

Divine Providence, Divine Hiddenness, and Commitment to the Good

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Abstract: Divine providence plays a significant role in John Schellenberg's formulation of the divine hiddenness argument. Although Schellenberg does not openly mention the providence of God, his refutation of this attribute supports his denial of God's existence, a denial which is the aim of Schellenberg's hiddenness argument. In this article, I show that Schellenberg's implicit refutation of providence presupposes two assumptions, the more comprehensive of which consists in saying that there is no good end of history and no commitment to the good is required on the part of the prospective believer. I argue that the assumptions at stake are inconsistent with Schellenberg's view of God as the omnipotent, omniscient and perfectly loving creator of all things, a view which Schellenberg uses as a starting point for his hiddenness argument.

Keywords: Schellenberg, Augustine, Pre-Christian Greek philosophers, Philosophy of history, End of history

Introduction

The hiddenness of God plays a crucial role in religious literature starting with the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament. The Gospel according to Matthew depicts Jesus experiencing abandonment by God on the cross.¹ In Jesus's footsteps, many mystics and saints have suffered from what they have described as the divine silence, abandonment and hiddenness.²

¹ See Mt 27:46.

² It may be said that it is from the Old Testament texts that the problem of divine hiddenness seems to emerge with greater sharpness. Texts such as Psalm 44 speak of God's incomprehensible remoteness, which may not seem to be comparable to that experienced by the Son of God, who has personal knowledge of God (P. Moser has spoken of this knowledge in terms of 'filial knowledge'. See Moser (1999)). Regardless, 'divine hiddenness' and 'divine revelation' have been seen—in both Old and New Testament—not only 'reciprocally contrary' but also 'mutually interdependent', as Veronika Weidner arguably points out (see Weidner [2021], 1f). In this connection, Michael Rea says that both divine love and divine hiddenness

In the course of the last decades, the divine hiddenness problem has matched the problem of evil in importance as an argument to support atheism. This is especially true when it comes to the version of the problem of divine hiddenness, which John Schellenberg has proposed in his book *Divine Hiddenness and Human Reason* (1993).³ Since then an impressive number of publications have been devoted to this problem. Nevertheless, no one has so far focused on the relationship between this problem and the providence of God. This is justified by the fact that Schellenberg does not openly mention the concept of divine providence. However, as I intend to show in Section 1, this concept plays a significant role in his formulation of the divine hiddenness problem. In fact, his refutation of God's providence allows Schellenberg to deny God's existence, which is the aim of his argument. In the following sections (2–3), I will argue that Schellenberg's implicit refutation of divine providence grounds on two assumptions, which are inconsistent with the view of God as the omnipotent, omniscient, and perfectly loving creator of all things, a view which Schellenberg uses as a starting point for his argument.⁴ One assumption is that there is no ultimate end of history, which is inconsistent with the view of God as the creator of all things — such a view of God implies that he is the first principle and last end of all things, including history. Another assumption, which is more comprehensive than the latter, is that there is no *good* end of history and prospective believers are not required to engage in the search for good. Again, so I will argue, this assumption is inconsistent with the view of God as the creator of all things—such a view of God implies that he is the ultimate *good* end of history.⁵

'occupy a central place not only in Christian theology, but also in the scriptures and religious traditions that gave it birth' (Rea 2018, 4).

³ See Schellenberg (1993, 2006). See also Schellenberg (2015).

⁴ In his book (1993), God seems to be seen as the creator of all things *ex-nihilo*. According to Schellenberg, in fact, 'God, if he exists, is *unsurpassably great*. As such, God is to be described (minimally) as ultimate (i.e., the source or ground of all existence other than his own, to whom nothing stands as a ground of existence), personal (that is to say, one of whom agential, intellectual, and affective qualities may appropriately be predicated), and (in some sense) all-powerful, all-knowing, perfectly good, and perfectly loving' (see Schellenberg 2006, 10). Schellenberg will later develop his view of ultimism, on which see below, note 5.

⁵ These considerations show that my argument applies to Schellenberg's challenge to *personal theism* (see above, note 4). The same cannot be said with regard to 'ultimism', which is the new position for which Schellenberg started to opt in 2003 (see Schellenberg 2015, 18). As he says, ultimism 'is the general claim that there is a reality ultimate in three ways: in the nature of things (metaphysically), in inherent value (axiologically), and in its importance for our lives (soteriologically)'. For Schellenberg, 'nothing more specifically about such things as love or knowledge or personal power will be found in it [in ultimism]' (Ibid.). Given this new perspective, it does not seem possible to develop a reflection on the way God's existence is related to his providence.

1. Divine Hiddenness and Divine Providence

At first sight, the subject of Schellenberg's argument does not seem to have anything to do with the concept of providence, to which Schellenberg makes no reference. Nevertheless, the non-existence of providence plays a significant role in the development of Schellenberg's reasoning.

According to Schellenberg, God is expected to help us enter into communion with him, because, if he exists, this communion is the greatest possible good for us. To this end, God should offer evidence for his existence to impede us from unbelieving reasonably and inculpably. However, so Schellenberg claims, there are people who doubt—reasonably and inculpably—that God exists. In other words, these people do not believe though they are not resistant to God and his revelation.⁶ They are inculpable, which implies that God is culpable: although he is omnipotent and omniscient, he does not grant them the opportunity to believe and consequently to achieve their highest good, i.e., communion with him.⁷ However, since God can only be thought of as perfectly good, one must conclude that God does not exist. Schellenberg believes that the lack of sufficient evidence—not only rational or 'public' but also experiential or 'private'—is in itself a demonstration that God does not exist.⁸

Although Schellenberg does not mention it, he refers to a type of *providential order* that presides over all things. The order in question is shown by the fact that, if an omnipotent, omniscient and perfectly loving God exists, then he is expected to put us in a condition to believe and to achieve full communion with him. If we do not believe, although we have done everything possible to believe, the only explanation (of our nonresistant nonbelief) is that no providential order exists, namely, an omnipotent, omniscient and perfectly loving God does not put us in a condition to believe and to achieve full communion with him. But this lack of providential order is unacceptable; therefore, God does not exist.

Now that I have shown that reference to a providential order has a substantial role in Schellenberg's argument—once he has argued that there is no providence on the part of God can he conclude that God does not exist—I

⁶ For a recent questioning of the existence of these nonbelievers, see Di Ceglie (2020).

⁷ Let me point out that this is a controversial view. According to Rea, nonbelievers may have a relationship with God. If they desire to find God, God may guide them to find him (see Rea 2018, 169–174). Harvey Cawdron has more recently pointed out that 'this model [the model proposed by Rea] allows those in a state of seeking nonresistant nonbelief to be in a relationship with God but does not accommodate nonseeking non-resistant nonbelievers'. This is why Cawdron proposes a model of panentheism on the basis of which 'all, including all nonbelievers, are in a relationship with God that can accommodate many of the criteria and motivations for personal relationship' (Cawdron 2021, 5)

⁸ See Schellenberg (2010, 509).

intend to move on to show the two assumptions mentioned above. As I will show, these are implicit assumptions that are inconsistent with the view of God, which constitutes the starting point for Schellenberg's argument.

Treating this subject, however, is the task of the next sections. To adequately introduce this treatment, I need first to focus on Schellenberg's view that God is to be thought of as a perfectly loving being.⁹ This view may be seen as merely Christian, as Schellenberg himself seems to think.¹⁰ At any rate, he believes that we can attribute perfect love to God through philosophical arguments. According to him, 'in forming our conception of divine love, we can do no better than to make use of what we know belongs to the best in human love'.¹¹ In fact, 'God is conceived as embodying the perfections of personal life', from which follows that 'he must be conceived as perfectly loving'.¹²

Schellenberg argues that the perfection of love implies (a) a desire for the greatest good of the beloved and (b) a desire for union with the beloved:

The best human love—the best love of parent or spouse or friend—involved seeking *meaningful personal relationship* with the beloved . . . The lover, being—as the best and truest lover must be—benevolently disposed toward the beloved, will also seek relationship *so that*, she may offer opportunities for *explicit participation in her life*.¹³

Obviously, if this relationship applies to God and his human creatures, then (a) and (b) will coincide with each other. If God feels (a), this necessarily coincides with (b), because, if God exists, union with him is the highest possible good for us.

Although this reflection is persuasive at first sight, it is not really convincing. It is not supported by a convincing determination of love. According to Daniel Howard-Snyder and Paul Moser,

⁹ See Schellenberg (2007, 195f).

¹⁰ See Schellenberg (2006, 10). Not surprisingly, Jacob J. Ross says that, as a Jew, he hesitates 'to follow the notion that God is "perfectly loving" in the sense described by Schellenberg' (See Ross [2002], 182). Note that Schellenberg's account of love may be not only inadequate for Judaism, but also for Christianity. This does not take us by surprise if we consider that, as M. Rea has said, both Schellenberg and his respondents have thought that 'the salient questions about the nature of divine love and personal relationship can mostly be settled a priori rather than by taking a more systematic or historical theological approach' (Rea 2015, 225).

¹¹ Schellenberg (2005, 202f).

¹² Schellenberg (2006, 11).

¹³ Schellenberg (2002, 41). This is in line with the view of love advocated by Eleonore Stump. According to her, love implies not only a desire for the good of the other but also a desire for union (see Stump 2010, 103).

people who emphasize that God would do whatever it takes to prevent inculpable nonbelief frequently regard God's love in analogy with parents who wish to comfort their young children in distress. Others, however, see God's love in analogy with familiar adult love, where the lover primarily wants certain attitudes and behavior to accompany any reciprocation of love on the part of the beloved.¹⁴

I find this distinction between young children and adult children especially fruitful. Let me radicalize it by making reference to *adult children and infant children*. In both cases, parents should feel (a) and (b). However, when it is referred to adult children, (a) is different from when it is referred to infants. In the latter case, a parent is expected to do *everything* for her children, with no cooperation on their part. In the former case, instead, cooperation is required. In fact, the flourishing of an adult child, which is the greatest good of (a), is not possible if she does not employ her abilities in a responsible way.

Note that the relationship which includes adult children apply more appropriately than that which includes young children to the relationship between God and prospective believers. Not surprisingly, in the Christian tradition the act of believing has usually been seen as a divine gift and at the same time as a *meritorious* human activity based on a *commitment to God* seen as the good in itself.¹⁵ Schellenberg neglects this decisive aspect of the relationship between God and prospective believers. His argument requires God's intervention to give them evidence to believe, but it makes no reference to the collaboration and the commitment to God that believing might require on their part. It is true that Schellenberg does not claim that unbelievers demand everything from God and nothing from themselves. As I will show in the next section, for him nonresistant nonbelievers have already done everything in their power to believe, and nonetheless no future commitment is expected on their part. It is to this lack of future development that the above-mentioned example of parents and children applies. Schellenberg's argument focuses on the disposition that only *parents* and *God* are expected to adopt toward infants and

¹⁴ D. Howard-Snyder and P. Moser (2002, 7f). For one more criticism directed against Schellenberg's connection between divine love and the seeking of a personal relationship, see I. Aijaz—M. Weidler (2007).

¹⁵ According to Aquinas, for example, God grants us the will to believe (see *Summa theologiae* II-II, q. 6, a. 1), although this does not mean that believers do not believe freely and meritoriously (see *ibidem*, II-II, q. 2 a. 9). Aquinas traces back to a tripartition proposed by Augustine and says that not only do they *believe in a God—credunt Deum*—and *believe God—credunt Deo*; they also *believe in God—credunt in Deum* (see *ST*, II-II, q. 2, a. 2). The fact that they *believe in God* means that they love and trust him, and are ready to believe whatever he has revealed, as Aquinas says in the same question (see *ST*, II-II, q. 2, a. 10, ad 2). For more on this, see Di Ceglie (2022, 95–102).

prospective believers, respectively. Needless to say, this disposition would be inappropriate and disrespectful towards adult children as well as prospective believers, given the duties they are expected to fulfil.

2. Schellenberg's First Implicit Assumption: There Is No Ultimate End of History

Let me start this section with one more example. The infant who has been banned from consuming too much candy will probably not understand that the ban may be of great benefit to her. She will rather consider it unfair to force her to comply with this ban. An adult, once subject to the same ban, should understand that it may have positive effects on her health and will be grateful to those who imposed it on her.

Note that the infant considers only what falls within *a limited experience*. She only considers what occurs *at the moment*. In contrast, the adult should be able to read her experience in the light of broader perspectives, i.e., when a fact is judged *in the light of future events*. Not surprisingly, adults who are unable to reflect on their experience in this way are usually considered *immature*, that is, not yet sufficiently adult.

Like the infant here under consideration, Schellenberg's nonresistant nonbelievers are taken into consideration only with regard to a limited experience. According to Schellenberg, they have *already* done their best to believe. They will remain nonbelievers unless God intervenes, which means that, with regard to their commitment and responsibility, no future development is possible. (One may object that, among Schellenberg's nonresistant nonbelievers are those who endlessly continue searching for God. This, however, does not seem to be consistent with Schellenberg's thesis that, if God does not make his existence obvious to them, then they will not come to believe—and will consequently be excluded forever from communion with him. It is hard to see how the fact that one is open to believing and endlessly continues to search for God does not play any role in one's coming to believe.) This implies a substantive assumption. It is the assumption that there is no *logos* which connects all of the historical events with each other. In other words, it is assumed that there is no project because of which, even if at the moment some events seem to deny the existence of such a project, they should eventually confirm it. The nonresistant nonbeliever did everything in her power to believe only up to a certain point in her life, after which it seems that even the slightest possibility to consider again reasons for believing cannot be contemplated. This implies the assumption that historical events *do not have any ultimate end*. An ultimate end, in fact, makes history a rational process, which means that historical facts are related to each other with the aim of attaining that end. They

receive from the end in question their meaning.¹⁶ The end in question is God. If God is the creator of everything, then he is the principle and the end of all things, including history. This means that, since God is the ultimate end of history, nonresistant nonbelievers are expected to *continue* doing their best to attain the ultimate end, which is God. It may be that they are momentarily impeded from pursuing the end in question. After all, the cruciality that Christians accord to divine salvation presupposes that mankind is not entirely committed to the end of history. If this end exists, however, it is plausible to expect nonresistant nonbelievers to resume their pursuit as soon as conditions permit. The carpenter who intends to turn wood into a wardrobe does not change his mind only because necessary tools are momentarily lacking. He will procure them no matter how long it takes and then he will go back to work to continue building the wardrobe. Unlike him, Schellenberg's nonresistant nonbelievers simply stop their research as if God, the ultimate end that they had previously searched for, did not exist.¹⁷ They first acted as if this end existed; then they started acting as if this end did not exist. However, denying the existence of an ultimate end is incompatible with Schellenberg's view of God. If God is seen as the creator of everything, then he should also be seen as the principle and the end of all things, including history.

Note that when Schellenberg (implicitly) denies the existence of an ultimate end of history, he (equally implicitly) assumes a view that was customary among pre-Christian Greek philosophers. Like him, they did not attribute any rational nature to history, which is why they were unable to develop a philosophy of history. Unlike him, they did so in a way that was fully consistent with their concept of the divine, which did not include creation. This is why Aristotle argued that history had less dignity than poetry:

The distinction between the historian and the poet ... is this: that the one (i.e., the historian) tells what happened, the other (i.e., the poet) tells the sort of things that *can* happen. That's why in fact poetry is a more speculative and more 'serious' business than history: for poetry deals more with universal, history with particulars. 'Universal' means the sort of things that according to likelihood and necessity a certain kind of person tends to say or do, and this is

¹⁶ As Aquinas points out with regard to human acts, these acts "whether they be considered as actions, or as passions, receive their species from the end" (*ST*).

¹⁷ If one objected that this is perfectly in line with Schellenberg's argument that God does not exist, then one would betray lack of understanding of Schellenberg's argument. According to this argument, in fact, God's non-existence is based on the fact that God does not intervene to offer evidence of his existence to prospective believers. And this *follows* the part of the hiddenness argument which is here under consideration. In this part, instead, Schellenberg is still assuming that *God exists*.

what poetry aims at, putting in names afterwards; 'particulars' (means) what Alcibiades (for example) actually did or what happened to him.¹⁸

According to Aristotle, history has less dignity because, unlike poetry, it does not allow us to see historical facts *as related to an order* that presides over them. This is why historical events appeared hard to decipher even to those who, like the Stagirite, in dealing with the physical world, had given rise to an influential *teleological* perspective. On the basis of this perspective, everything in nature appeared to have a *telos* and to be subject to a kind of order. But how could it be possible to find order and *telos* of historical events without assuming the existence of an ultimate end of history?

It was the Jewish and Christian revelation that attributed an order and purpose to historical facts. The novelty in question, as K. Löwith pointed out, was that

in the Hebrew and Christian view of history, the past is a promise to the future; consequently, the interpretation of the past becomes a prophecy in reverse, demonstrating the past as a meaningful 'preparation' for the future. Greek philosophers and historians were convinced that whatever is to happen will be of the same pattern and character as past and present events; they never indulged in the prospective possibilities of the future.¹⁹

Preparing for the future in a meaningful way means placing all events in an ordered relationship of means and ends. In other words, historical events make sense to the extent that the direction they show is determined by a project. If God is understood as the omnipotent and omniscient creator of all things, then time and the events that unfold in it must be subject to him. This is a prerequisite to consider history as ordinate as any other thing. The order of history is shown by the fact that all things are ordered toward an end. Schellenberg implicitly denies the existence of such an end when he assumes that nonresistant nonbelievers stop trying to attain the ultimate end of historical facts. This assumption is inconsistent with the view that God is the creator of all things, a view which is the starting point of Schellenberg's argument—the creator of everything, in fact, is also the ultimate end of history.

Now that I have shown in what the first of the two inconsistent assumptions that Schellenberg makes consists, it must be noted that part of my explanation is still unclear. If God is the ultimate end of history, then *all* creatures should tend to attain such an end, namely, they should tend to promote communion with God. However, there are those who are not interested in seeking this

¹⁸ Aristotle (1997), 1451 b 1–15.

¹⁹ Löwith (1957, 6).

communion; also, there are those who, like Schellenberg's nonresistant nonbelievers, stopped doing this research. Does this deny the existence of the ultimate end here under consideration? To answer this substantive objection, I need to consider the second of the two inconsistent assumptions made by Schellenberg. Unlike the first one, the second assumption does not limit itself to denying the existence of an ultimate end of history. It also denies that such ultimate end is the good itself.

3 Schellenberg's Second Implicit Assumption: There Is No Good End of History and No Commitment to Attaining It

Schellenberg's second assumption is more comprehensive than the first one because it includes something that the latter does not express. I am referring to the fact that the ultimate end of history is also *the good in itself*. This is why the second assumption seems to deserve a separate treatment. In this why, the substantial role that *free will* plays in the commitment to the good made by prospective believers can appropriately be emphasized.

As Aristotle says at the beginning of his *Nicomachean Ethics*, 'the good has rightly been declared to be that at which all things aim'.²⁰ That said, if the ultimate end of history is the good in itself, then all creatures are expected to aim at attaining it. And this seemingly reinforces the objection mentioned at the end of the last section. If all creatures are expected to act in this way, then all human beings should wish to believe in God and to achieve communion with him, which is obviously untrue.

To offer a reply to this objection, let me note that the nature of the good in itself, at least on the basis of the view of God as the omnipotent, omniscient and perfectly loving creator of all things formulated by classical theism and adopted by Schellenberg, implies *free will* on the part of believers and prospective believers. This implication emerges from Augustine's reflection very clearly. In the footsteps of what the Scripture, from *Genesis* onwards, had suggested with regard to history, the author of the *City of God* (412–427) was the first of a long series of thinkers who offered an extensive reflection on this subject matter. The Western Roman Empire was besieged by the advance of the barbarian hordes. In 410, Alaric, king of the Visigoths, had devastated Rome and sacked its churches. At such a point the anguish caused by this fact had come that, from Bethlem, St. Jerome had said that 'the torch of the world' had gone out and that the death of a single city was the death of all humanity.²¹ Augustine gave rise to a reflection aimed at showing, as active in history, a principle of order and a reason for optimism. In the above-mentioned work, he defends Christians from

²⁰ Aristotle (2009), 1094 a 4.

²¹ See Jerome, *Commentary on Ezekiel*, Prol.

the accusation launched by pagans that they, the Christians, had somewhat caused the end of the Empire.

What is of special interest for the purposes of this essay is that Augustine argues that *two cities* oppose each other throughout history. On the one hand, there is the *city of men*, that is, the city of those who prefer the love for themselves to the love for God. They are not interested in attaining communion with him. On the other hand, there is the *City of God*, more precisely, the city of those who prefer the love for God to the love for themselves. This city is generated by God's love, where the genitive is both subjective and objective. It is subjective because Christian theism typically implies that it is God who grants believers the desire to commit themselves to him and the neighbour. After all, preferring love towards others and God to self-love is self-expropriation, which is not possible unless supernatural aids are granted.²² The genitive in question is also objective because believers are expected to love God meritoriously, which means that they should love him *freely*. Otherwise, they would not have any merit in committing themselves to God, as it emerges from the influential teaching of Aquinas.²³

The role that free will and commitment to God is expected to play in the experience of prospective believers contrasts with Schellenberg's view that, since they did everything possible to believe *in the past*, they are no longer required to do anything, whereas it is God who should intervene to convince them of his existence. Let us turn back to the example of adult children and infant children mentioned in the previous section. As I said, parents are expected to do everything to promote the flourishing of their infant children, whereas things are different when children are adult. Adult children are expected to do their fair share; their parents, if they really love their children, should require their collaboration. Parents who did not act in this way would not really promote the good of their children. Clearly enough, God can be seen as the perfect parent who will do good to their children. And since these are adults—prospective believers can only be considered in this way—he will expect them to do their fair share. This is what emerges from the view of God as the perfectly loving creator of all things, as shown by an outstanding exponent of the Christian theism such as Aquinas. Schellenberg's conviction that nonresistant nonbelievers are not required to collaborate with God is plainly inconsistent with the view of God as the perfectly loving creator of all things.

²² Aquinas refers to love for God and our neighbour as "things which we cannot do without the aid of healing grace" (*ST*, II-II, q. 2, a. 5, ad 1). For more on this, see Di Ceglie (2022), 80–88.

²³ See above, note 15. The vast influence exerted by Aquinas's teaching on faith has been pointed out by G. Dawes. According to him, 'few Christians will have read Aquinas, but since his view is widely shared by theologians they may have absorbed it "by osmosis"' (Dawes 2015, 80)

Nevertheless, Schellenberg starts the divine hiddenness argument precisely from this concept of God, which also Aquinas, and many other Christian thinkers with him, accepted and sustained.

It is now time to show in what exactly the second inconsistent assumption made by Schellenberg consists. According to him, the possibility for the nonresistant nonbelievers mentioned above to come to believe depends on God's intervention. God is required to make them believers, whereas they are not required to do anything—as I have already said, they did everything possible to believe *in the past*. In contrast, it should be said that these prospective believers should *continue endlessly* to search for God. The carpenter who intends to make a wardrobe may interrupt momentarily his work for a number of reasons, and nonetheless he is expected to resume working on his project as soon as conditions permit. Why could the carpenter not decide to abandon his work? And why could the prospective believers mentioned by Schellenberg not decide to stop searching for God? I have claimed that the ultimate end is also the good in itself. If such an ultimate good exists, then history *in its entirety* is characterized by a commitment to attaining this good. All creatures are expected to move in that direction. More specifically, all humans are expected to seek to attain the good in question. Furthermore, since God is the good in question, such a perfectly loving creator of all things, as I have shown above, is expected to want his human creatures to love him and *freely* search for him. Finally, an established tradition teaches us that they experience this love at various degrees of intensity.²⁴ As a result, we should conclude that the more one loves God the more one searches for him, no matter whether or not impediments in this direction may momentarily show up. It is in proportion to the love in question and the related commitment to God and the good that one will commit oneself to overcoming the impediments in question and resuming one's search for God. Schellenberg's assumption that the nonresistant nonbelievers he mentions stopped their search *forever* and that only God's intervention can put them in a condition to believe does not consider the role that love and commitment to the good may play in the relationship between human creatures and God. If God—the ultimate good end of history—exists, then *the whole* history is characterized by a commitment to him. Clearly enough, this view is incompatible with the assumption, which Schellenberg makes, that it was only in a limited period of time that nonresistant nonbelievers made this commitment.

²⁴ Augustine consecrates himself to God by proclaiming: "I love Thee alone, Thee alone follow, Thee alone seek, Thee alone I am ready to serve". Nonetheless, in the same passage, he also addresses this prayer to God: "Increase my faith, increase my hope, increase my charity" (Augustine [1910], vol. 1, 1:5). In the same vein, Aquinas focuses on the existence of various degrees of faith (*ST*, II-II, q. 5, a. 4) and charity (*ST*, II-II, q. 24, a. 9).

When all is said and done, note that my argument does not apply to all kinds of nonresistant nonbelievers. As Schellenberg says, '*nonresistant nonbelief* comes in various types'.²⁵ Among them are those whom he calls 'isolated nontheists', whose distance from the type of nonresistant nonbelievers whom I have taken into consideration so far is evident. Unlike these ones, isolated nontheists have never sought the truth about God's existence. Among them are those who lived before monotheistic religions entered the historical stage as well as those who simply have never thought of God, as Schellenberg points out when he refers to people who 'can flourish without ever considering the question of God at all'.²⁶ The view that I have advocated here is that it is implausible that at a certain time history should stop moving towards its end and so it is implausible that, to attain communion with God, prospective believers are required to commit themselves to it *in the past but not in the future*. Consequently, my view does not apply to the type of nonresistant nonbelievers who simply have *never* committed themselves to the afore-mentioned communion. This should not take us by surprise. According to Schellenberg, each of the types of nonresistant nonbelievers which he considers gives rise to grounds for atheism that can function 'quite independently' of the more general hiddenness argument that he has developed. As a result, one could offer an appropriate explanation to some of these types but it may be hard to offer an explanation that covers all of them.²⁷

Conclusion

In this article I have argued that Schellenberg implicitly makes two assumptions that are inconsistent with the view of God that constitutes the starting point of his argument. First, Schellenberg (implicitly) assumes that an ultimate end of history does not exist. Second, he (equally implicitly) assumes that there is no ultimate *good* end of history and no commitment to it on the part of prospective believers. In fact, he assumes that nonresistant nonbelievers did their best to believe and achieve communion with God only up to a certain point in their life. In other words, Schellenberg limits their commitment to the good to *a section* of history, which is inconsistent with the view that, if the ultimate good end of history exists, then the *whole* history should be characterized by a commitment to such an end.

The commitment in question coincides with the ordering of all things to the end of history. This ordering to the ultimate good end, which for Christian

²⁵ Schellenberg (2007), 227.

²⁶ Schellenberg (2015), 85.

²⁷ This is pointed out by Green and Stump (2015), 4.

theists is God, has traditionally been called ‘providence of God’.²⁸ In this view, God grants history a rational nature, which means that all facts are related to each other and the creatures of God aim at attaining communion with him. The more these creatures love God the more will they search for him, whether or not various obstacles may momentarily prevent them from searching.

Schellenberg does not even mention the providence of God. Nevertheless, his refutation of divine providence plays an important role in grounding his denial of God’s existence, which is the aim of his divine hiddenness argument. If my argument is correct, then the two inconsistent assumptions which I have explored in this essay make Schellenberg’s refutation of divine providence as well as his denial of God’s existence implausible. It is true that my argument only applies to those nonresistant nonbelievers who committed themselves to communion with God *in the past*, whereas no explanation of types of nonbelievers such as ‘isolated nontheists’ emerges from it. Regardless, if my view is correct, it can become part of a cumulative argument to counter Schellenberg’s argument against theism’s affirmation of the existence of God.

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²⁸ See Aquinas (1920), *ST*, I, q. 22, a. 1.

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