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Is "Divine Hiddenness" evidence for atheism? A response to J. L. Schellenberg

Jim Beilby
james-beilby@bethel.edu

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Is Divine Hiddenness Evidence for Atheism? A Response to J. L. Schellenberg

by Jim Beilby

Forthcoming in “Christianity Contested,” edited by Paul Copan & Stewart Kelly. Wipf & Stock

J. L. Schellenberg

Professor of Philosophy at Mount Saint Vincent College

Defender of “Skeptical Religion” (a view he says is compatible with atheism)



Schellenberg’s argument (simplified)

- (1) If a loving God exists, then there are no nonresistant nonbelievers.
- (2) There are nonresistant nonbelievers.
- (3) Therefore, no loving God exists.

Rationale for each of these statements:

- ... Why? Because a loving God would provide sufficient evidence of his existence.
- ... Some people truly desire to believe in God, but cannot due to the lack of evidence
- ... A valid deductive inference from (1) and (2)

RESPONSE

Schellenberg’s notion of “non-resistance” is too simplistic.

He says that a person is non-resistant if they “want” to believe that God exists.

But it is possible that people “want” (in some meaningful sense) to believe in God, but do not want what full-fledged belief in God requires of them.

Schellenberg assumes that if God has provided sufficient evidence of his existence, that nonresistant believers would be in possession of that evidence.

This is a false assumption.

God could provide evidence and humans might mis-interpret it or see it as evidence of something else (such as the majesty of the natural world).

Schellenberg assumes that God’s being all-powerful means that He could assure that the humans would believe in his existence.

However forcing humans to belief that God exists would not give God what he wants.

God does not desire our (mere) belief, he desires relationship (James 2:19).