

Summary

This dissertation seeks to answer the research question: *Why, if God exists, is his existence not more obvious?* The question represents, or points to, a much-discussed theme in contemporary analytic philosophy and theology entitled the ‘problem of divine hiddenness’ (PDH hereafter). The answer given to the research question is informed by Alvin Plantinga’s Reformed epistemology.

Chapter one is concerned with prolegomena surrounding PDH. It first explains what ‘divine hiddenness’ (as defined in this dissertation) is *not*. For instance, many attributes traditionally ascribed to God—incorporeality, transcendence, and incomprehensibility—can, in fact, be taken to merit discussion of ‘divine hiddenness’. Comparably, some theologians—Martin Luther and Karl Barth, to name two—have analyzed the so-called ‘hiddenness of God.’ But neither the way in which divine hiddenness relates to God’s attributes nor the way it is referenced by these prominent theologians are the focus of this project. This delimitation enables me to define more precisely the sort of divine hiddenness—PDH—to be analyzed. PDH, in short, is the problem that if God exists then his existence would be more obvious, a problem that sparks the research question. Christians have offered many responses to PDH, but chapter one argues that there is one way that Christians have yet to use: a Plantingean Reformed-epistemological response.

Crudely stated, Plantinga, in his book *Warranted Christian Belief*, offers two models for how we can know God: the Aquinas/Calvin (A/C) model and the extended Aquinas/Calvin model. The A/C model articulates how theistic belief can have warrant; warrant is that property enough of which turns mere true belief into *knowledge*. However, as Plantinga is quick to argue, the human race has fallen into sin, and sin has drastic consequences, including certain cognitive

consequences for our knowledge of God. Therefore, he develops the *extended A/C* model in order to demonstrate how Christian belief, in its postlapsarian condition and which considers the salvific work of Jesus Christ, might have warrant. Chapter one explains that Christians can utilize these two models to respond to PDH, particularly in order to answer the research question.

Now, traditionally, theists have used *defenses* (accounts which, for all we know, are *possible*) and *theodicies* (accounts which are – supposedly – *actual*) to respond to the problem of evil; following this tradition and since PDH and the problem of evil are tightly related and hence can be responded to similarly (discussed below), Plantinga's models are used as a defense for PDH, a possible way to respond to the problem. It is here that this dissertation's thesis statement is articulated: *Plantinga's Aquinas/Calvin models for how Christian belief might have warrant can be utilized as a defense to explain why if God exists his existence is not more obvious*. Two desiderata intend to be satisfied, namely, that the defense will

- (i) develop a specifically Christian account describing why if God exists his existence is not more obvious and
- (ii) show that this description is true for all we know.

Desideratum (i) states that the defense against PDH will be distinctively Christian (as opposed to broadly theistic) in its aim to answer the research question, while desideratum (ii) states that the defense will not be only *logically* but also *epistemically* possible; the latter is stronger than the former, entailing that the description, so far as we know, does not commit us to any falsity. These desiderata sit well with Plantinga's Reformed epistemology, as the chapter clarifies.

My defense unfolds in three parts, following the broad outline of Plantinga's models, which chapter two explains in further detail. Chapter one also includes a historical overview of PDH as it is conceived in the thought of Blaise Pascal, Joseph Butler, David Hume, Søren

Kierkegaard, Alexander Campbell, and Friedrich Nietzsche; some of these thinkers' conception of PDH, it is argued, mimic or anticipate a Plantingean response.

Chapter two is a formal literature review in two parts. Part one uses the premises (as well as the responses that the premises have received) contained in J.L. Schellenberg's 1993 hiddenness argument for atheism (in his important book *Divine Hiddenness and Human Reason*) as a way to navigate the present literature, showing along the way how my thesis is relevant for, but also how it contributes to, the scholarly discussion. Part two compares and contrasts in more detail PDH and the problem of evil; it is explained there that, despite notable similarities, there are significant dissimilarities between the two, and that a Plantingean Reformed-epistemological response to PDH has the resources to address some of the perceived dissimilarities. Chapter two ends by detailing the plans for how my three-part defense will unfold in chapters three, four, and five; each part corresponds to the three chapters respectively.

Chapter three articulates the first part of my defense against PDH. First, the chapter explains the bare A/C model on Plantinga's own terms. Following Calvin, Plantinga argues in the A/C model that all persons have a *sensus divinitatis* (SD hereafter), a cognitive faculty, and that when the SD is triggered or occasioned by our natural environment (a brooding waterfall, say, or a beautiful flower) then belief in God can be properly basic. A basic belief is a non-inferred belief; 'properly' denotes the justification or the rationality of one's belief. A person can be, as Plantinga explains in the model, justified (within her rights) or rational (subject to no cognitive dysfunction) in holding theistic belief. But theistic belief on the model can also be properly basic with respect to *warrant*; a belief has warrant (as Plantinga argues) when it is formed by properly functioning cognitive faculties in an appropriate environment according to a design plan aimed successfully at truth. Second, this explanation in hand, the A/C model is then

applied to PDH; it is argued that God has clearly revealed himself in creation (to follow Plantinga's interpretation of Calvin and Aquinas), and that, through the SD, we can have warranted theistic belief, or knowledge of God (we can also be justified and rational in our theistic belief). Third, I respond to objections to the bare A/C model when applied to PDH. Responding to objections—the objection, for example, that there is no SD—aids to defend as well as to clarify my argumentation.

Chapter four elaborates the second part of my defense against PDH. First, the chapter explains the initial stages of the extended A/C model in which Plantinga argues that sin has far-reaching consequences on our cognitive endowment (and thus on our knowledge of God), what he calls the 'noetic effects of sin'; the model also stipulates that sin damages our affections (i.e., our loves and desires, what we relish and delight in). Because of sin, we neither know nor love God as we ought. Second, the chapter applies the model's emphasis on sin to PDH. It is argued that sin can undermine warranted belief in God; sin can taint our environment as well as the SD's proper function and successful orientation toward truth. It can inhibit the perceived-clarity of God's existence, making him seem hidden. Third, the chapter responds to objections to this part of the extended model's application to PDH. One objection states that to apply the notion that sin has certain effects to PDH is to apply a theological solution to a philosophical problem, which (so the objection goes) is a methodological misstep, since PDH is mostly examined by analytic philosophers.

Chapter five is the third and final part of my defense against PDH. First, the chapter explains the full-blown extended A/C model, especially its final part; Plantinga employs the extended A/C model to account for theistic knowledge in our postlapsarian condition, noting that God has given the remedy for sin in the work of Jesus Christ. Three central themes in the model

demonstrate how the SD as well as our fallen affections can be restored, and how we can thus have warranted theistic belief: Scripture, the internal instigation of the Holy Spirit, and faith. Scripture is written testimony about God's redemptive work in Christ, and it is the Holy Spirit's instigation or witness which aids us to see the truth of Scripture; what one believes by faith—the main tenets of the Gospel of Jesus Christ—can satisfy the warrant conditions, thus counting as knowledge. Second, the chapter applies the full extended A/C model to PDH. It argues, in short, that by having faith in Jesus Christ, we can be saved from our sin and that, at least on some occasions, God's existence can be clear to us, and can even be clearer to us over time the more we are sanctified by, for instance, reading Scripture and attending church. Third, objections to this final part of the applied model are considered. Such objections include the nature of sincere seekers—those who claim to have sought God sincerely but whose search was unsuccessful—as well as objections to the warrant criteria, especially proper functionalism. Taken together, the three parts comprise a distinctly Christian response to PDH; along the way, each part shows how the research question is answered as well as how the defense desiderata are satisfied.

The sixth and final chapter ties up loose ends by attempting to accomplish four things. First, it explains contributions that the defense has made regarding PDH in comparison with the existing body of literature. For instance, two areas of research have been connected that were unconnected: PDH and Plantingean Reformed epistemology. Second, the chapter responds to a few final potential concerns or worries about the defense. For example, one addressed worry is that a defense against PDH, as opposed to a theodicy, is too meager, or not enough; is a defense really the best we can do? Third, the chapter considers future work concerning PDH in light of my defense. For example, Plantinga's epistemology is influenced by his Reformed theological heritage, and as a result the defense applies many themes and doctrines from the Reformed

tradition (e.g., the SD, the noetic effects of sin, the perspicuity of Scripture, and so on) to PDH; future work by Christians from other traditions, it is suggested, may want to employ themes or doctrines that are unique to their tradition as a way to analyze and address PDH. Fourth, the chapter considers future work on other related issues in philosophy of religion in light of my defense. For instance, in the same way that PDH is similar to the problem of evil, PDH may also be similar to other problems in philosophy of religion, such as the problem of religious diversity or what is sometimes called the soteriological problem of evil (the problem that there are some who go unsaved, which amounts to an evil of sorts); future work may want to examine these other problems using my defense.

The answer given to the research question, in short, is that, according to the state of affairs described on the bare A/C model, God is not hidden. His existence is obvious (“plain” as Plantinga quotes Paul in Romans 1:19), and we can have warranted theistic belief. Following the initial stages of the extended A/C model, sin, it is argued, distorts our theistic knowledge as well as the perceived-clarity of God’s existence; were it not for sin, God’s existence would be as obvious as it can be. On the full-blown extended A/C model, God offers the remedy for sin through faith in Jesus Christ; those with faith in Jesus Christ can have warranted Christian belief. As a result, God’s existence can be obvious to those with faith, at least on some occasions (hearing Scripture preached, say, or taking the Lord’s Supper at church), and presumably all the time at the culmination of one’s earthly life in heaven.