuine defects as they are not incompatible with perfection. Could a perfect being love some more than others? Well, since no being can love all finite beings in the deepest way, then, if God is to love in the deepest way, God must love some more than others. And, arguably, the failure to love in the deepest way would be a genuine defect incompatible with perfection and worship-worthiness.²⁰

A CONCLUSION

One might wonder if the intrinsic value of being in a personal relationship might rescue the idea that God would always be open to a personal relationship with any finite person? This wonder dissipates with the realization that we do not act impartially between those we love best and others whom we love.²¹ So, if there is variation in the divine love, then, for all we know, re-

19 For an extended argument on this last point, see Jeff Jordan, ‘The Topography of Divine Love’, *Faith and Philosophy*, 29/1 (2012), 53-69.

20 It may be that the aggregate of the extrinsic value, as well as the intrinsic value, of relationships with those loved deeply could outweigh the aggregate value of being in a personal relationship with any finite person. Or, for all we know, the variability may result in God not now being open to a personal relationship with those he deeply loves in order to facilitate a personal relationship with others.

21 Professor Schellenberg offers an intriguing last chapter (‘Coda: After Personal Gods’) in which he remarks on the grandeur of deep time and human progress. While reading it, a passage from another non-theistic writer about similar themes came to mind, Friedrich Nietzsche, *Daybreak: Thoughts on the Prejudices of Morality* (1881), eds M. Clark & B. Leiter; trans. R. J. Hollingdale; (Cambridge University Press, 1982), 32: “Formerly one sought the feeling of the grandeur of man by pointing to his divine *origin*: this has now become a forbidden way, for at its portal stands the ape, together with other gruesome beasts, grinning knowingly

relationships with those deeply loved could require that God not now be open to personal relationships with those not deeply loved. Or, for that matter, if there is variation in the divine love, then, for all we know, relationships with those not deeply loved could require that God not now be open to personal relationships with those deeply loved. The takeaway here is that, apart from the now discredited claims of (A)-(C) associated with the Schellenberg sense of perfect love, we have been given no reason for thinking that a variable divine love must always be open to a personal relationship with every finite person.

Since 1993 the HA, as developed by Professor Schellenberg, has relied upon a premise that either God must love all humans, or love all finite beings, in the deepest way possible. While the presentation of the HA in 2015 differs from that of 1993, it is still reliant on the Schellenberg sense of perfectly loving: the theistic God must love all others beings in the deepest way possible. But, clearly, even if we cannot know everything that perfect love would or would not do, we can see via a simple argument that it is impossible for any being to love all finite beings (human or not) in the deepest way possible. The HA, whether new or old, is no more successful than an argument which required that a perfect being must be so omniscient as to tell us the value of the greatest positive integer.²² Theists have little to worry about any argument involving claims about omniscience of that sort. Likewise, there is little to worry about arguments reliant on proposition (L)

as if to say: no further in this direction! One therefore now tries the opposite direction: the way mankind is going shall serve as proof of his grandeur and kinship with God. Alas this, too, is vain! At the end of this way stands the funeral urn of the last man and gravedigger (with the inscription '*nihil humani a me alienum puto*'). However high mankind may have evolved—and perhaps at the end it will stand even lower than at the beginning!— it cannot pass over into a higher order, as little as the ant and the earwig can at the end of its 'earthly course' rise up to kinship with God and eternal life. The becoming drags the has-been along behind it: why should an exception to this eternal spectacle be made on behalf of some little star or for any little species upon it! Away with such sentimentalities!"