

The Problem of Divine Hiddenness

Seven Talking Points

By John DeRosa

There are many ways to respond to the argument against God known as the *Problem of Divine Hiddenness*. Remember, it's always a good practice to start by asking questions like "What do you mean by that?" or "How did you come to that conclusion?" This way, you will get a sense of the type of hiddenness argument the other person is presenting. Also, with questions, you gain a better sense of how much he or she has studied. In this PDF, I've organized some useful talking points and replies to assist you in conversations about divine Hiddenness.

The Argument

Suppose someone presents the argument like this.

God does not exist. If an all-loving perfect God existed, then He would make His existence clear and obvious. It would be like the existence of the Sun. No one debates whether the sun exists, because we all just see that it does. Yet, people disagree about whether God even exists. So, a loving God does not exist because if He did He would show himself to everyone.

How to Respond: Talking Points

1. **God is not obligated to make his existence like that of the sun.** The objector is correct that God *could* have made his existence as obvious as the sun. But why *must* he do that? If God chose to make His existence somewhat hidden for various reasons (we discuss some potential reasons below), then such hiddenness does not count against His existence. We must ask the objector, "Isn't it possible that God exists yet made His existence somewhat hidden?" And if not, ask Him, "Why is this impossible?" You will then want to follow with points from #6 below.
2. **God is not completely hidden.** It's true that God does not present himself to us like our coffee mug presents itself to us. But, there are [good reasons](#) to believe that God exists. Moreover, in addition to powerful philosophical arguments for God's existence, we have the historical evidence of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. None of this is as clear and obvious as saying a coffee cup in front of you exists, but it's still very good evidence to adopt a Christian worldview.
3. **It's not clear merely *knowing that* God exists would lead more people into a proper relationship with him.**¹ Of course, people can confidently assert that more people would believe in God if He made His existence more obvious. But it's not clear that *mere belief* would lead to a *proper relationship* in those cases. Perhaps people would grow to resent a God who was so obvious that He was always watching over their shoulder in some intrusive way. Perhaps some would recognize His existence and still choose not to follow Him.

Trent Horn gives the analogy of eating healthy food. Many people know that eating healthy

¹ Blake Giunta defends this point and takes it further in [this podcast discussion](#) with an atheist.

foods will be good for them, but they choose to eat unhealthy junk food instead. Mere knowledge that food is unhealthy is not sufficient for them to choose healthy food. Similarly, mere knowledge of God's existence is not sufficient for people to choose proper relationship with Him.

4. **God may be somewhat hidden for various reasons related to our goodness.** God's remaining somewhat hidden allows human beings to seek Him in humility and to use their intellect to reason to His existence. When one is learning mathematics, it is not useful to *merely* look up the answers in the back of the book, but rather to work through the problem step by step. It is in accord with our dignity as rational creatures to seek and discover God with our intellects.
5. **God may be somewhat hidden due to "the Fall" of Adam and Eve.** As Catholics, we affirm "the Fall" of man as a *real historical event*. Of course, we allow for the possibility that the events described in Genesis did not unfold literally with a tree, serpent, and apple. Also, those accounts may use figurative language. But, however one interprets Genesis 1 - 3, it cannot be denied that, according to the Bible, it was the first sin of human beings that brought suffering and chaos into the world. This event, known as "the Fall," led the expulsion of our first parents from paradise and exposure to death, disease, and a world where God does not protect us with the same immediacy as in the garden. Part of losing paradise could be a degree of God's Hiddenness that was not part of life in the garden.
6. **God may be somewhat hidden for reasons that transcend our understanding.** Dr. Michael C. Rea argues for a thesis related to God's transcendence that states, "All intrinsic substantive predications of God are at most analogical." He [explains that thesis here](#) and defends it in his book on Hiddenness (see resources below). It follows from this that we ought to have a *humility of expectations* regarding what God, who is transcendent, will do.

We expect loving, human parents to make their existence and love obvious and physical to their children. But God is not a human being like we are. He did *become human* in the person of Jesus (and [we have good evidence for this](#)) and express love in clear and physical way to many when performing signs and miracles as well as offering his body for our salvation. But God, in His divine nature, is not a human being and thus cannot be bound by human expectation.

God may have His own divine reasons or ways that are so far beyond us that we would not understand them even if we knew them better (e.g. Isaiah 55 "his thoughts are *higher* than our thoughts" or Romans 11 "how inscrutable are his ways?"). Yet, just because God's ways are *beyond* our comprehension in various respects does not mean He does not exist. It just means that skeptics can't use human standards and expectations to disprove the existence of the transcendent God of Classical Theism.

7. **It's possible that many who find God to be hidden are *resistant* to God in some way.** Many people struggle with the claims of Christianity, particularly in regard to sexual ethics. If someone despises Christian teaching on homosexuality or abortion, then they are less likely to be *nonresistant* to the Christian message. Moreover, our human psychology is complicated, and

by behaving in certain ways or studying certain views that point away from God, we may build up more resistance to His existence over time. So, to such people, God's existence would appear hidden whereas if they had made different moral choices or studied different evidences with an open mind, He might appear less hidden.

In [a blog article](#), Dr. Edward Feser explains, "We are indeed naturally inclined to infer from the natural order of things to the existence of some cause beyond it. But the tendency is not a psychologically *overwhelming* one like our inclination to eat or to breathe is. It can be dulled." If this dulling is something various people are *culpable for*, then this can hardly be pressed as an argument against God's existence. Jesus says, "Seek and you will find." Those struggling with the idea of God's existence should pray for guidance and that God reveal Himself in their heart so that they may know with more confidence that He exists and loves them.

Lastly, [toward the end of this episode](#), Dr. Rea explains that it is extraordinarily hard to demonstrate or know with any confidence that someone is truly *nonresistant* to belief in God in every respect. So, we don't have good reason to think there are many (if any) nonresistant unbelievers out there.

List of Resources for Further Study

- Karlo Broussard responds to the argument in [this podcast episode](#) as well as his recent book *Prepare the Way*.
- Dr. Michael C. Rea responds to the argument in [this podcast episode](#) as well as his recent book [The Hiddenness of God](#).
- Dr. Edward Feser responds to the argument on pp. 300 - 304 in his book [Five Proofs of the Existence of God](#).
- The quote above comes from [this blog article](#) by Dr. Edward Feser.
- In [this episode of Pints with Aquinas](#), Christian apologist Blake Giunta responds to the argument from divine Hiddenness with special attention to point #3 above and other points related to forming proper and improper relationships with God.
- A Facebook friend of mine recommends the following resource for further reading:
 - [Hidden Divinity and Religious Belief](#) edited by Adam Green and Eleonore Stump

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