

Forthcoming in *Philosophy of Religion: Classic and Contemporary Issues*, eds. P. Copan and C. Meister (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007).

Chapter 15

DIVINE HIDDENNESS, DEATH, AND MEANING

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In the *Phaedo*, Plato claims that “those who really apply themselves in the right way to philosophy are directly and of their own accord preparing themselves for dying and death” (64A). This claim sounds very strange to us today. If Plato is right, contemporary philosophers have failed to “apply themselves in the right way to philosophy.” So, maybe contemporary philosophers aren’t true footnotes to Plato after all. Maybe they have missed his main point about the point of philosophy. Even so, the important questions regarding death are not about Plato.

What has death to do with philosophy? Or, more immediately, what has death to do with *us*, with us *as persons*, regardless of whether we are philosophers? Does death have an important lesson for us, even if we are inclined to ignore its lesson? Let’s begin with the obvious: death happens.

The Reality of Death

Death is the cessation of *bodily* life. Some mind-body dualists, under Plato’s influence, deny that death is the cessation of *mental* life. It is, however, the end of embodied life, at least as we know it. So, when we die, others will bury or cremate our bodies, even if they don’t do the same to *us*,

to our souls. Mind-body dualists and materialists agree on this much: bodily death happens.

They disagree, however, on whether our bodily death allows for our mental survival.

We might deny that death happens. Still, we will die. We can run but we cannot hide from death. The reality of death marks the human predicament, wherever we go in space and/or time. Death is universal for humans. The reality of death is the reality of a pervasive destructive *power*. It destroys us at least physically, if not mentally and socially too. It sometimes is delayable, given the powers of modern medicine. Still, death seems unavoidable if we are left to our own resources. Its power seems immune to our best medicine and science. Death inevitably triumphs over humans and our powers.

What, if anything, is the significance of death? The answer depends on what exactly death is. One question is whether it is an *irreversible* destructive power. Is death forever? Given materialism about reality, it is: there is no coming back. If reality is uniformly material, entropy meets no lasting counterbalance, and death doesn't either. Our best physics tells us that in the long term the physical universe is destined to break down. The energy of the physical universe will naturally disperse if it is not counterbalanced. Consider, for instance, how a cube of ice will naturally melt in a heated room. The same ice cube does not ever return from its dispersion. The material world thus does not offer us, as the persons we are, a lasting alternative to death. It leaves us with dying and death, with the dispersing of bodily life. If we depend for our existence on bodily life, we too will be dispersed forever, given materialism (see A NATURALISTIC ACCOUNT OF THE UNIVERSE).

Loss in Death

Given materialism, we will no longer be persons after our death. So, there is no lasting hope for *us*, regarding our future as persons. We have no lasting future; so, we have no lastingly good future. Our destiny is just the abyss of dispersed physical energy. We will then have, in the abyss, no value in ourselves because we will have ceased to exist. People who were once valuable will then no longer be valuable. We will no longer be important, or worthwhile. Our existence and value will have ceased, never to be recovered. Some people may remember us, but mere memories are not the persons we are. We ourselves will not survive in memories. We will be gone forever, dispersed and done for, given materialism.

The loss of us will be a real loss. Why? Because we now are valuable—that is, worthwhile and good—in many ways. We exemplify goodness in many respects, even though we exemplify evil too. So, our funerals will be a sad occasion for many people—not for *us*, of course, but for many others. Their sadness will correspond to the loss of us with regard to what *was* valuable about us, including our being alive. People who pretend that death is no loss at all are misguided, perhaps even self-deceived. They need a reality check from the spontaneous responses of people at funerals. One might spin the reality of death to fit a far-fetched theory, but the responses of the uninitiate at funerals are telling indeed.

Materialists might take an extreme position here. If our value as persons ceases at death, as it will given materialism, then our death is not important after all, because we aren't truly valuable. We are just insignificant energy centers waiting entropically (so to speak) to be dispersed. Such extremism is confused. The fact that we have no *lasting*, or ultimate, value, given materialism, doesn't entail that we have no value at all. We can still have *temporary* value, and we do, even though materialism makes our ultimate future bleak. Correspondingly, we can

reasonably have *short-term* hope for our temporary well-being. Hope for our lasting, or ultimate, well-being would be misplaced. Materialism offers no basis for such hope. Entropy will leave us all without hope. The final hopelessness of materialism is palpable. Lasting meaning, or purpose, is likewise excluded. Camus (1955), for example, paints a powerful portrait of life without lasting meaning.

Our ultimately hopeless destiny, given materialism, is a reality beyond our power to change. We can't save ourselves or anyone else from the abyss of final dispersion and destruction. Our intelligence, however sophisticated, can't save us. Our philosophy, however profound, can't save us. Our willful drive, however resolute, can't save us. Nor can our families, friends, colleagues, or community save us, however well-intentioned they are. Death will leave us in its cold wake, regardless of our cleverness, drive, or acquaintances. Materialism, then, is less than cheery about death. Materialists should be too, at least as long as they embrace materialism. The grave is their destiny.

Outside Help

In the face of death, we can reasonably be hopeful only if we have outside help from a power that can overcome death. This would be *outside* help, because its power would be beyond us. We lack the power of our own to overcome death. The needed help would be actual help, not merely possible help. It would offer us the actual opportunity to overcome death, to survive the destruction brought by death.

Could an *impersonal* power save us from death? This would be a power without plans, intentions, or goals. It would enable us to survive destruction by death, but it would not do so intentionally, or purposively. It would happen blindly, in the way the wind, for instance, could

blindly form a three-dimensional portrait of Mother Teresa's face on the sandy shoreline of Lake Michigan. The wind *could* do this, but we cannot count on it to do so. If it happens, it is unpredictable for all practical purposes and thus beyond what we can reasonably hope for. If it were to happen for Mother Teresa (against all odds), we could not reasonably assume that it will happen for another person too. We thus wouldn't wait on the shoreline for someone's portrait to emerge from the sand. If we did, our sanity would be questioned.

Our *grounded* hope in surviving death, *if* we have such hope, requires a ground for supposing that death will be overcome by us. This ground cannot be the unpredictable vicissitudes of local wind movements. It requires a ground predictable and trustworthy by us, that is, predictable and trustworthy in practice. The announced intentions of a reliable, trustworthy personal agent would offer such a ground. We know this from everyday experience, as we often form a grounded hope on the basis of the announced intentions of other persons. For example, I reasonably hope that my return home from the campus will be timely, given that a trustworthy friend has promised to give me a ride home. This hope has a basis different in kind from the basis for my wish that the wind inscribe a human portrait on the shoreline of Lake Michigan. My hope is grounded in a good reason; my wish is not.

Let's consider the kind of outside help that would come from a trustworthy personal agent who has the power to overcome death. I have said "would come," rather than "does come," to avoid begging a likely question: namely, "*Is there actually such help?*" Another likely question is: "If there's outside help from a personal agent, why would that agent allow death to occur in the first place?" Some people hold that such an agent, if genuinely helpful, would block death from the start. Here we have the beginnings of an analogue to the so-called problem of evil for theism (see THE EVIDENTIAL ARGUMENT FROM EVIL).

Would a superhuman personal agent allow us to undergo death even though that agent seeks to help us to overcome death? If so, why? A noteworthy answer comes from Paul's epistle to the Romans: "The creation was subjected to futility, not by its own will, but by the will of the One who subjected it, in [the One's] hope that the creation will be freed from its slavery to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God" (8:20-21). Let's unpack this.

Paul's reference to futility echoes the writer of Ecclesiastes: "Futility of futilities! All is futility" (Eccl. 1:2, 12:8). They have in mind what is ultimately pointless, in vain, when left to its own ways. Paul thus suggests that God introduced death to show that the ways of creation on its own are ultimately futile, pointless, meaningless. In particular, as a part of creation, we humans ultimately come to naught on our own. Death leaves us with a hopeless destiny if we are left to our own resources. All of our own projects and achievements, even our philosophical labors, will meet the same fate: futility. They are all destined for the abyss, never to be revived. This seems to be nothing but bad news, but is it really?

Paul suggests that a certain hope lies behind the futility of death: God's hope of freeing people from futility to enter the family of God. Death is portrayed as a means to bring about this hope. How can death, our death, lead to life, our life? How can such loss yield such good?

Dying to Live

Death can enable a needed learning curriculum for us if it serves the teaching purposes of an agent who can overcome death for us. What might such an agent have to teach us with death, our death? We all need instruction about our desperate situation when left to our own resources. We need to learn that all of our best intentions, efforts, and achievements will ultimately be futile, meaningless, if we are on our own. Death is the intended wake-up call to this humbling lesson. It

shows that we cannot think, will, or work ourselves into lasting satisfaction by our own resources. It shows that we are fragile and even ultimately hopeless on our own. Death announces that we need outside help for lasting satisfaction and meaning. It solemnly warns us who remain: if we stay to ourselves, without outside power, we are done for, forever.

The reality of death fits perfectly with the view that we are creatures intended to depend on One greater than ourselves, on One who can overcome death for us. Such depending is just trust. It is faith, *not* as guesswork or a leap beyond evidence, but as willing reliance on One whom we need to overcome death, to live lastingly. What exactly is this reliance, and how does death bear on it?

For shorthand, let's introduce talk of "God" for the One in question. The slippery word "God" is a title, not a proper name. It signifies One who not only can overcome death but also is worthy of worship, i.e., unconditional commitment and adoration as our morally impeccable Maker and Sustainer. We can use a title intelligibly, even the title "God," without begging the question whether God exists. A title can have semantic significance owing to its connotation, even if it lacks denotation. So, our use of the term "God" as a title does not automatically ignore the qualms of atheists and agnostics.

Our trusting, depending, or relying on God appropriately is just willingly counting on God as our Savior and Lord, that is, as our Redeemer and Master. In counting on God thus, I commit to God as *my* God. I thereby commit to putting God's will over my will, just as Jesus did in the Garden of Gethsemane as he prayed to God: "Not what I will, but what You will" (Mark 14:36). In trusting God, I commit to dying to my own selfish ways to live to God's ways. In short, I resolve to die to my selfishness to live to God. This entails a commitment to reject selfishness, in particular, any selfishness that involves exalting my will above God's. In

selfishness, I fail to honor God as God. I put myself and my ways first. The call to faith in God is, in contrast, a call to die to selfishness in order to live to One who can overcome death for us. Whatever else it is, it is *not* a call to leap beyond evidence, as if faith in God were necessarily defective from a cognitive viewpoint. Trust in God can, in principle, be at least as cognitively good as your trusting in your best friend.

Why assume, however, that I must die to my ways to live to God? Isn't this a perversely harsh understanding of what faith in God involves? Not if my own case is at all representative of the human condition. My problem is the human problem: deep-seated selfishness, the antithesis to the unselfish love integral to God's morally impeccable character. I'm also very good at hiding my selfish ways from myself and others. I tell myself stories of how they are reasonable and even good. Our inveterate selfishness qualifies us as morally deficient and thus disqualifies us immediately as God. The title "God," requiring a morally impeccable character of its holder, does not apply to ourselves. Even so, we have the persistent tendency to play God in at least some area of our lives. We pose as Lord over at least part of our lives, particularly in areas we deem vital to our well-being. One such area concerns how we treat our enemies, that is, our acquaintances who are a clear threat to our well-being. At best, we ignore them; at worst, we seek to destroy them. Rarely do we show them unselfish forgiving love, the kind of merciful love found in the true God (see Matt. 5:43-48). The risk is, we suppose, too great, too threatening to our comfort and well-being. We thereby choose against the ways of an all-loving God. We presume to know better. We thus play God. Trust in God is the refusal to play God.

Another area where we play God concerns what is to count as suitable evidence of God's reality. We presume to be in a position, on our own, to say what kind of evidence God *must* supply regarding God's reality. We reason, in agreement with Bertrand Russell and many other

philosophers: If God is real, God would be revealed in way *W*. For instance, God would show up with considerable fireworks or at least Pomp and Circumstance. God, however, is not revealed in way *W*. Hence, God is not real. Russell (1970) thus anticipated his preferred response if after death he met God: “God, you gave us insufficient evidence.” We thereby exalt ourselves as cognitive judge, jury, and executioner over God. God, we suppose, must be revealed on *our* cognitive terms. In such cognitive idolatry (see Moser 2002), we set up our cognitive standards in ways that preclude so-called “reasonable” acknowledgment of God’s reality. Our cognitive pride thus becomes suicidal. We play God to our own demise. The reality of our impending death exhibits that without the true God, we are ultimately hopeless. We are then impostors in playing God.

We must die to our playing God, if we are to live lastingly. Death is our final notice. It calls us to the stark realization that our playing God will not last but will instead lead to the grave, once and for all. In shattering us, death ultimately ruins all of our projects too. The needed power for lasting life, then, is not from us or our projects. Only pride gone blind would lead one to deny this. Even in the face of death, our selfish pride endures. In the absence of the humbling effects of death, our pride would run wild indeed. Death reveals that what is lastingly important is not from us. It exposes our core insecurity (and impotence) about life itself, that is, our insecurity about the future of our lives. We know *that* our lives will end, but we have no idea of *when* they will end. Our end could come in twenty years or it could come in twenty minutes. This indefiniteness makes for insecurity and anxiety, at least when we honestly attend to the matter. As a result, we typically divert attention in ways that lead to indifference about death and related realities.

How Not to Approach Death

Avoidance and indifference toward death threaten all of us at times, in our fear, insecurity, and weakness. Blaise Pascal writes:

the fact that there are men indifferent to the loss of their being . . . is not natural. They are quite different with regard to everything else: they fear even the most insignificant things, they foresee them, feel them, and the same man who spends so many days and nights in rage over the loss of some office or over some imaginary affront to his honour is the very one who, without anxiety or emotion, knows he is going to lose everything through death. It is a monstrous thing to see in the same heart and at the same time both this sensitivity to the slightest things and this strange insensitivity to the greatest (1660 [1995]: sec. 681).

We ignore and become indifferent to death, because we know that our own resources cannot overcome it. We know that death will triumph over us. So, we conclude, let's just resign ourselves to it. We then fail to seek the needed solution (the One who is the solution) in the right way.

Russell acknowledges the inadequacy of our own resources in the face of death, but still recommends intentional and courageous "contemplation" of our fate in death. He claims: "it remains only to cherish . . . the lofty thoughts that ennoble [our] little day; . . . to worship at the shrine that [our] own hands have built." He means the shrine that our *minds* have built. Russell also recommends that we approach the dying "to give them the pure joy of a never-tiring affection, to strengthen failing courage, to instill faith in hours of despair" (1903 [1975], 18). Faith? In what? Russell is silent, because he has no hope-conferring object of faith to offer.

Russell's rhetoric may sound good, but he cannot deliver on it. The eternal truths he loves passionately offer no hope to the dying. How could they? They cannot overcome death for the dying. So, they are no basis for us to "instill faith in hours of despair." Russell deserves credit for facing death as an immediate problem even for philosophers. He has, however, no

basis for his courage, his joy, or his faith. His faith does not yield living through dying, because his faith has no *object* of faith that can overcome death. The mere *attitude* of faith, being a psychological human state, does nothing to overcome death. Russell, then, is not helpful in solving the human plight. He offers no genuine help. He has no good news for us, the dying.

Do we want outside help? Some of us don't. Thomas Nagel claims that the existence of God poses a serious "cosmic authority problem" for us, so much so that he hopes that God does not exist. Nagel writes: "I want atheism to be true I hope there is no God! I don't want there to be a God; I don't want the universe to be like that" (1997: 130). Contrast this bold attitude with the tempered attitude of the Yale surgeon, Dr. Richard Selzer (2000), who likewise is not a theist: "Probably the biggest, saddest thing about my own life is that I never had faith in God. I envy people who do. Life without faith is rather a hard proposition." An undeniable hardship of life without God is that ultimately it all comes to naught, and we have indications of this futility of life. Selzer rightly feels the pain of life without God. Somehow, Nagel doesn't. He evidently misses the tragedy of a bypassed opportunity of a lastingly good life. Something has gone wrong.

It would be a strange, defective God who didn't pose a serious cosmic authority problem for humans. Part of the status of being *God*, after all, is that God has unique authority, or lordship, over humans. Since we humans aren't God, the true God would have authority over us and would seek to correct our profoundly selfish ways. Nagel confesses to having a fear of any religion involving God. Such fear seems widespread among humans, and all humans may share it at least at times. It stems from human fear of losing our supposed lordship over our decisions and lives. We want to be able to say, as the blindly arrogant song goes: "I did it my way." Willful children are very good at exhibiting this attitude, and adults can be too. Our attitude is:

“It’s my way, or no way.” Human willfulness runs deeper than the reach of reason. One’s willfulness, tragically, can be *consistently* suicidal. Reason is no panacea, after all. If it were, we wouldn’t need God.

Our supposedly self-protective fear, confessed by Nagel, may *seem* to be for our own good. It blocks, however, our receiving a lastingly good life. Consider the existence of an all-loving God who sustains, and who alone can sustain, lastingly good life for humans. The existence of such a God is a good thing, all things considered, for us humans. Nagel hopes that there is no such God. In doing so, he hopes that something good, all things considered, for all of us does not exist. Such a hope against the reality of something good for us arises from Nagel’s desire to have moral independence and authority. At least, I can’t find a better diagnosis.

Nagel’s desire is willful in a way that flouts good judgment. It rests on this attitude: “If I can’t have my moral independence of God, even though God is all-loving and good for me, then I hope that God doesn’t exist. I don’t want to exist in a universe where God is the moral authority over me and others. I just won’t stand for that kind of moral non-independence. If I can’t be morally independent of God, then I just won’t be at all.” Nagel is willing to sacrifice something good for himself and others (namely, lastingly good life) for the sake of a willful desire to be morally independent of God. If, however, God is all-loving (as God is by title), this willful attitude is dangerously misguided. Its willfulness invites the needless destruction of suicide in a world blessed by the presence of an all-loving God. We thus have a case where willfulness blocks good judgment. This is a trademark of the human condition of *supposedly* self-protective fear.

Our attitudes toward God's existence are not purely cognitive in their origin and sustenance. Our *willfulness* looms large. Let's turn, then, to the role of *evidence* regarding God as the One who can overcome death for us.

Hidden Help

If God exists, God is hidden. Pascal was dead right: "... any religion which does not say that God is hidden is not true" (1660 [1995]: sec. 275). Jesus himself thanks God for hiding. After giving his disciples instructions regarding their preaching of the kingdom of God, Jesus prays as follows:

I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the learned, and you have revealed them to infants. Yes, Father, this seemed good in your sight (Luke 10:21; cf. Matt. 11:25-26; Isa. 45:15).

If an all-loving God aims to help us to overcome death, shouldn't we all receive an explicit revelation of God's reality that is beyond reasonable doubt? Wouldn't an all-loving God appear clearly to dispel doubts about God's reality and the significance of human death?

We think we know what we *should* expect of an all-loving God. As a result, we confidently set the parameters for God's reality as if they were decisive regarding God's reality. We seldom ask, however, what *God* would expect of *us*. We'll do so here. An all-loving God would promote unselfish love, and thus would not settle for our simply knowing that God exists. I could know that God exists but hate God. Indeed, my hate toward God could increase as my evidence of God's reality increases. As I get more evidence of God as a genuine moral authority over me, I could easily deepen my hate toward God. This could come from willful insistence that I be my own moral authority at least in certain areas of my life.

Hate toward God is not good for anyone, including the one who hates God. It blocks a congenial relationship between a person and the only One who can overcome death and supply lastingly good life for that person. So, an all-loving God would not promote hate toward God. For the person resolutely opposed to God, more evidence of God's reality would typically be harmful. It would intensify and solidify opposition to God. Jesus thus advises his messengers not to cast his sacred message before resolute opponents, lest they trample it under foot (Matt. 7:6). Such a mean-spirited response by Jesus' opponents would be good for no one, not even the opponents. An all-loving God seeks to break willful opposition but not typically by means of a counterproductive direct assault on it. Instead, God typically invites us in various ways to come to our senses, and then waits. Since people aren't pawns, we should not expect universal success on God's part. Because people can freely reject God's invitation, some people might not ever come around to acknowledge God, despite God's best efforts.

What of "agnostics"? They withhold judgment regarding God's existence on the basis of allegedly counterbalanced evidence. They reportedly endorse agnosticism "for reasons of evidence." Typically, however, agnostics overlook the most important evidence of God's reality: namely, the reality of God's genuinely unselfish love in Jesus and thereby in the life of a person who yields to him as Lord and thus receives God's Spirit. This kind of love prompts the apostle Paul to make the following *cognitively* relevant point: "[Christian] hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us" (Romans 5:6). Paul thus identifies a kind of evidence that saves one from disappointment in hoping in God: the presence of God's Spirit accompanied by God's unselfish

love. Followers of Jesus often fail to live up to the high calling toward God's holy love, but this does not challenge the distinctive evidence just noted.

Evidence from the presence of God's Spirit is akin to the evidence from conscience regarding, for instance, the goodness of a case of self-giving kindness and the evil of a case of needless torture. Such evidence can be suppressed by us, and we will dismiss it if we *will* to do something in conflict with it. Still, the evidence from conscience is genuine and salient. Likewise for the evidence of God's Spirit, which comes typically with the conviction in conscience that we have fallen short of God's unselfish holy ways.

Volitional factors loom large in acquiring evidence of God's reality. An all-loving God would seek to be known *as God*, for the good of humans. So, God would seek to be known as *our* God. God sent Jesus as living proof that God is for us, not against us. The self-giving sacrifice of Jesus aims to alert us to God's intervention on our behalf. In his journey from Gethsemane to Calvary, Jesus resists ("dies to") selfishness in order to live to God. He subjects his will to the unselfish will of his Father. This subjection of the will is cognitively as well as morally significant. It highlights autobiographical factors in receiving evidence of God's reality as God. As I yield to God's call to obey, as Jesus did, God emerges as *my* God, and I thereby become God's servant and child. Only in such volitional yielding on my part does God become *my* God. My firm knowledge of God as my God thus depends on volitional factors concerning me, concerning my exercise of my will in relation to God. I must yield my will in response to the convicting and redirecting intervention of God's Spirit in my conscience. I can have no firm knowledge of God as my God in a will-free manner. We tell ourselves that *if* God appeared to us

in an astonishing manner, *then* we would yield to God as God. This, however, is doubtful, because we then have already set ourselves up as cognitive judge over God.

The evidence from the presence of God's Spirit may not on its own yield a non-question-begging argument for God's reality. This is no problem, however, because the reality of evidence does not depend on a non-question-begging argument. For example, I may not have a non-question-begging argument for my belief that I am awake now (at least relative to an extreme skeptic's questions), but I still have good evidence that I am awake now. Whether an argument is non-question-begging varies with the questions actually raised in an exchange. Evidence itself is not exchange-relative in this way. Our *having* evidence does not entail *giving* an answer of any kind. So, we should not be troubled if we lack a non-question-begging argument relative to an extreme agnostic's questions. We should rather identify the evidence suited to an all-loving God who seeks volitional transformation rather than mere reasonable belief. (For a challenge to extreme skepticism and religious agnosticism, see Moser 2004, 2007.)

Commitment to the true God can yield unsurpassed explanatory value, at least in certain areas of inquiry. Such a commitment, we might argue, makes the best sense of who we are and of why we have come into existence. The cognitive reasonableness of theistic belief is thus sometimes recommended as underwritten by an inference to a best explanation (see Moser 2002). Still, the foundational evidence of God's reality is irreducibly a matter of experiencing the presence of God's personal Spirit. This presence is not an argument of any kind. It is rather God's authoritative call on a person's life. If a call promotes hate, it is not from an all-loving God. False gods compete with the true God, and they are known by the standard of unselfish love.

Some agnostics will demand that we begin with mere “existence-arguments” concerning God. This is misguided. In the case of the true God, essence, character, and value must not be bracketed for the sake of mere existence-arguments. The present approach holds these together, thereby maintaining the explanatory, psychological, and existential distinctiveness of the evidence supplied by the Jewish-Christian God. Genuine existence-evidence regarding the true God comes not as a needed preliminary to, but instead *through*, the Good News of what God has done for us in Jesus, in concert with the convicting and drawing power of God’s Spirit. Proper conviction of God’s reality comes through the transforming working of God’s personal Spirit in conjunction with the Good News of what God has done for us. So, we should begin not with mere existence-evidence but rather with evidence of what God has done and is doing in terms of His gracious personal calling through the Good News of Jesus. We will thus avoid the risk of being diverted to deism, mere theism, or something else less robust than the reality of the true God and Father of Jesus. We will then highlight God’s gracious offer of reconciliation to all people, even unsophisticated people, via the Good News of Jesus. A person doesn’t have to be able to follow intricate arguments to receive evidence of God’s reality. This is good news indeed.

Arguments aside, the Good News of Jesus need not be lost on people raised within non-theistic traditions. The convicting and drawing power of God's Spirit can begin to transform receptive people from any tradition, even receptive people who do not yet acknowledge this Spirit as the Spirit of the risen Jesus. When the Good News of Jesus actually comes to the latter people, it will, in due course, bring them to acknowledge the work of God's Spirit within them as the work of the Spirit of the risen Jesus. The Good News of Jesus has its base in a power that

cuts much deeper than arguments and religious traditions: the transforming power of the Spirit of the living God.

Conclusion

For the person eager to follow God's ways, the available evidence is subtle but adequate. It is subtle in order to keep people humble, free of prideful triumphalism of the kind that destroys community. In our pride, we would readily turn a conveniently available God into a self-serving commodity. This tendency prompted Jesus to say that "it's an evil generation that seeks for a sign" (Matt. 16:4). The evidence available to us fits with the curriculum of death: the aim is to teach us to trust the One who alone can save us from death and corruption.

The lesson is that we must turn from our ways to get in line with the true God. This is difficult news, because we have a hard time trusting a God we cannot see. We fear that our well-being and rationality will be at risk if we trust this invisible God. The truth of the matter is that our well-being and rationality are at risk and even doomed if we fail to trust God. Death serves as a vivid reminder. Without God as our trusted Savior, only death awaits us. As we die to our ways in order to live to God, we receive God as our Savior from death and corruption. Nothing can then extinguish us, not even death. Death leaves us, then, either with lives that are ultimately an empty tragedy or with a God subjecting this world to futility in order to save it. In sincerely hoping for the latter, we become open to a kind of evidence that will change us forever, even from death to life. If we have the courage to hope in God, we'll see that Plato was right: Philosophy done right prepares us for dying and death. It also leads to the One we need.

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Recommended Reading

- Moser, Paul K. (2002). "Cognitive Idolatry and Divine Hiding." In Daniel Howard-Snyder and Paul Moser, eds., *Divine Hiddenness*, New York: Cambridge University Press, pp. 120-48. (Identifies purposes of divine hiding.)
- Pascal, B. (1660 [1995]) *Pensées*, trans. H. Levi, New York: Oxford University Press. (Acknowledges the relevance of human will to divine hiding.)
- Russell, B. (1903 [1957]) "A Free Man's Worship." In *Mysticism and Logic*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday. (Statement of life in an accidental universe.)