

Divine Hiddenness, Cognitive Psychology, and the Problem of Unconscious Resistance

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In this paper, I examine the role that some of the psychological mechanisms posited by cognitive psychology play in strengthening the problem of divine hiddenness. First, I present an overview of the problem of divine hiddenness and how the argument from J.L. Schellenberg rejects the existence of an all-loving God. Next, I analyze the implications of the existence of human psychological biases and their influence on the formation of core beliefs, specifically the belief in the existence of God. My analysis requires distinguishing between two types of resistance to belief in God: unconscious resistance and conscious resistance. I show that it is unlikely that an individual who does not currently believe that God exists would be able to entirely overcome all resistance to the belief in God's existence. Then, I consider responses to the problem of divine hiddenness that use psychological phenomena to support the theistic position. Next, the paper examines the role of cognitive psychology in recognizing a potential sign from God and concludes that it does not allow for a completely unbiased formation of the belief in the existence of God. Finally, I propose theistic responses to the problem of unconscious resistance and show how these responses are unable to fully and adequately address the problem of unconscious resistance. Ultimately, the difficulty of forming a belief in God without bias, combined with the difficulty associated with attempting to remove all resistance towards belief in God, leads me to believe that the argument for divine hiddenness is especially cogent in light of contemporary cognitive psychology.

I. Introduction

J.L. Schellenberg offers the most influential argument from divine hiddenness to the non-existence of God. "Divine hiddenness" refers to "alleged facts about the absence of belief [in] God, on the basis of which one might think there is no God" (Howard-Snyder and Green). Many philosophical responses attempt to explain why there is non-resistant nonbelief and

whether it is evidence against theism. Schellenberg's argument rests on the idea that there exist some persons who currently or at some point in the past have been non-resistant nonbelievers regarding God's existence (Schellenberg 1). Here is a concise version of the argument:

1. If an all-loving God exists, then the God who exists must always be open to forming a personal relationship with any person.
2. If a God who is always open to forming a personal relationship with any person exists, then no person can be in a state of non-resistant nonbelief about the existence of God.
3. If an all-loving God exists, then no person can be in a state of non-resistant nonbelief about the existence of God (based on premise 1 and premise 2).
4. Some persons are currently or have at some point in the past been non-resistant nonbelievers regarding the existence of God.
5. An all-loving God does not exist.

From Schellenberg's argument, it is clear that the existence of non-resistant nonbelievers presents a significant obstacle for theism (Schellenberg 1). At first, Schellenberg clarifies the concept of God; he views God as a personal ultimate being (Schellenberg 2). Schellenberg does not restrict his conception of God to any specific religious tradition, as is often the case in philosophy of religion arguments, which tend to focus on an Abrahamic God. For Schellenberg, in order for a being to be a personal ultimate it must be all-loving because perfect love is part of the overall perfection. According to Schellenberg, it is the result of cultural change during the last hundred years that has allowed for a clearer picture of an all-loving God without the "distorting effects of sexism" and "images of the strong solitary male and the distant father" (Schellenberg 2). It is this cultural evolution that has allowed for the development of the

hiddenness argument because it focuses on God's motivation to be pro-relationship as opposed to a focus on God as all-good, which is instead the main property at issue in the problem of evil¹.

In addition to offering an explanation for the conception of God as all-loving, Schellenberg also focuses on the kind of relationship a person should be able to have with God. Schellenberg states that his argument involves a "conscious reciprocal relationship", which is the type of relationship that is very common because it describes human social relationships where one party, be it a parent or a friend, is known to have love for another party (Schellenberg 2). This relationship does not need to involve God, in the sense that God would not necessarily want or try to develop such a relationship with any person God loves. Rather, according to Schellenberg, God would need to always be open to this relationship; the possibility of the relationship should always exist. Crucially, a person is not able to enter into a conscious reciprocal relationship with another being if that person has no belief that the other exists; this belief is required in order for the person to enter into the relationship at all. Following this, Schellenberg thinks that the possibility of a conscious reciprocal relationship between a person and God should only be obstructed due to resistance toward belief in God by the human being; God would not create or permit any additional obstruction.

II. Impacts of Cognitive Psychology on the Problem of Divine Hiddenness

When philosophers of religion approach the problem of divine hiddenness, they sometimes focus on either supporting or refuting the fourth premise of Schellenberg's argument, which claims that non-resistant nonbelievers exist. One specific philosophical focus pertaining to

¹ The problem of evil refers to the philosophical question of how an all-good God can exist in a world where evil also exists, specifically whether the presence of "undesirable states of affairs" in the world make it "unreasonable to believe in the existence of God" (Tooley).

non-resistant nonbelief is the way in which cognitive psychology is involved in the issue of resistance to belief in God. These philosophical arguments focusing on cognitive psychology consist of two types of responses: philosophers who argue that cognitive psychology is compatible with theism, and philosophers who believe it causes problems for theism. An example of the first type of response comes from Miles Andrews, who states that advances in cognitive psychology regarding the “unreliability of affective forecasting”, meaning one’s ability to accurately predict their own future feelings (e.g. what will make them happy), weakens the argument for the existence of non-resistant nonbelievers (Schellenberg 3). According to Andrews, this is because in the case that some individual exists who could be classified as a non-resistant nonbeliever, then Schellenberg’s claim from premise four indicates that such an individual would form a belief in God if evidence of His existence were presented to the individual. This resulting claim “amounts to an affective forecast” (Schellenberg 3). However, Andrews’ objection is vulnerable because he thinks there is a need for an independent reason outside of the ‘affective forecast’ in order to find Schellenberg’s non-resistant nonbeliever premise plausible. But such an independent reason does not appear to be entirely necessary since, based on Schellenberg’s premise and argument, if there is ample evidence that the non-resistant nonbeliever individual exists, then it can be assumed that the individual would form a belief in God if presented with evidence of God’s existence (Schellenberg 3).

The objection to Schellenberg’s argument from Miles Andrews focuses on human psychology and the idea that belief in God is at least partly “affective”. That is, Andrews believes that Schellenberg’s claim of nonresistant nonbelievers includes the implication that a nonresistant nonbeliever would form a belief in God if they receive the right evidence for God’s existence. Andrews also states that, since Schellenberg believes that to enter a proper relationship

with God, there must be “both affective and propositional belief” (Andrews). This means that, based on Schellenberg’s idea of nonresistant nonbelievers, this aspect of his argument must include an element of affective forecasting. Andrews’ understanding of Schellenberg’s argument is that a human’s belief in God stems, at least in part, from an emotional confidence that the belief is correct (Andrews). Thus, the consideration of whether to believe in God involves some amount of affective forecasting. Specifically, Andrews cites the psychological phenomenon of affective forecasting, in particular its lack of reliability, despite the fact that most humans think themselves adept at predicting how they will feel in the future, as a relevant obstacle a person may face even if they are entirely open to believing in God. The concept of affective forecasting and its lack of reliability is especially relevant when considering the inherent human limitations put in place by human psychology. Since human beings are, in certain cases, psychologically predisposed to think a certain way, such as in the case of the common human overconfidence in their affective forecasting abilities, it can be especially difficult to predict what would alter a person’s currently held theories or beliefs. Psychological bias only increases this human tendency to cling to beliefs and reject evidence that does not support them, especially if a person has held a belief for a long period of time. A person who is already overconfident in their beliefs can think irrationally and make overly hasty decisions.

Andrews provides an example of the involvement of affective forecasting, in which a person who is open to belief in God exists is presented with evidence that God does exist. Andrews argues that the affective forecasting leads the individual either to predict that believing in God would have a positive emotional effect on them, or to predict that it would have a negative effect. If the positive emotional prediction did not occur, a belief in God would likely be consciously rejected. Since humans already hold the belief that they will be able to accurately

predict their future feelings, it is possible that their trust in their own judgment could be greater than presented evidence of God's existence. However, I claim that there is a problem with this situation: since affective forecasting is unreliable, the potential believer would be basing their decision to reject belief in God on a false belief in the accuracy of their human judgment. In this case, the strength of the false current belief is more powerful than new provided evidence of God's existence, resulting in an illogical final decision. Therefore, this example expresses one possible circumstance where human cognitive psychology, in this instance an overconfidence in affective forecasting abilities, can serve as an additional obstacle to belief in God.

Branching off from the philosophical literature, particularly the arguments from Schellenberg and Andrews, comes the central argument that the existence and influence of human psychological bias on the formation of core beliefs results in a strict human cognitive limitation that prevents individuals from considering evidence without bias when forming their belief in, and relationship with God and potential signs from God. The presence of this bias ultimately strengthens the argument from divine hiddenness. This presents an additional dimension to the problem of divine hiddenness because if there is such a human limitation, then an additional obstacle is present in regard to God's existence. Premise 1, 2, and 4 (examined in reverse numerical order) from Schellenberg's divine hiddenness argument offer the most relevant claims concerning human psychological bias. Premise 4 posits that there exist some people who currently or at some point in the past have been non-resistant nonbelievers about the existence of God. However, due to the existence of human confirmation bias, the tendency to view information in a way that supports an individual's currently held beliefs, it becomes even more difficult to determine whether nonbelievers are actually capable of being non-resistant. People who do not believe in God have already developed a belief that God does not exist, so they must

experience some level of confirmation bias. Therefore, any new evidence presented to them in an attempt to convince them that God exists is, at least to some extent, more likely to be rejected because it does not align with their currently held belief.

III. Two Types of Resistance

Resistance to belief that God exists can be divided into two distinct types, each receiving separate consideration: the first is unconscious resistance, which is the result of human cognitive biases; the second is conscious resistance, which can arise from an individual's active skepticism about the existence of God, or it can stem from resistance of the will. In the case of resistance of the will, conscious resistance can emerge from an individual's desire that there be no supreme authority in the universe. Unconscious resistance, unlike conscious resistance, relates largely to the unconscious, so it is passive rather than the active choice of conscious resistance. Unconscious resistance is something that occurs, either because an individual is not aware of it, or because, even if the individual becomes aware of it, they do not, or are not able to, actively choose to ignore the psychological biases that result in the unconscious resistance. This is because a person likely experiences more than one psychological bias surrounding a significant belief, such as the belief that God exists, so it would be very difficult to accurately pinpoint a single bias that is causing an unconscious resistance towards the belief that God exists. For example, there is a selective perception bias that leads humans to allow their expectations prior to an experience to influence their perception of the experience (Wood). This bias presents a problem because it likely strengthens any skepticism an individual may hold about God's existence. For instance, if an individual expects that they will have reason to doubt the authenticity of a potential religious experience, then should such an experience occur, the

individual will be more likely to reject the authenticity of the experience than they might otherwise.

Another significant psychological bias is blind-spot bias, which leads to an individual being much more likely to fail to notice their own biases, even when they are able to recognize them in others (Wood). Blind-spot bias is particularly important because its existence in itself strengthens unconscious resistance. Overcoming resistance originating from bias is even more difficult when there is a bias responsible for preventing acknowledgement of one's own biases. In addition to this, the threads of different biases can easily become entangled, and even if an individual is able to overcome their blind-spot bias, which would enable them to gain some conscious awareness of their own biases, there remains the additional obstacle of attempting to determine which biases are creating unconscious resistance to the belief in God's existence. The problem facing the theist is that they must present an explanation for why God would either make humans with this inherent unconscious resistance, or why God would allow humans to evolve and develop this unconscious resistance. This, the problem of unconscious resistance, is multi-layered with no clear solution; conscious acknowledgement and understanding of one's own biases on its own is not enough to overcome unconscious resistance, and trying to isolate a specific bias is extremely difficult because it is hard to obtain any kind of certainty that such a bias is the source of resistance to the belief in God's existence. Even if the individual has a low conscious resistance to the belief in God, the resistance still exists in some capacity and so it still has an impact on the acceptance or rejection of evidence which may be proof of God's existence. So, human psychology is constituted so that disbelief in God is already itself a kind of unconscious resistance. Also, there is no definitive way of knowing that a single bias is responsible for unconscious resistance, or if, instead, the resistance is the result of a combination

of interconnected biases playing different roles. Therefore, unconscious resistance appears to be a substantial built-in resistance to a belief in God's existence, which presents an additional obstacle to theism.

The second type of resistance, conscious resistance, has a more straightforward and active role in an individual's lack of belief in God's existence. Where unconscious resistance is largely a passive part of the unconscious, conscious resistance is its active counterpart. Specifically, conscious resistance arises from an individual's own personality and attitude towards the possibility of the existence of God. An individual's conscious resistance to belief in God is directly connected with personal traits of the individual; they do not have a favorable view of the idea of an ultimate being. A human being has conscious awareness of both holding this view, and of the existence of some personal trait or attitude they have which contributes to their skepticism of God's existence. The major distinguishing characteristic between conscious resistance and unconscious resistance is that while unconscious resistance presents probable human cognitive limitations that create a barrier to belief in God's existence, conscious resistance can be more easily overcome because it is applied actively by an individual. For instance, prolonged exposure to a highly religious environment, or a near-death experience, can lead to a complete shift in an individual's understanding of the world, which may lead to an active retraction of conscious resistance to belief in the existence of God. In this way, conscious resistance does not appear to be a built-in form of resistance to the belief in the existence of God, so conscious resistance on its own, unlike unconscious resistance, does not offer an obstacle to theism.

IV. Cognitive Psychology in Support of the Theist; and Forms of Nonbelief

Helen De Cruz offers an example of the second type of response to Schellenberg's claim that non-resistant nonbelievers exist; a belief that this causes problems for the theist. First, De Cruz offers an argument based in cognitive psychology². As psychological biases are psychological phenomena, there is an unconscious element to consider. A bias is more powerful when the individual is unaware of it because they will not consciously attempt to fight bias where they do not think any exists. This adds a deeper layer to the bias because psychological bias would be even more difficult to contend with in the individual who currently holds the belief that they do not experience psychological bias.

However, cognitive bias becomes an even more complex issue because of the wide variation in the minds of humans. De Cruz argues that people on the autism spectrum are less likely to hold a belief in God, and that this often makes them non-resistant nonbelievers. She states that it is harder for autistic individuals to "represent supernatural beings (especially their mental states)" and that the cognitive variation of autism is correlated and likely causally linked to the emergence of nonbelief (De Cruz 58). While the statements that autistic individuals are less likely to perceive the mental states of others and to believe in God are true, these things do not necessarily make autistic individuals non-resistant nonbelievers. Human psychology creates cognitive limitations for all individuals. If there is an individual who is autistic and has a significant cognitive difference, they may not experience the same cognitive limitations of someone who is neurotypical, but they still experience cognitive limitations. These cognitive limitations can present an especially strong obstacle for the belief in God by someone on the autism spectrum; their autism does not eliminate unconscious resistance to such a belief. Instead

² Although this paper discusses the problem De Cruz raises for theism, she is a Christian philosopher who thinks that theism survives the problem of divine hiddenness.

it alters and potentially strengthens the unconscious resistance due to psychological differences like the decreased ability to perceive others' mental states.

An examination of individual nonbelief arising from cultural psychological factors creates greater potential for cognitive psychology to serve as resistance to the belief in God, or to bias a person in favor of the belief. According to De Cruz, there exist psychological factors at the cultural level that can result in nonbelief at the individual level within a society, even among those who may seem non-resistant to such a belief (Schellenberg 3). Specifically, shifts in culture that lead to greater exposure to secularism and less exposure to overt (or covert) religious exhibitions can have the effect of minimizing the importance of a belief in God and reducing social pressure to believe in the divine (Schellenberg 3). This resulting lack of social pressure affects human society as a whole, and also the individuals living within the society. When a person is not exposed to an environment where they feel pressure to develop a certain belief, they have no greater incentive to accept that belief over lacking such a belief or accepting an alternate belief instead.

Many beliefs, such as the belief in God, are not simply constructed from intuition; a person is far less likely to believe something without being prompted, consciously or unconsciously, to do so. For instance, a child who is raised in a religious family is far more likely to believe in God than if that same child had an irreligious upbringing. According to the *Pew Research Center*, of the children raised in an exclusively Protestant household, approximately eight out of every ten of them retained their Protestant faith as adults. Similarly, among children raised in an exclusively Catholic household around six out of every ten of them are Catholic adults (Pew Research Center). A religious upbringing creates not only immense exposure to religious thought, but also a strong pressure to conform to the religious standards of one's family,

place of worship, and likely the local community. This immense psychological pressure throughout a child's formative years results in a bias towards one set of beliefs, including the belief in God. This potential bias in favor of the belief in God provides support for the theist in responding to the problem of divine hiddenness because it shows that psychological bias can also result in an individual facing less unconscious resistance to the belief in God. But in a society that is more secular, the pressure of religious standards is reduced, at least in part, because the secular society necessarily decreases overall exposure to religion, making the foundational belief in God less significant and a less necessary belief to hold to be socially accepted. Humans are social creatures, which lends them some sensitivity to social shifts. As a shift in society makes the belief in God less socially relevant, humans adapt to have less religiosity, the bias towards belief in God is reduced, and nonbelief emerges. Powerful external social pressures combine with internal psychological biases to create an additional obstacle for belief in God within a secular society or serve to eliminate obstacles for belief in God within a highly religious society. Ultimately, nonbelievers are not able to be entirely non-resistant to believing in God because they cannot completely separate themselves from their psychological biases, which can make up one type of resistance to the belief in the existence of God.

However, even if nonbelievers cannot be entirely non-resistant to forming a belief in God, this does not mean that God necessarily exists. The claim from premise 2 presents the potential for God's existence when viewed independently of Schellenberg's other premises, but the antecedent can be false and still result in a valid argument that God does not exist. Specifically, premise 2 posits that if a God that is open to forming personal relationships exists, then there is no way for non-resistant nonbelievers to exist. The consideration for this premise is the idea that God is entirely open to forming personal relationships, but it seems like the

evidence from cognitive psychology creates a problem for belief in a God who is open to relationships. This is because if God created the universe and humanity, then He created humanity with psychological limitations that result in some natural amount of human resistance to the belief in Him. The implications of this seems to work against the theist who may think that cognitive psychology strengthens their argument in response to the problem of divine hiddenness. Specifically, there is the issue that if humans can have some natural bias against the belief in God based on their cognitive limitations and their interaction and experiences within the world that God created, then it seems that, as a result of God's own actions, He is not fully open to forming a personal relationship with any person.

By limiting human openness to forming a personal relationship with Him, God also limited his own openness to forming personal relationships with humans. This restricted openness for both humans and for God is a problem because it implies that an all-loving God does not exist. This specifically relates to premise 1 of Schellenberg's divine hiddenness argument, which posits that if an all-loving God exists, then that God must be open to forming a personal relationship with any person. Since God does not seem to be entirely open to forming personal relationships with any person, it seems likely that an all-loving God does not exist. The existence of the natural psychological phenomena of human psychological biases results in probable human cognitive limitations about their acceptance or rejection of a belief in God. These limitations, in turn, appear to place some limitation on God's openness to forming personal relationships, even when non-resistant nonbelievers do not exist. This presents an additional obstacle to God's existence in connection with the problem of divine hiddenness.

V. Signs from God and Belief

The role of multiple psychological biases, particularly confirmation bias and selective bias, in human beliefs is clearly significant in terms of acquiring or rejecting the belief in God, and it is similarly significant when considering how to determine without bias whether an unusual occurrence is mere coincidence or a sign from God. Arising from the lack of evidence of the divine is the problem that phenomena which may be a sign from God are incredibly difficult to confirm as such. Therefore, any human being who experiences a potential sign from God is very likely to rely on the beliefs, particularly any religious beliefs, that they currently hold in order to determine whether the occurrence serves as proof of God's existence. Also, it is likely that the individual's current beliefs will lead them to have certain expectations about a potential sign from God; holding expectations prior to actually experiencing a potential sign from God influences the perception of the experience if or when it does occur. Because of this, it can be incredibly difficult to view any singular instance as definitive proof for or against God's existence, especially because of the personal, anecdotal nature of such incidents.

For example, say that for the past few weeks a person who believes in God has been unhappy with their job and is seriously considering quitting. One day while driving to work they are forced to take a different route they have never taken before due to a car accident and end up driving past multiple signs on the side of the road. The signs state things like 'looking for something new?' and 'fed up with the status quo?'. Surprised by this event, they determine that the car accident and various road signs must be a sign from God that they should quit their job, and they choose to do so. The occurrence in the example states that the hypothetical individual holds a belief in God at the time they experience the potential sign from God, and that belief is the reason they choose to take the event as a definite sign from God. This ultimately has a powerful influence on their final decision, as their belief leads them to easily accept that God is

implying quitting the job is the right action to take. Quitting a job can be a significant event in a person's life, and perceived advice from God, which cannot be confirmed, may lead someone to make an entirely different decision than they otherwise would have, for better or for worse.

In a case, such as the above example, where the individual already has a belief in God and has formed expectations based on that belief, to perceive an experience as a sign from God is tied to the influence of their various biases, including confirmation bias and selective bias. The individual's already held belief in God coupled with the prematurely formed expectations regarding a potential divine experience, gives them a stronger inclination, a kind of predisposition, towards viewing a potential sign from God as a definite sign from God, as doing so would serve as evidence to support their current belief. When holding a belief, a person is more likely to attempt to find evidence or anecdotes to support it rather than evidence against it. People prefer to retain their beliefs and are resistant to change, especially when they have held a belief for a long period of time, which is the case for many who believe in God.

From the perspective of the individual in the example, accepting the occurrence as a sign from God is much easier. Although, when the event is examined from an outside perspective, there is no real reason to do so instead of simply viewing it as a coincidence. The event is not a strong source of evidence supporting God's existence, but neither is it a strong source of evidence for rejecting His existence. When determining whether the incident is a sign from God, one could simply flip a coin to decide. Also, once a person has decided to believe a personal experience is a sign from God or merely a coincidence, it is unlikely that they can be convinced to reverse their belief. In this way, there is a major human limitation which must be contended with. The immense difficulty for individuals attempting to use reason without bias to come to a conclusion regarding a potential sign from God or, more broadly, the existence of God, does not

seem to support the existence of an all-loving God. These evaluations of potential evidence of God's existence are an additional contribution to the forms of unconscious resistance. As shown in the earlier example, there does not appear to be a way in which separation of unconscious resistance from the formation of the belief in God's existence can occur. There seems to be at least one psychological bias at play when considering any matter regarding God's existence, and very likely more than one. The example shows the direct significance of confirmation bias as well as selective bias from the perspective of a theist experiencing a potential sign from God, and their current belief and expectations resulted in the conclusion that the experience was indeed a sign from God and so should be heeded.

However, since at least some portion of the foundation of this decision was based on psychological bias, it is flawed and appears to be, at least in part, a self-deception resulting from unconscious resistance. It would be strange for an all-loving God to accept a human being's self-deception as part of that human's basis for believing in Him, and interpreting and following His orders, especially because this self-deception would leave humans vulnerable to accepting a false God. This is because a human's self-deception presents an obstacle to their forming a true relationship with God. If an individual's relationship with God is partially reliant on false perceptions then there is a lack of clarity and confidence in the belief in God, which leaves greater room for doubt. When there is more doubt, there is a greater likelihood that the individual will, in an attempt to alleviate their doubt, search for other possible divine beings. They may also begin to reject the possibility of God entirely. Should an all-loving God exist, the presence of this self-deception could also result in an individual either misinterpreting signs from God, or inaccurately attributing a mere coincidence to a divine act, which could lead that individual to make an life-changing decision with negative consequences that may damage an individual's

relationship with God. At least one of these possible issues seems likely to arise due to the existence and strength of human unconscious resistance involved with decision making in circumstances relating to the belief in the existence of God, and this likelihood appears to pose a problem for belief in an all-loving God.

VI. Theistic Solutions to Unconscious Resistance

One possible theistic solution to the problem of unconscious resistance is that God would consider it to be a good thing for humans to aid each other in finding God. One of the specific features of unconscious resistance is the lack of personal awareness, which leads to a dependence on other people and their knowledge of the individual in order for the individual to better themselves. This knowledge that people have about each other but that people do not have about themselves is a reflection of the way that God knows things about people that they do not know about themselves. Since it seems that forming relationships with other people is helpful for overcoming a lack of personal awareness, then it would make sense that forming a relationship with God would have a similarly positive outcome. According to Dustin Crummett, it is generally “good, and one of God’s aims” that we “come to enter into relationship with God” and also that we do this “partly through participation in communities” so that we can be “mutually responsible for one another’s...knowledge of God” (Crummett 49). Crummett claims that this is good because it gives humans “the ability to form relationships with God and one another that are based partly on positively and freely influencing one another’s...knowledge of God” (Crummett 49). Based on Crummett’s claim, it appears that God would support humans helping one another to overcome unconscious resistance. Since it is unlikely that an individual would recognize their own unconscious resistance, they would obtain the information from another person. But even after becoming aware of unconscious resistance, a person would likely have

difficulty determining the extent of its influence on their current beliefs, so it appears they would remain influenced by it. If this is the case, then the strongest attempt to overcome unconscious resistance would be a combination of consciously working to ignore or work past psychological biases as well as accepting aid from other people. This aid would come in the form of advice for developing methods to reduce the resistance and clearer explanations of the way a person expresses their psychological biases, so that they can more easily recognize this in themselves. This outside aid would have to be accepted by the individual, so it would come from trusted sources. This means that there would have to be a strong bond between the party giving the aid and the party receiving it, or the person providing the aid would have to be in a perceived position of authority. Each of these elements would encourage human connection by building trust between people and increasing effective communication skills.

A secondary objection that arises from the argument above concerning the positive impact of human social connections on an individual's formation of belief in God. Specifically, when a person has a larger, more diverse social network of people upon whom they believe they can rely, they are more likely to open themselves to more diverse types of thought. This would seem to increase the likelihood that an individual would be open to believing in God, since, as there are a far greater number of theists than atheists, a diverse social network would likely result in more exposure to theists than atheists. According to a poll from *Gallup*, when Americans were asked whether they believed in God in the format of a yes or no question, 87% of them answered yes. Even when the question wording was more ambiguous, 64% of Americans still said that they were convinced God exists, which is a significant majority of individuals (Hrynowski). It seems that since God considers humans helping each other to find Him a good thing, then it

would make sense that getting help from other humans would be the strongest attempt at overcoming unconscious resistance to belief in God.

However, this objection does not account for what seems to be a natural psychological slant in favor of an atheistic outcome for people who already do not believe that God exists. While a person may be able to minimize the influence of their unconscious resistance, it still seems that they are not fully able to overcome a built-in element of their psychology with layers of bias working against them. Also, since it appears that a person has to actively work against their own psychology in order to believe in God's existence, then an individual's original, natural state may result in a lack of belief in God. If this is true, then an alteration of a person's natural state would be something positive. But this seems strange because it implies that God created humans to be naturally closed off from Him, and that God would want humans to change themselves from the way He made them in order to be as open to His existence as possible. But even if one were able to accomplish this and open themselves to God as fully as possible, there would still be a limit on how much of their own psychology the person would be able to overcome. This human limitation would be put in place by God if He created humanity, but there does not appear to be a convincing explanation for it. This is because if an all-loving God exists, then it does not appear that He could be responsible for creating humanity with this inherent unconscious resistance because it does not seem to offer any significant benefit to human life that cannot be achieved in another way. Therefore, despite theistic objections, unconscious resistance is a significant complication for belief in an all-loving God.

Another potential solution for theists relating to the problem of unconscious resistance could be that God considers the journey to finding Him to be good and important. Unconscious resistance would be a powerful challenge facing someone, and such challenges are important

aspects of the journey to find God. In order for there to be a journey to find God, there must be some obstacles to overcome. Otherwise, God's presence would simply be clearly evident in the natural world. The existence of unconscious resistance serves as one such obstacle in the journey to find God; a problem that does not seem to have an obvious solution. Especially since unconscious resistance consists of multiple types of cognitive bias that can occur at the same time and overlap each other, making it increasingly difficult to identify, separate, and entirely overcome each bias. But a theistic response to this could be that the unconscious resistance does not have to be completely overcome in order to foster a belief in God. Though the resistance is unconscious and, therefore, difficult to recognize, this does not mean that there is no possible way in which to surpass it.

While an unconscious influence may have a significant impact on the formation of thoughts and beliefs, once a person becomes aware of an unconscious influence, it can become easier to control and the bias resulting from it can be minimized. Additionally, not every cognitive psychological bias supports resistance to belief in God. Instead, some support a more robust belief in God. This appears to be the case in children with a religious upbringing, which results in a bias towards the belief in God. Also, there is some intrinsic value in working to overcome obstacles in order to reach a goal, especially one that could completely alter the way a person views the world. Hard work and dedication are positive traits, so using and strengthening them as a means of handling a psychological shortcoming, specifically unconscious resistance, can lead to powerful self-improvement. An all-loving God would consider this development of positive and useful human traits to be greatly beneficial to human life.

Tyler Paytas offers this kind of solution, appealing to Immanuel Kant's claim that a clear perception of God would result in a lack of developed virtue and morality (Paytas). An all-loving

God would want humanity to experience positive growth and development, and if direct access to God would be detrimental to this, then it would make sense for God to remain separate and elusive. If humans were created by God with built-in unconscious resistance, then it would seem that God's purpose for doing this would be to prevent the stagnation of human morality. By giving humanity unconscious resistance, God would be able to ensure that, in their attempts to find Him, humans would undergo a significant struggle that would lead them towards self-betterment. However, this solution should be rejected because it does not offer a good reason for why an all-loving God would force human beings to work so hard in order to find Him. While the journey to find God has its benefits, the extreme difficulty of the journey itself would likely lead to a high level of frustration among humans who, once they reach a high enough threshold of doubt and frustration with no completely reliable evidence to support their huge intellectual and emotional undertaking, would be even more likely to reject the belief in God. If people frequently give up during the journey to find God, then it appears that, rather than leading to great benefits for human life, the journey to find God can create resentment, anger, and despair. If this is the case, it does not seem like the kind of situation that an all-loving God would allow to occur. Further, it appears that, since God would be responsible for this unconscious resistance, then God would also be the one responsible for enabling and potentially encouraging some negative emotions or traits in humans. Allowance or encouragement of these negative traits and emotions does not support the idea of an all-loving God.

VII. Conclusion

Overall, the influence cognitive psychology has on the human belief in the existence of God combined with the built-in psychological resistance to belief in God are strong evidence in favor of rejection of an all-loving God. First, there must be a return to the relevant claims from Schellenberg: premises 1, 2, and 4. I will begin with premise 4, which proposes that there are people who are non-resistant nonbelievers on the subject of God's existence. But psychological biases, particularly confirmation bias, make it harder to determine whether a nonbeliever can be non-resistant. If someone does not believe in God, they operate based on this currently held belief that God does not exist, so they are vulnerable to some amount of confirmation bias. So, they are more likely to reject new evidence that God exists than they are to accept it and alter their lack of belief in God. This would be an issue even with a small amount of resistance from the individual, and so cannot be ignored.

Next, premise 2 proposes that non-resistant nonbelievers and a God that is open to forming personal relationships cannot coexist, comes the issue that God, if He created humanity, did so in a manner that resulted in natural unconscious resistance to belief in God. This idea does not support a theistic response to the problem of divine hiddenness because if a natural bias exists against the belief in God, then God is not entirely open to forming personal relationships with human beings. Finally, in continuation of the issue with premise 2, premise 1 posits that if there is an all-loving God, He would be open to forming personal relationships with any person. The problem with this claim is that natural human cognitive psychology, if formed by God, leads to unconscious resistance to belief in God's existence. This limitation on human openness to forming a relationship with God also creates a limit on how open God can be with His personal relationships, even without the presence of non-resistant nonbelievers. A seemingly self-imposed limit on God's openness to forming personal relationships with humans does not support the

existence of an all-loving God. Thus, the problem of unconscious resistance is a significant obstacle for belief in an all-loving God.

In conclusion, the problem of unconscious resistance to the belief in God is substantial because it does not seem like one that can be effectively overcome. Since this form of resistance is the result of psychological bias, there is no known way to determine which bias or how many biases are involved in the formation of resistance to the belief in God. If an all-loving God exists, then it does not appear that He could be responsible for creating humanity with this built-in unconscious resistance, especially as it does not appear to offer any significant benefit to human life that cannot be achieved in another way. Also, as the unconscious resistance does not clearly aid in or lead to forming a belief in God's existence, any reason God could have for limiting the human cognitive ability to believe in and form a personal relationship with Him does not support His existence. While theists may claim that God considers the struggle to find God to be a good one, the presence of unconscious resistance, a challenge that a human may not be able to overcome, appears to place a distinctly unloving limitation on the potential for human belief in, and connection with, the divine. Theistic solutions to the problem of unconscious resistance are worth considering but are ultimately unconvincing. Therefore, unconscious resistance to the belief in God strengthens the problem of divine hiddenness.

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