



BRILL

Journal of Reformed Theology 7 (2013) 69-90

JOURNAL
OF REFORMED
THEOLOGY

brill.com/jrt

Divine Hiddenness and Human Sin: The Noetic Effect of Sin

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Abstract

This paper examines the relationship between human sin and divine hiddenness, drawing on views that are widely acknowledged within the Reformed tradition. It argues, first, that according to these views there is no inculpable nonbelief, and thus, second, that a crucial premise in the atheistic argument from divine hiddenness is untenable. The overarching question here is: If there is a *sensus divinitatis*, is it possible to be an inculpable nonbeliever? To answer this question, the cognitive effects of sin on our *sensus divinitatis* as a faculty of producing basic beliefs about God will be assessed. I conclude that the premise which many find plausible—that there is inculpable nonbelief—is in fact controversial and dubious.

Keywords

inculpable nonbelief, Schellenberg, Calvin, *sensus divinitatis*

Introduction

Many people are perplexed that God should permit a situation in which human beings live in incomprehension and bewilderment regarding His existence, while all the time God could save humanity from such a predicament. The problem of 'divine hiddenness' refers to the epistemic situation where we human beings live in a world in which God is transcendent, where we have limited cognitive faculties, and that nevertheless knowledge of God is essential for our flourishing in this-worldly and otherworldly life; and where in addition it is supposed that God, the omniscient, omnipotent, and perfectly loving One, has permitted us to live in bewilderment and perplexity regarding His attributes and existence, all the while knowing that it is essential for our well-being during our eternal life to believe in His existence and thus to act according to His commandments.

Based on this problem as laid out, one might expect that God would not permit such an epistemic situation to occur. That is, one might argue that if there is a personal God who is unsurpassably great, then there is a personal God who is unsurpassably loving. If there is a personal God who is unsurpassably loving, then for any human person *H* and any time *t*, if *H* is at *t* capable of relating personally to God, *H* has it within *H*'s power at *t* to do so (i.e., will do so, just by choosing), unless *H* is culpably in a contrary position at *t*. However, for any human person *H* and any time *t*, *H* has it within *H*'s power at *t* to relate personally to God only if *H* at *t* believes that God exists. So, the argument continues, if there is a personal God who is unsurpassably great, then for any human person *H* and any time *t*, if *H* is at *t* capable of relating personally to God, *H* at *t* believes that God exists, unless *H* is culpably in a contrary position at *t*. One might conclude, then, that because there are people who are capable of relating personally to God but who, through no fault of their own, fail to believe, and if there is a personal God who is unsurpassably great, then there would be no such people (as inculpable nonbelievers): therefore, there is no such God.

This, famously, is the form of the dispute known as the *argument from divine hiddenness* based on the *problem of divine hiddenness*.¹ My aim in this paper is to show that the premise—that there is inculpable nonbelief—actually is not true and thus the argument is not sound. The argument from divine hiddenness has been mainly developed by Schellenberg, and so I will focus on his most common version of it.²

Schellenberg's argument for the nonexistence of God based on the existence of inculpable nonbelief can be formalized as follows:

¹ Here I distinguish between the problem of, and the argument from, divine hiddenness; such as the argument from evil that is the source of the atheistic argument from evil. For the relation between these two problems see: Peter Van Inwagen, *The Problem of Evil*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 135-37.

² There are many versions of the argument. An influential one is presented by John Schellenberg in *Divine Hiddenness and Human Reason* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993), based on his PhD dissertation at Oxford under the supervision of Richard Swinburne. See also John Schellenberg, "Divine Hiddenness," in Charles Taliaferro, Paul Draper, and Philip Quinn (eds), *Companion to Philosophy of Religion* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 509-518. Other versions of his argument can be found in Schellenberg's *The Wisdom To Doubt* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2007), Chs 9 and 10. Other versions of the argument have been defended by Theodore Drange, *Nonbelief and Evil: Two Arguments for the Nonexistence of God* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 1998), and Stephen Maitzen, "Divine Hiddenness and the Demographics of Theism," *Religious Studies* 42 (2006): 177-191. See also Herman Philipse, *God in the Age of Science: A Critique of Religious Reason* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 302-309.

- S₁ If there is a God, He is perfectly loving.
 S₂ If a perfectly loving God exists, inculpable nonbelief does not occur.
 S₃ Inculpable nonbelief does occur.
 Thus,
 S₄ No perfectly loving God exists.
 So,
 S₅ There is no God.³

There are several responses to this sort of argument; none of them seriously dispute the premise S₃.⁴ In this paper I shall show that the premise S₃ is problematic. However, to establish the claim that there is no inculpable non-believer, one needs to explicate the nature of sin (culpability from a religious point of view)—including its universal prevalence—and then try to show how sin might have an effect on our specific cognitive faculty that produces belief in God.

The notion of turning human will away from God seems to hold out the promise of helping us to better understand the nature of sin and thus its effects on our noetic structure. The suggestion would be that, when we sin, we really do turn our wills and our faces from the Lord, and so implicitly resist receiving divine grace and guidance.⁵

³ Schellenberg, *Divine Hiddenness and Human Reason*, Ch. 1. This is a simple version of his argument; however, my objection to this simple version can be applied to the more sophisticated versions as well, because all presuppose that there is inculpable nonbelief—the presupposition that I am aiming to refute. Here is a full-blooded version as it appears in Schellenberg, *Wisdom to Doubt*, 204-206:

1. Necessarily, if God exists, anyone who is (i) not resisting God and (ii) capable of meaningful conscious relationship with God is also (iii) in a position to participate in such relationship (able to do so just by trying).'

2. Necessarily, one is at a time in a position to participate in meaningful conscious relationship with God only if at that time one believes that God exists.

3. Necessarily, if God exists, anyone who is (i) not resisting God and (ii) capable of meaningful conscious relationship with God also (iii) believes that God exists.

4. There are (and often have been) people who are (i) not resisting God and (ii) capable of meaningful conscious relationship with God *without* also (iii) believing that God exists.

5. Thus (from conjunction of 3 and 4) God does not exist.

⁴ For one of the best collection of responses, see Daniel Howard-Snyder and Paul Moser, *Divine Hiddenness: New Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002). See also Richard Swinburne, *The Existence of God*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2nd ed., 2004), 267-272.

⁵ Paul Moser, in his recent book *The Elusive God*, highlights this theme and tries to direct epistemologists' attention toward the importance of the concept of turning the will away from God. He proposes a reorienting epistemological approach toward religious belief, arguing that there is conclusive evidence available for human beings to have belief that God exists; however, this evidence is not ordinary evidence such as that which pertains to the existence of familiar

Indeed, turning one's will and one's face from God leads to a failure to apprehend evidence of God's existence and attributes, which may be regarded as the cause of one's nonbelief. One would then be looking in the wrong direction, one's attention possibly directed toward an artificial idol of one's own making. In outline, then, the proposal would be that we have first created a false image of God, subsequently found no evidence for the existence of anything corresponding to that false image, and so conclude with nonbelief.

However, looking in the wrong direction because we turn our will away from God is not the only error that leaves us empty-handed in our search for God. Our sins may have another, deeper, impact on us: first, they affect the functionality of our heart (symbol of our affective faculty), so that our hearts come to love an unworthy object; then—and this is the deeper impact—they may lead to dislike of the worthy object because of our loss of ability to discern good from bad in an appropriate way. The process is, perhaps, as follows: first, we insist on doing evil sinfully (perhaps because of our inherited inclination to act sinfully), and after a while our hearts may not only lose the power to discern good from evil, but also come to love evil instead of good—and indeed come to love evil *as* good. Then, not only do our sins make the direction of our attention stray, but they also disturb our *inclination* to look in the right direction.⁶ As its

beings. Conclusive evidence for divine reality is, according to him, *purposely* available to humans who wholeheartedly conform their wills to the purposes of a perfectly loving God. Accordingly, it seems that human failure to apprehend the available evidence of God's reality is caused by human volitional sins, which are rooted in a failure to attune one's perceptual tools toward God. Paul K. Moser, *The Elusive God* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 105-17.

⁶ This idea is rooted in St. Paul's and St. Augustine's teachings. Augustine sees all of us as engaged in *volitional* sins, which are caused by the direction of our own wills toward worldly desires. Sin according to him is an *intentional* activation of our skewed inclination (which governs our affections and desires) toward mundane things rather than God the Creator. See Augustine, *City of God*, trans. Marcus Dods; reprinted in *St. Augustine's City of God and Christian Doctrine*, ed. Philip Schaff (Grand Rapids: Michigan, 1890), bk. 13, chap. 14. There is a good discussion of Augustinian views in this regard, and its roots and consequences, in John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), chap. 9. In *On The Free Choice of The Will*, Augustine defines sin as a kind of wrong attention, a defective movement in an incorrect direction, which occurs self-deceptively. According to him, this movement, namely *turning the will away* from the Lord God, is undoubtedly the essence of sin. Augustine, *On Free Choice of the Will*, trans. P. King (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 71-2. For a detailed examination of Paul's ideas on the cognitive effects of sin, see Rik Peels, "Sin and Human Cognition of God," *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 64(4): 390-409 (2011).

consequence we fail to have certain true beliefs about God, and lack familiarity with Him.⁷

To explore this type of view towards sin, and to understand more deeply its emphasis on the effects of sin on our affective faculties, I first shall try to reach a definition of sin and seek to achieve a comprehension of its nature.⁸ Subsequently, I shall endorse the existence of a universal *sensus divinitatis* (sense of divinity), which is an awareness of divinity within the human soul that has been implanted in *all* men by God. In the third step, I shall show how the noetic effects of sin can affect our *sensus divinitatis* to the extent that there can be no inculpable nonbeliever. I will thereby claim to cast doubt on one of the main premises of the argument from divine hiddenness.

The Nature of Sin

In a preliminary framing, sin appears as a sort of culpability which concerns our failure to satisfy the duty to give attention to God's existence, commandments, and interests, or to regulate our actions based on religious law. For a definition of culpability we may usefully turn, in this as in many other issues, to

⁷ Peels mentions three types of consequences of sin: *existential* consequences, such as our separation from God, the loss of paradisiacal life, having a strong and inborn inclination to do evil, the loss of free will in spiritual affairs, our bodies' being mortal, and eternal death; *affective* consequences, such as our envy of our neighbors and friends, our inclination to hate God, our love of ourselves more than our brothers and sisters, and our proud, egocentric, and arrogant actions; and *cognitive* consequences, such as our denying the existence of God, and our distorted knowledge of good and evil. See Rik Peels, "The Effects of Sin Upon Human Moral Cognition," *Journal of Reformed Theology*, 4 (2010): 42-69.

⁸ The legitimacy of the question of sin's nature and origin has been disputed by Berkouwer. He thinks that it is impossible for anyone to give an explanation for his or her sin's origin and yet not come through or arrive at an illegitimate self-excuse. In the process of explaining the origin of sin, we normally do not recognize our sin as our very own. According to him the tendency to make a self-excuse by giving an explanation of the origin of sin is a part and parcel of very nature of sin. Hence he concludes that an explanation for sin is truly impossible, and so sin is *inexplicable*. However as he says 'there is also a kind of genuine understanding of sin's 'causality' which pierces one to the quick and banishes all self-excuse. . . . When we stop thinking in referential terms or in terms extrinsic to ourselves it is soon apparent that there is no room for locating outside ourselves the first and deepest *cause* of our sin' (p. 19). His moral is that, if in the process of seeking for the origin of sin we seek for an extrinsic cause for our sins rather than an intrinsic cause, we then find it impossible to explain our sins. Granting his views, in this paper I try to find the true intrinsic cause and nature of sin as it stands in us, which makes us responsible. G. C. Berkouwer, *Studies in Dogmatics: Sin*, trans. Philip C. Holtrop, (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1971), 15-26.

the works of Plato and Aristotle. From Plato we draw the observation that necessarily a man will try to do what he believes to be the best act open to him. Accordingly, performing an intentional action involves believing the action to be in some way a good thing—either because it involves bringing about a good state of affairs or because the action is itself good independent of its consequences.⁹ So, if we know what is objectively good then we will spontaneously choose to do the good action corresponding to an objective good (in the case that the agent is subject to no balance of contrary desires, and there is no otherwise overriding reason not to do it).¹⁰ However, this account seems to underplay the effects of other factors such as temptations, desires, and deceptions upon our will and belief system.

According to Plato one would not knowingly do wrong; whereas on the Aristotelian view it is possible for one to see and know what is right, but yet prefer what is wrong.¹¹ According to Aristotle it is possible that we would do a thing we know to be evil, or be convinced we ought to do one thing and nevertheless

⁹ To do some action, we must normally believe that it is in some way a good thing to do it—that is, we normally have *reason* for undertaking an action. Plato believes that we always choose to act according to what we believe to be the good unless we were ignorant; and ignorance would be the only cause for choosing evil. See Plato, *Meno* 77b-79e and *Protagoras*, 351b-358d.

¹⁰ With regard to the Platonic view it is worth mentioning that an overriding reason is considered to accrue to the overall best possible action among the several possibilities open to an agent. An intentional actor always acts on reason (what they regard as a good in doing the action), but perhaps does not always act on what she regards as overriding reason. To choose among the possibilities open to one at any given time, one must rank the possibilities. The ranking of possible actions may be purely *selfish*. Here the door is open for desires to come in: we may know the best but ignore it, our desires and wants overcoming our reasons for doing an action which we believe to be the best. To resist overwhelming desires that are contrary to reason, one needs effort and self-persuasion. For more details, see Richard Swinburne, *Responsibility and Atonement*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 43-44.

¹¹ Aristotle's view of human responsibility for evil-doing can be found in *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1145a-1147b, where he contends against Socrates' view that no one acts contrary to what is best, believing what he does to be bad, except through ignorance. Aristotle thinks that this theory is manifestly at variance with fact, and emphasizes the effect of the desires and passions on culpable human behaviour, such that not only one's desire can rule one's will contra one's reason, but also that one's will could be so skewed that one desires what one believes is wrong.

In Reformed tradition, Calvin, interpreting Aristotle, distinguishes two types of sin in his terminology—respectively, sins of *incontinence* (that one's desires and passions rule the will and turn it away from the right) and *intemperance* (that one deliberately wills to act on a desire despite one's belief that it would be bad to do the action). It is important that he places more emphasis on sin as performing a voluntary action against what we believe as good. Sin for him is not based on ignorance of what is good or what should be adored, but on man's deliberate decision to choose evil. Contra the Platonic view of sin according to which we sin out of ignorance (whatever its cause may be), Calvin endorses the Aristotelian view that we may persistently and

do another. This opens the door to accepting the existence of incontinent or a-kratic actions.

Following Aristotle, one can categorize the performance of evil actions in three ways: as *objective sin*, in which one does what one believes is right, but where objectively the action is wrong; as *spontaneous sin*, in which one acts wrongfully upon one's contrary-to-reason desires (mainly short-term desires which are contrary to one's moral duties); and also perhaps as *subjective sin*, in which one yields to temptation or to a desire to do what one *believes* to be bad.¹²

In the case of spontaneous sin agents are naturally inclined to do actions that are in fact bad, while in the case of subjective sin they are naturally inclined to do actions that they believe to be bad. In this manner we distinguish between the badness of naturally (i.e., stemming from the perverted nature of the human being) and readily doing something, and the badness of doing or trying to do what the agent believes to be bad. While it is bad that objectively bad actions are done at all, it is worse if they are done naturally, readily, and spontaneously; and it is worse still if they are done while the agent believes that (even though there is an alternative action open to her), all things considered, it would be better not to do such actions, or that acting in such manner is wrong. It is bad that I drink too much whiskey but it is worse that I do it naturally and spontaneously, and it is worse still if I do it while believing that it is a wrong action. Subjective sin may occur where the agent's balance of desire leads a person to act contrary to a better action that she or he believes is open to him or her, and must choose whether to conform to reason or yield to desire. It takes effort, self-restraint, and self-persuasion to resist desire, and if the agent does nothing the natural desire will win out.¹³

stubbornly choose evil. John Calvin, *Institute of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill (Westminster: John Knox Press, 2008), II.2:24, and 283.

¹² There is of course some intermingling between these definitions. In the case of spontaneous sin, the passions and contrary-to-reason desires rule the will, and the agent will perform a wrong action naturally, readily and spontaneously, and without ulterior motive. In other words, the agent does the bad actions because he or she desires to do them and is naturally inclined to do such things. However there are some cases of objective sin that one does not perform them naturally and readily. Nevertheless, in the case of spontaneous sin—because the agent does not necessarily believe that her or his action is wrong—it is not the case that every subjective sin is spontaneous or vice versa.

¹³ For details of this categorization, see Swinburne, *Responsibility and Atonement*, 50. See also William Wainwright, *Reason and the Heart* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), 45. In a subtle passage, Wainwright tries to integrate the subjective and spontaneous aspects of sin by defining sin as a failure to obey the Lord's *love* commandment. For him, sin is 'failure-to-obey' a right

The interrelations between these types of sin are complicated. Objective sin may happen because of the effects of one's spontaneous or subjective sins and *vice versa*. Because of one's weakness of will, one might not try sufficiently to know the objective good or not try sufficiently to resist the factors (social or personal) that prohibit one from acquiring knowledge about the objective good. On the other hand, one's ignorance (culpable or inculpable) may lead one to act upon unrestrained desires. In a worse case, one may suppress one's initial ability to distinguish between good and bad and reach a point where one chooses evil as one's good, due to an insistence on ignoring one's knowledge about the good and so acts based on contrary-to-reason desires in the long term.

Insisting on Platonic intuition, many in recent years have suggested that subjective sin and its special case *akrasia* (when a person does something despite clearly believing that doing so is wrong) may not be possible, or at best occurs less frequently—perhaps far less frequently—than is commonly supposed. Zimmerman agrees with this intuition, accept the view that *akrasia* never happens or that such cases are at best exceedingly rare. Although at first glance it seems that cases of *akrasia* might be highly exceptional, under scrutiny we will find it plausible that it is easy to act from *akrasia*. Peels draws attention to common cases in which we stubbornly violate our epistemic obligations and duties, such as those of not paying enough attention to available evidence or being insufficiently open-minded regarding others' intuitions. In such cases, despite the fact that we believe that we should be more careful we are more likely to succumb to the temptation of violating the obligation.¹⁴

Davidson famously points out cases of incontinent action (action that is clearly intentional, although against one's better judgment)—other than the special cases of being overcome by the best in us—failing to heed the call of duty, succumbing to temptation, or forgetting our epistemic duties.¹⁵ Where *r* is someone's reason for holding that *p*, he notes, someone's holding that *r* must

commandment that is a voluntary disobedience (subjective sin), and in addition to that, the commandment is itself a sort of love commandment that is acquired by the production of an un-perverted heart. If one's heart is skewed toward selfish desires then it won't love the right and deserved object, and so one will act based on stray desires (spontaneous sin). Here Wainwright is explaining Jonathan Edwards's ideas. For Edwards's own ideas in this regard, see Jonathan Edwards, "The Great Christian Doctrine of Original Sin Defended," in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1995), 1:143-233. See also Oliver Crisp, *Jonathan Edwards and the Metaphysics of Sin* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), 25-45.

¹⁴ Peels, 'Tracing Culpable Ignorance,' 579-580.

¹⁵ Donald Davidson, *Essays on Actions and Events*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 33-35.

be a cause of her holding that p . But—and this is what is crucial here—someone's holding that r , may cause him or her holding that p , without r being his or her reason; indeed, the agent may even think that r is a reason to reject p . Hence it is possible that r be the agent's *cause* for holding that p even while the agent thinks that r is a *reason* to reject p . This seems a possible case in which the incontinent agent acts, and judges, irrationally, and this is surely what we must say of an agent who goes against her or his own best knowledge.¹⁶ Reflection on these cogent possibilities regarding incontinent action or akrasia leads us to demonstratively deny one's claim that akrasia is highly exceptional.

In addition to showing the possibility of subjective sin, one may argue that all culpability is due to non-ignorance and must be in the form of subjective sin. The idea is that all culpability must, at root, involve a lack of ignorance—that is, culpability requires a belief on the agent's part that he or she is doing something morally wrong.¹⁷ If a subject S is culpable for ignorant behavior then she or he is culpable (and of course responsible) for the sort of ignorance to which the behavior may be traced. But one is never in direct control of whether one is ignorant. Hence S 's culpable ignorance can be traced back merely to an indirect ignorance (a sort of ignorance that is caused by another culpability).¹⁸ The sort of culpability that causes indirect ignorance ultimately must be non-ignorant culpability because there is no infinite chain of culpable actions. Therefore, all culpability can be traced to non-ignorant culpability.¹⁹

The interim conclusion, then, is that sin as a blameworthy action is primarily rooted in subjective sin that is a sort of *non-ignorant culpability*. Hence, if

¹⁶ See Davidson, *Essays on Actions and Events*, 42-43. This idea, is famously represented as the *enkratic condition* of rationality: Necessarily, if you are rational then, if you believe your reasons require you to F , you intend to F . Obviously, the *enkratic condition* says that akrasia is irrational. See John Broome, 'Rationality', in *A Companion to the Philosophy of Action*, ed. Timothy O'Connor and Constantine Sandis, (Blackwell, 2010), 285-92. And also his 'Does Rationality Consist in Responding Correctly to Reasons?' *Journal of Moral Philosophy*, 4 (2007), 349-74.

¹⁷ It seems a common intuition that ascription of culpability to a person requires one's knowledge regarding the wrongness of one's action.

¹⁸ Indirect control of something can be defined as follows: One is in indirect control of something, X , if and only if one is in control of it by way of being in control of something else, Y , of which X is a consequence.

¹⁹ This argument is presented and discussed by Michael J. Zimmerman, "Moral Responsibility and Ignorance," *Ethics* 107 (1997): 414-418; see also Michael J. Zimmerman, *Living with Uncertainty: The Moral Significance of Ignorance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 173-193. For more discussions see also Rik Peels, 'Tracing Culpable Ignorance,' *Logos & Episteme* 2(4) (2011): 577; William J. FitzPatrick, 'Moral Responsibility and Normative Ignorance: Answering a New Skeptical Challenge,' *Ethics* 118 (2008): 589-601 and James A. Montmarquet, 'Culpable Ignorance and Excuses,' *Philosophical Studies* 80 (1995): 41-43.

my aim is to show that every case of nonbelief is due to sin, I must show two further things: first, the universality of non-ignorance regarding the belief in God, and second that there is a sort of widespread culpability among human beings. The former claim will be developed in the next part based on Calvin's views regarding the universal *sensus divinitatis*. In part IV, human self-interest and self-centeredness as the root of general culpability will be explicated.

Sensus Divinitatis

It is possible for us to sin, and perhaps this possibility is necessary for our soul-making process as it strives toward perfection.²⁰ It is possible for us to be so drowned in the flood of sin that we may kill many innocents and do as much wrong as we can. Nevertheless, God does not forget us, even though we have forgotten ourselves. He has sent several prophets and messengers throughout history, and has informed us of many propositional truths through sacred scriptures. In addition, he has implanted in us certain internal senses with which to find the true way, and these are our conscience and our sense of divinity. According to Calvin, "there is within the human mind, and indeed by natural instinct, an awareness of divinity."²¹

To prevent everyone from taking refuge in the pretense of ignorance, Godself has implanted in all persons a certain understanding of God's divine majesty.²²

Calvin's argument for endorsing such a universal sense of divinity is an empirical one, based on the idea that in a survey of recent and ancient nations, and even of old tribes, one finds no region of the world in which there is no kind of religion or worshipping, even albeit perverted or corrupted.²³ It seems that

²⁰ This view that there is a theodicy for sin (and that there are some goods which outweigh the possibility of sin) stretches back to the Irenaean tradition and is stressed mainly in the works of the great nineteenth-century Reformed theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher. For details on the Irenaean theodicy in Schleiermacher, see Hick, *Evil*, chap. 10. For Schleiermacher's own ideas in this regard, see *The Christian Faith*, trans. H. R. Mackintosh and J. S. Stewart (London: T&T Clark Ltd., 1999), 269-354; also see W. E. Wyman, "Sin and Redemption," in *The Cambridge Companion to Fredrick Schleiermacher*, ed. J. Marina (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 129-150.

²¹ Calvin, *Institute*, I.3.1. The *sensus divinitatis* was first posited by Calvin, however the concept has been considered by many Reformed thinkers like Kuyper, Banvick, Plantinga, Alston, and Wolterstorff. For review of their ideas in this regard consult Michael Sudduth, *The Reformed Objection to Natural Theology*, (Farnham, Ashgate, 2004).

²² Calvin, *Institute*, I.3.1.

²³ To support his experimental argument from universal consent for the existence of God, Calvin refers to the views of Cicero (a famous pagan) as independent evidence. In addition, Calvin

Calvin is right in his claim, and it seems uncontroversial that the ‘non-religious’ *society* is a phenomenon newborn in the age of modernism. However, as well as this empirical claim, Calvin points to another important factor common in all human beings, namely our *conscience*. According to Calvin, our conscience—which can be defined as our innate power to distinguish between good and evil, and which forms the groundwork of morality—is implanted by God in all of us.

There are two principal parts of the light which still remains in corrupt nature: first the seed of religion implanted in all persons, next the distinction between good and evil is engraved in their conscience.²⁴

For Calvin, the seeds of religion and conscience are implanted and innate senses in all human beings, which guide them towards the knowledge of God.²⁵ Knowledge of God is not just a cognitive state whose content is the proposition that ‘there is a God,’ but also contains a positive, affective, and conative component directed towards the beloved who is glorious and worthy of worship. And one could acquire this kind of knowledge by means of those two innate faculties, if they were not perverted by sin.

Hence the *sensus divinitatis*, essentially, triggers beliefs and feelings of awe, respect, gratitude, and obligation to the Lord. And if it were remained non-perverted then people could consecrate their lives to God’s obedience and direct their will towards the Lord’s will. It appears that for many of us this *sensus* is not working properly or is malfunctioning. But what has happened to that pristine *sensus*, such that it has been perverted? And in general what are the effects of sin on our *sensus divinitatis* and our noetic structure? In the following part I will try to answer these questions.

thinks that the presence of such a sense is clearly taught by Paul in the first two chapters of the letter to the Romans. See Paul Helm, *John Calvin’s Ideas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 231-33.

²⁴ John Calvin, *Commentary on John* (Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 2002), chap. 1.5.

²⁵ According to Calvin, the *sensus divinitatis* gives to all humans a confused knowledge of the true God. In addition to producing knowledge about God (knowledge by acquaintance that contains a basic belief about God), Calvin holds that what enables us to distinguish right from wrong is God-self—the atheist, of course, denies this. Even the atheist, according to Calvin, is able to distinguish right from wrong and may believe that there is something which enables us to make these discriminations. See Helm, *John Calvin’s Ideas*, 233, and Alvin Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 175.

The Noetic Effect of Sin

If all of us have the *sensus divinitatis* and the conscience which God has implanted in us to enable us to acquire knowledge about Him and to find the right way, then we might expect that almost all normal human beings would believe in God's existence, excepting those who deliberately impede the activity of this faculty. One might then proceed to argue that since the case of deliberate impedance is rare and highly exceptional, there is no innate sense of divinity. On the other hand, if God does exist, then He, the benevolent and the merciful, should have provided us either with the sense of divinity or some other sort of indisputable evidence to acquire belief in Him. If neither the *sensus divinitatis* nor convincing evidence for God's existence is available, one rationally should conclude that God does not exist.

This sort of argument faces several difficulties which extend beyond the scope of this paper;²⁶ here, however, my aim is to refute the idea that the case of deliberate impedance of the *sensus divinitatis*, seen as a kind of culpability (as in the case of *akrasia*), might not be rare at all but rather be very common. It seems that one problem with this sort of argument is that it accedes too easily to the idea that there really are inculpable nonbelievers in the world—an intuition which can be defeated by noting that sinful rejection of God, although sometimes cleverly disguised, may really be quite common. The idea is that our sins that ensued upon the original sin of the first humans (put us in a sinful condition that) perverted the *sensus* to the extent that many of us now are ignorant about God's existence. How is this ignorance culpable and what is the non-ignorant culpability that is the ultimate source of this culpable ignorance? To answer these questions I shall refer to one central feature of the human character, which is important for us now to note.²⁷

There are two sorts of inborn desire, which evolve in all of us and have a strong effect on our actions and then on our character: these are the self-centered and the altruistic desires. The self-centered desires are desires centered on one's own reception of bodily satisfaction and certain attitudes of respect, affection, and obedience from others. The altruistic desires are desires for the well being of one's offspring, friends, fellow-workers, etc. However, these altruistic desires operate alongside the selfish desires and can often be dismissed. Normally, our self-centered desires govern our actions and then

²⁶ I shall explicate this argument in more detail in the next part.

²⁷ Here I am indebted to Richard Swinburne for drawing my attention to this point during our conversation regarding this paper. See Swinburne, *Responsibility and Atonement*, 111-112.

build our characters (shaping our other desires, beliefs, and will), except for educated, self-disciplined, and self-restrained persons. It stems from a very basic feature of human nature that each of us desires what we believe we will enjoy, and acts upon such desire despite the fact that it would be wrong to do so. Thus, a proneness to objective wrongdoing, whether or not the agent realizes its wrongness, seems naturally to be with us. This objective wrongdoing gradually has an effect on our desires, to the extent that we become habituated into liking the wrong action. Humans become subject to wrong desires, in consequence of which they often do objectively wrong actions spontaneously. When a desire is combined with a belief that the action desired is wrong, then, where the agent is also subject to weakness of will, he or she would often commit a subjective sin, an incontinent action. So we develop an inclination to do what is believed wrong and not to do what is believed good. In the special case of belief in, and obedience to, God, our *sensus divinitatis* would produce the belief that God exists and upon this belief a rational person should infer that it is his or her duty to obey and worship God. The person would then be prone to subjective wrongdoing. Although humans might desire to worship, as well as believe that they ought, such a desire would be in conflict with other desires, above all the desire to be self-centered and self-governed. This is the process which starts from non-ignorant culpability and results in our *sensus divinitatis* being disturbed, impeded, and obstructed to the extent that one refuses to acknowledge to oneself his or her basic belief in God, and in the worst case hides from oneself the fact that she or he has so refused.

Hence our sin has had deep and dramatic effects on our *sensus divinitatis*. This fact, that our sins are rooted in selfish desires that are obviously in contrast with the teachings of our *sensus divinitatis*, has also been pointed out by Plantinga, who says:

Sin is perhaps primarily an affective disorder or malfunction. Our affections are skewed, directed to the wrong objects; we love and hate the wrong things. Instead of seeking first the kingdom of God, I am inclined to seek first my own personal glorification and aggrandizement, bending all my efforts toward making myself look good. Instead of loving God above all and my neighbor as myself I am inclined to love myself above all and indeed to hate God and my neighbor. Much of this hatred and hostility springs from pride, that aboriginal sin, and from consequent attempts at self-aggrandizement.²⁸

²⁸ Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 208.

According to Plantinga, our sin is that we have framed our lives in a self-centered manner rather than a God-centered one. We ignore the fact that all creatures are absolutely dependent on God and reflect His glory. Self-centeredness blinds us to such an extent that we ignore everything that does not bear on immediate self-interest.

Self-centeredness as the root of subjective wrongdoing can be traced back to the first sin of Adam, which is supposed the main cause of our human condition as fallen. Consider, then, a possible world in which the story of Adam and Eve is happening. In this possible world we perceive an ideal situation in which human knowledge about divine commands is flawless and far from doubt. The situation is such that Adam and Eve were created directly by God, that God spoke to them and taught them the knowledge of moral good and evil,²⁹ and that their faculties were also un-fallen and so worked properly. Nevertheless, *they* disobey God and sin. But why?

It seems that through this idealized situation, which puts aside cultural, social, and cognitive factors, we can understand the nature of sin, and then its effects, more profoundly. While Adam and Eve believe that God is their creator and is merciful and loves them, and in addition know that God has ordered them not to go near the specific tree (and therefore know God's will and command), it seems that they prefer their own desires to eat from the forbidden tree "not only because [they were] seized by Satan's blandishment [,] but contemptuous of truth, [they] turned aside to falsehood."³⁰ Where is the point of divergence at which they turn aside?

On closer reflection, one can see that before they sinned, either they had thought that God's command was not important and then deliberately denied His order, or they had thought that God's reason for His command was not a good reason, and the order was more like advice in a non-imperative mood. In the former case (like the case of Satan), their degree of selfishness and pride

²⁹ It is debated whether, before their fall, Adam and Eve had moral knowledge or not. One interpretation of the Genesis narrative says that before their fall Adam and Eve did not have any moral knowledge, and as the result of their disobedience they became knowers of moral knowledge. On this interpretation, "the tree of the knowledge of good and evil" means just what it literally says: by eating from this tree, one acquires knowledge about what is good and what is wrong. However, as Margaret Shuster points out, the narrative presumes that Adam and Eve had a moral conscience; otherwise, it is hard to see how they could have been genuinely disobedient. See Marguerite Shuster, *The Fall and Sin: What We Have Become as Sinners* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 102-27. For the sake of our discussion it seems sufficient to consider the point that Adam and Eve perhaps did not know all moral knowledge in the strict sense of the word, but at least they knew that eating from the specific tree was an evil action.

³⁰ Calvin, *Institute*, II.1.4.

was so high that they thought that they knew better than God, even while they believed that God is omniscient and perfectly loving. In the latter case, which is more complicated, the degree of selfishness and pride is not so high. It seems that they must descend three steps before committing sin: they should come down from loving God and love themselves instead (because the lover will obey love's commandment immediately and wholeheartedly); they should also prefer their own desires to the reason which God had declared as good, and thus they lose their trust in God, at least at the moment of sinning; and in the third step they also ignore the requirement to be obedient to God, for otherwise they would see that they must obey God and follow His commands without disputing them.

Here one may ask: Where is the source of their desire that runs against God's will and which initiates the paradoxical challenge for Adam and Eve? Plantinga offers some good points in this respect.³¹ He suggests that a substantial probability of falling into this condition of disobedience is perhaps built into the very nature of free creatures that have knowledge of God's glorious status, and who see it as desirable and thus desired indeed. Beings that are created in the image of God, who have autonomy and free will, perhaps will also want to—and do—see themselves as the *center* of the universe. They have enormous desires, and a powerful tendency to occupy such a position themselves. If this desire for perfection combines with *self-centeredness*, which is highly probable, then the process of self-deception may begin and a sinful action will be realized as its consequence. Desire for perfection itself may not be considered as a sin, but when we forget the teachings of our *sensus divinitatis* that there is a God of whom we are servants, then a mistake or slip that requires continuous repentance and remembrances comes about.

The consequences of our sins, which follow the original sin, are deep and vast. If sin in its nature is rooted in self-centered malfunction of our will, and if the *sensus divinitatis* is the innate light implanted in our hearts that shows us God's existence and God's guidance, and its function is to show us God-centeredness and to direct our heart toward God, then evidently our self-centeredness damages the *sensus* to the extent that we cannot see God's glory in His handiworks, and perhaps we come to hate God. So, due to our sins, we stubbornly reject or ignore God's guidance and deliberately choose evil, which is absolutely contrary to the commandments of the perfectly good being.

Nonetheless, it is important to note that despite the fact that our sins have defective consequences for the functionality of the *sensus divinitatis*, they

³¹ Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 212.

could not completely eradicate it: they only leave it *pervverted*.³² The *sensus* requires fixing and refreshment: it is perverted and fallen, but it is working slightly, and this seems sufficient to provide us the ability to distinguish between good and evil or to acquire knowledge of God. The *sensus* exists and is implanted in us, and it works like an attitude and endowment which produces inclinations toward knowledge of God. However, if we continue to do sinful actions we gradually extinguish its light. Our voluntary sins have damaged the functionality of our *sensus divinitatis* to the extent that our knowledge of God is covered over, impeded, and suppressed. God is not hidden, but we ourselves, because of our own envy, self-deception, pride, and self-aggrandizement—all stemming from our autonomy and self-centeredness—damage the functionality of the *sensus*, to the extent that not only do we choose to do bad actions but we even choose evil as good; and thus some of us become evil-worshippers instead of God worshippers.

To sum up, it seems that the nature of sin is rooted in the human desire for perfection, when combined with self- rather than God-centeredness.³³ And such a sinful action is absolutely contrary to the teachings of *sensus divinitatis* which teaches us the existence of God to whom we ought to be servants. In the following part I examine the argument from divine hiddenness to show that, in the light of our previous discussions, one of its basic premises should be considered dubious.

An Objection to the Argument from Divine Hiddenness

Schellenberg argues that an unsurpassably great personal reality could not but be perfectly loving, and that perfect love is open to relationship in a manner that ensures that anyone capable of meaningful conscious relationship with the divine and not culpably resistant to it will always be in a position to enter into such a relationship at some level. Now, this cannot be the case unless all creatures who are non-resistant and inculpable always believe in the existence of God, for such a belief is a necessary condition of being in the position just

³² Helm, *John Calvin's Ideas*, 234-38.

³³ Self-centered subjects forgets that they are God's servants and that they should obey Him. They are created as the *image* of God and try to be *like* God, not through the path of servant-hood but through their own indulgence. This point that the essence of sin is self-centeredness and self-exaltation can be concluded from Isaiah 14:12-14. Self-centeredness is in complete opposition to the principle of selfless, self-sacrificing love, which is the foundation of the church's guidance. See Rom. 15:2; 1 Cor. 10:23, 24, 31, 32; Phil. 2:3, 4.

described. However, the fact that there are instead many inculpable non-believers is an indication that there is no perfectly loving God, and therefore that there is no God. Evidently the concept of *hiddenness* that is front and center in this argument is the subjective hiddenness (experiential hiddenness), in a sort that *many individuals or groups of people feel uncertain about the existence of God*, as opposed to objective hiddenness that usually means that *the available relevant evidence makes the existence of God uncertain*.³⁴

Schellenberg in his recent book, *The Wisdom To Doubt*,³⁵ suggests that instead of reasoning from inculpable³⁶ non-belief in general, and on grounds of perfect love alone, the atheist can argue from any or all of at least four distinguishable types of inculpable non-believers, appealing to various aspects of the moral character a perfect God must display. The four groups of inculpable non-believers are: (1) *former believers* who have found out that their beliefs were not rationally based; (2) *lifelong seekers* who have tried to find the truth wholeheartedly during their life but they returned empty handed; (3) *converts to non-theistic religions* who after searching for truth find out that monotheism is not true and they convert to a non-theistic religion instead; and (4) *isolated non-theists* who never have heard about theism. He asks, "Why, if a God of perfect moral character exists, should we have onetime believers trying to make their way home without being able to do so; or dedicated seekers failing to find, or taking themselves to have found a truth that only enmeshes them in a meaning system distortive of what must, if God exists, be the truth; or individuals being entirely formed by a fundamentally misleading meaning system?"³⁷ Drawing on considerations about God's responsiveness and caring, non-capriciousness and justice, non-deceptiveness, benevolence, and providence, he then claims we can show the difficulty of squaring the existence of God with each of these types of inculpable nonbelief.

³⁴ John Schellenberg 'Divine Hiddenness,' 509-518.

³⁵ John Schellenberg *The Wisdom To Doubt*, chs 9 and 10.

³⁶ Schellenberg prefers to use the term 'non-resistant' instead of 'inculpable' in his recent writings. Via using this terminology he clearly ignores the noetic effect of sin that is the central issue in our discussion. One may accept that actually there are nonresistant non-believers; however as I argued there would be a sort of subjective sin in the past which had affect on the functionality of the nonbelievers' *sensus divinitatis* to the extent that they could not work properly to produce true religious beliefs. If this were the case, the only way to come to belief would be repentance instead of non-resistance. Nevertheless, by culpability here I also mean resistance, because the culpability includes failure to take action to care about the disease of one's *sensus divinitatis*.

³⁷ Schellenberg 'Divine Hiddenness,' 511.

It appears that if one accepts my argument as presented in the previous part then one cannot accept the premise of Schellenberg's argument, that there *are* inculpable nonbelievers—for, as it was explained according to Calvin, God created each of us in His image and implanted in us the *sensus divinitatis* by which we could know God's existence and His basic commandments about moral rights and wrongs, had it remained unperverted.³⁸ Regrettably, because many of us suffer from a kind of corruption, a proneness to act selfishly and wrongfully despite our initial knowledge that is produced by the *sensus* in us, our *sensus divinitatis* has been disturbed and perverted. Hence, whatever sin does, it cannot be thought to entirely eradicate the *sensus* and the knowledge of God afforded by it. And, as it has been shown, all of our culpable ignorance traces back to a sort of non-ignorant culpability, that is we might sin knowingly and stubbornly, without regret, persisting in choosing evil. Stopping sinning is the thing we can do such that, had we done it, we would not have suffered from the corruption of our *sensus divinitatis*. Our perverted *sensus divinitatis* requires a remedy, and its remedy is to stop sinning, repent, and then to restore it. If we do not care about our remedy we are culpably *resisting* divine guidance. If we are still non-believers, this indicates that we did not repent, and thus that our *sensus divinitatis* does not work properly and remains in its perverted state. Therefore, if we are non-believers, then we are culpable.

A proponent of the existence of inculpable nonbelief may raise an objection to this argument. Such a person may contend that if we take the noetic effect of sin seriously then we should suppose that our cognitive and affective faculties are so disturbed and depraved that we might lack any desire to understand our remedy, or may even not understand how to cure ourselves. The proponent may continue that our ignorance regarding the effect of our sins in this world is so deep that we cannot even understand that we are ill nor that we have a defected or perverted *sensus divinitatis* at all. If this is the case, then it seems plausible to suppose that there are some inculpable nonbelievers who cannot be blameworthy for non-ignorantly and stubbornly resisting belief in God.

In response, I would draw attention to Calvin's view that, despite the fact that our sins have harmful effects on the functionality of *sensus divinitatis*, it

³⁸ 'There is within the human mind, and indeed by natural instinct, an awareness of divinity. This we take to be beyond controversy. To prevent anyone from taking refuge in the pretense of ignorance, God himself has implanted in all men a certain understanding of his divine majesty.' Calvin, *Institute*, I.3.1.

is not the case that it has completely eradicated the *sensus*, but only left it perverted.³⁹ The *sensus* works sufficiently to provide us with the ability to acquire minimum knowledge of God and some basic ethical truths.⁴⁰ The *sensus divinitatis* exists and is implanted in us, and it works like an attitude and endowment, which produces inclinations toward knowledge of God. Thus such deep ignorance could not occur.⁴¹

However, consider that such a deep ignorance *does* occur. This is the result of a non-ignorant sin, which may be a source of many other culpabilities that can be traced to this non-ignorant and incontinent culpability. Our voluntary sins have damaged the functionality of our *sensus divinitatis* to the extent that our knowledge of God is covered over, impeded, and suppressed. God's signs are evident, but we ourselves—because of our own envy, self-deception, pride, self-aggrandizement, and self-centeredness—have damaged our ability to see them to such an extent that even belief in such a God's existence is effaced.

A proponent of the existence of inculpable nonbelief may raise yet another objection to this argument. The claim may be made that perhaps some non-beliefs are due to human sin, but also a note that there are doubters who have agonized for long years over matters of faith, hoping that belief may come to them. They have tried to acquire faith and to remedy their disease caused by their sins; however, despite their endeavors they honestly claim that they are empty handed. John Schellenberg raises such an objection when he says:

³⁹ For Calvin's views in this regard, see also Helm, *John Calvin's Ideas*, 234-238.

⁴⁰ Helm infers from Calvin's writings that the natural knowledge of God, which is produced by our *sensus divinitatis*, has two aspects, moral and metaphysical (Calvin, *Institute*, I.2.1; Helm, *John Calvin's Ideas*, 224). The metaphysical aspect of the knowledge conveys an awareness of divinity, and the belief that there is a God Who is our Maker. The moral aspect refers to our conscience, viewed as the ability to distinguish between evil and good, that seems to be the source of our moral judgments. This concerns the awareness of certain obligations arising out of the knowledge of the fact that God is the source of all goodness. According to Calvin both of these aspects still are working, though in many cases improperly. Although the *sensus* remains in the members of fallen humanity, the moral aspect of the *sensus* is less disturbed than is the metaphysical aspect, although even that does not function equally in all. For whereas it is possible to be an atheist, it is usually not possible to avoid the activity of the conscience, and conscience is the voice of equity—even though it is a voice that is often distorted and out of tune. Although we are not always right in our moral decisions, it seems that we still have the ability to act morally and distinguish the wrong and the right.

⁴¹ In a similar vein Rik Peels tries to answer the objection that asks how, if sin has affected our cognitive faculties, can we find the truth about the noetic effects of sin by employing those very same faculties? See his 'Sin and Human Cognition of God,' 392.

We can see, I think, that honest inquirers have very good reason indeed to accept that not all failures to believe are due to the sin of the non-believer, and in particular, that inculpable doubt occurs. There is, for example, good reason to suppose that some who claim they have no private experience apparently of God or that such experiences as they do have are ambiguous, and who have carefully examined the relevant arguments, finding them indecisive, have no wish to be in doubt.⁴²

My answer to this objection is twofold. First, as mentioned, we should distinguish between objective and subjective sin, and henceforth their defective consequences. Consider a lifelong seeker who has long agonized over matters of faith, but who took a wrong path. Perhaps this person is not blameworthy for any subjective sin; but his or her objective sin has consequences upon the person's recognition of the truth. Of course, it is difficult to point exactly to the source of one's objective sin, but the suggestion is that one should search for its root in the person's subjective or spontaneous sins, given that she or he does not care sufficiently to find the right way or does not try sufficiently to overthrow her contrary-to-reason desires.⁴³ Second, and more important, as Swinburne suggests,⁴⁴ there is no reason why we should suppose that all of our endeavors in this time-limited world should reach the desired result. When normal human beings trust in the trustworthy God and continue to act as morally as they can, it is enough for them to be saved and to reach salvation. God has bestowed upon us infinite time in the other world for finding Him and coming into union with Him, if only we trust God and follow His guidance in this world. However, if someone rejects trusting in God, why, we may ask, should such a person not be considered as resistant to divine guidance?

Some may say that they have sought, but have found nothing. In response, Tim Mawson proposes that they, and those atheists who take the subject matter of God's existence to be an important issue, should pray that God will show them the right way. If they fail to do so, it seems that they are *prima facie* culpable. But why do the atheists who read his paper still persist in not praying? Mawson cites various reasons, such as that they (the atheists who

⁴² John Schellenberg, *Divine Hiddenness and Human Reason*, 82.

⁴³ There are many ways that one's objective sins might trace back to one's subjective or spontaneous sins. However in many cases it is very difficult to exactly point to the subjective source of an objective sin. Nonetheless it is undeniable that in many cases objective sin is blameworthy. Consider a terrorist suicide attacker who killed innocents in the Syriac Catholic cathedral in Baghdad. The terrorist definitely is blameworthy for his action despite his belief that he is doing it for the purpose of achieving a good end.

⁴⁴ Richard Swinburne reminded me of this point during a conversation regarding this paper.

read his paper) think that it leads to false positives (and are afraid of acquiring false beliefs in this way), or that it requires prior belief in God's existence. Perhaps they do indeed have such reasons for not praying; however it seems they (those who deny themselves prayer) can hardly describe themselves as honest agnostics.⁴⁵

Schellenberg's argument against the existence of God from divine hiddenness is premised on the existence of inculpable nonbelief. However, this premise will not be accepted by anyone persuaded of the views of sin mentioned above, views that have been considered convincing to no small or insignificant number of believers. By rehearsing these views, I have sought to review the literature that supports their plausibility, and thereby to undermine Schellenberg's argument. One may respond that the views presented of *sensus divinitatis* and noetic effects of sin will only appeal to those who already believe in God, and that an appeal to them begs the question against atheism. To the contrary, the burden of proof is on Schellenberg, who needs to show that his premises are correct in order for his argument to be convincing. Schellenberg is attempting to show that even if God existed, divine hiddenness would be incompatible with religious teachings about divine attributes; hence, an appeal to religious teachings to show how divine hiddenness is not incompatible with divine attributes, but is due to culpable (resistant) nonbelief, will be sufficient to undermine his case.

Conclusion

As discussed, our sins have damaged our God-gifted *sensus divinitatis* to the extent that many of us do not believe in God's existence and cannot see His glorious existence in God's creatures, which are God's signs. In addition, we have the power to cure the depravity which is the consequence of our sins by stopping sinning and undertaking repentance. But, instead, we demand convincing evidence for belief in God while forgetting to *remedy* our heart, which in fact is failing to function properly in producing the proper belief in God and love for the true being who is God. Our most important sin is that our hearts love ourselves, and do not tend sufficiently to love God and our neighbors. This self-centeredness, which seems to be the root of our sins, makes our heart ill.

⁴⁵ Tim J. Mawson, 'Praying to Stop Being an Atheist,' *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 67 (2010): 173-86.

Our human heart requires remedy. And if we do not attend sufficiently to its remedy we are definitely resisting God's guidance and graces. One result of this resistance is non-belief in God, which is the consequence of the malfunction of our *sensus divinitatis*.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ Thanks for wise counsel and penetrating comments to Kaave Lajevardi, Muhammad Legenhausen, Tim Mawson, Mahmoud Morvarid, Nasir Mosavian, Richard Swinburne, and Hamid Vahid.