

Who You Could Have Known: Divine Hiddenness, Epistemic Counterfactuals, and the Recalcitrant Nature of Natural Theology

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Abstract: We argue there is a deep conflict in Paul Moser’s work on divine hiddenness (DH). Moser’s treatment of DH adopts a thesis we call **SEEK**: DH often results from failing to seek God on His terms. One way in which people err, according to Moser, is by trusting arguments of traditional natural theology to lead to filial knowledge of God. We argue that Moser’s **SEEK** thesis entails the counterfactual **ACCESS**: had the atheist sought after God in harmony with how God reveals himself, she would have had access to filial knowledge of God. By failing to incorporate arguments or propositional evidence for God’s existence, Moser’s account leaves the doubting seeker without any evidential reason to think that either **SEEK** or **ACCESS** is true. Without this rational motivation in place, the doubting seeker is unlikely to seek after God in the way **ACCESS** describes. We argue that natural theology provides an evidential epistemic aid to motivate persons to seek God the way **ACCESS** describes. Thus, Moser is mistaken. Such arguments can be evidentially helpful in coming to know God. In conclusion, we explain how our reply naturally fits how we form and maintain trusting interpersonal relationships with others.

Introduction: Laying the Groundwork

The current landscape of philosophy of religion is replete with aversion to the arguments of natural theology, evident by the popularity of both reformed epistemology and skeptical theism.¹ Regrettably, this aversion is also present in some treatments of divine hiddenness, albeit for different reasons. The broad aim of this paper is to undermine this aversion. To that end, we analyze a treatment of the problem of divine hiddenness from Paul Moser, who denies that natural theology provides any epistemic value to those seeking a hidden God.

As we understand it, the problem of divine hiddenness is actually a family of problems, presenting both (a) epistemological and (b) moral issues that attempt to undermine traditional Abrahamic theism. What’s more, a reply to the problem of divine hiddenness may be formulated as either (α) a theodicy or (β) a defense.² It

¹ It should be noted, however, that natural theology has been defended in a sophisticated and rigorous manner. See, for example, *The Blackwell Companion to Natural Theology* and the *Oxford Handbook of Natural Theology*.

² See Peter van Inwagen, “What is the Problem of the Hiddenness of God?” In Daniel Howard-Snyder and Paul K. Moser (eds.), *Divine Hiddenness: New Essays*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002): 24-32) for more on these two distinctions. We go into more detail on the latter distinction in Section 3, when we offer our principal objection to Moser’s view.

isn't always clear in the literature what problem is being addressed. So let us be clear. We aim to analyze a reply of kind (ω) to the problem of variety (a). That is, we are concerned with the atheist's claim that one can justifiably doubt or deny the existence of God because of the apparent lack of evidence for the existence of God.

There are two strategies one can take in response to this particular claim. First, one could try to justify God's self-concealment by arguing that there are greater goods achieved by divine hiddenness.³ A second strategy (not mutually exclusive with the first) is to argue that God's hiddenness is the result of factors that originate in the individual's will rather than in God's will. We state this as follows:

SEEK: Divine hiddenness can result from factors within the control of the individual, namely failing to seek after God in harmony with how God reveals himself.⁴

Various philosophers have defended versions of **SEEK**, chief among them Paul Moser.⁵ In his support of **SEEK**, Moser rejects arguments of traditional natural theology as unhelpful in providing the experiential evidence made available in interpersonal encounters with God. The category of *traditional* arguments of natural theology Moser has in mind includes the ontological argument, cosmological argument, teleological argument, and so on. Although Moser offers what he has called a "distinctive first-person perspective argument of natural theology,"⁶ he nevertheless argues that natural theology as *traditionally* understood is of no serious help in knowing God. He suspects that such arguments may be distracting if not damaging⁷ insofar as they fail to accommodate the motives of God.⁸

However, we suspect this may not be a wise move. We think that such traditional arguments of natural theology can serve as an epistemic aid for those who sincerely seek God. To see this, note that **SEEK** entails the following counterfactual:

³ See, for example, Richard Swinburne, *Providence and the Problem of Evil* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 203-212, 257-258 note 7.

⁴ Notice that **SEEK** does not exclude the reality that divine hiddenness can at times be caused by God who waits to reveal himself at a later time for morally sufficient reasons.

⁵ His most thorough treatment is his book, *The Elusive God: Reorienting Religious Epistemology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

⁶ Moser, Paul Moser, "How Not to Defend Natural Theology: Reply to Woldeyohannes" *Evangelical Philosophical Society* (2013). <[http://www.epsociety.org/userfiles/artMoser%20\(How%20Not%20to%20Defend%20Natural%20Theology-revised\).pdf](http://www.epsociety.org/userfiles/artMoser%20(How%20Not%20to%20Defend%20Natural%20Theology-revised).pdf)> For a response to Moser, see, Tedla Woldeyohannes, "Natural Theology in Context: A Rejoinder to Moser", *Evangelical Philosophical Society* (2013): 9-11. <[http://www.epsociety.org/userfiles/art-Woldeyohannes%20\(Natural%20Theology%20in%20Context-A%20Rejoinder%20to%20Moser\).pdf](http://www.epsociety.org/userfiles/art-Woldeyohannes%20(Natural%20Theology%20in%20Context-A%20Rejoinder%20to%20Moser).pdf)>

⁷ See, for example, "A God Who Hides and Seeks: A Response to Davis and DeWeese", *Philosophia Christi* 2 vol. 3, no. 1 (2001): 119-125, especially, 121; and "Natural Theology and the Evidence for God: Reply to Harold Netland, Charles Taliaferro, and Kate Waidler" *Philosophia Christi* 14, no. 2 (2012): 305-311.

⁸ Paul Moser, *The Severity of God* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 121.

ACCESS: If the atheist had sought after God in harmony with how God reveals himself, then she would have gained filial knowledge of God.

If **ACCESS** is true, then it appears the atheist cannot use the problem of divine hiddenness to justify non-belief because her present epistemic situation may not be representative of the way the world actually is. Consequently, the problem of divine hiddenness is a problem of human seeking. However, to affirm this counterfactual is to face a potential problem. If **ACCESS** is true, then God exists. Filial knowledge of God is possible only if God exists. This of course poses no trouble for the theist who is already convinced of God's existence. But for those who are not, and who are so constituted or so predisposed that they would gain some epistemic benefit from arguments for God's existence,⁹ it leaves them with little to no rational motivation to seek after God in the way **ACCESS** describes.

In what follows we take up these issues in more detail. First, we show that Moser's view entails a certain version of **SEEK**, which in turn depends on **ACCESS**. Second, we argue on behalf of those who could be epistemically aided by natural theology when facing divine hiddenness. Finally, we argue, contrary to Moser, that these arguments can aid greatly in coming to interpersonal and morally transformative knowledge of God.

I. Moser Affirms SEEK, Which Entails ACCESS

SEEK as Necessary for Moser's Account of Divine Hiddenness

Why think Moser is committed to **SEEK**? The simple answer is that **SEEK** is the fundamental thesis Moser offers. According to Moser, divine hiddenness often results from failing to seek God in accord with His primary desire to morally transform us. Appropriate seeking requires volitional openness to personal interaction with God. In turn, these personal interactions provide morally transforming evidence for God. Accordingly, the reason God's existence is not evident to some is that they are looking for God in the wrong place and in the wrong way. Perhaps, like Bertrand Russell, they are merely looking for more propositional evidence of God's existence.¹⁰ However, according to Moser, everyone should be seeking knowledge by acquaintance with God in submission to Him. Doing so results in receiving morally transformative first-person evidence of God.

These encounters make available what Moser calls *filial knowledge* of God. Such knowledge results in, "our being reconciled to God..., entrusting ourselves as children to God in grateful love, thereby being significantly transformed in who we

⁹ Moser has acknowledged that such arguments can provide psychological or aesthetic value to their user, but he denies that they have any epistemic value. See Moser, *The Evidence for God: Religious Knowledge Reexamined* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2010), 159-160.

¹⁰ Here we have in mind a famous remark by Russell. When asked by Leo Rosten, what Russell would say if after he died he met God, Russell said he would say to God, "Sir, why did you not give me better evidence?" Leo Rosten, "Bertrand Russell and God: A Memoir", *Saturday Review/World* (February 23, 1974), 26.

are and how we exist, not just what we believe.”¹¹ Those such as Russell can receive evidence of God, says Moser. Yet, only if they seek out the type of morally transformative knowledge by which God makes himself known. Such knowledge is not at a distance, but in relationship with Him. You must seek God in the right way if God is to come out of hiding. It is therefore, uncontroversial that Moser’s account of divine hiddenness requires **SEEK**.

Two reasons SEEK entails ACCESS

Arg. 1: Moser Says So

But, why think Moser is committed to **ACCESS**? First, it is by his own admission. Consider the following statements made by Moser:

“The extent to which we know God depends on the extent to which we are gratefully willing to acknowledge God’s authority and, as a result, to participate in God’s program of all-inclusive redemption. So it becomes clear why humans have difficulty in knowing God. The difficulty originates in our resisting transformation towards God’s morally perfect all-loving character.”¹²

“A perfectly loving God can properly make confident knowledge of His reality arise simultaneously with filial knowledge of Him. As a result, God is absolved from the charge of negligently refraining from performing entertaining signs, so long as He reveals His personal reality to anyone suitably receptive.”¹³

Moser’s thesis makes sense only if correctly seeking God would alleviate divine hiding.¹⁴ That is, Moser’s thesis entails the counterfactual **ACCESS**.

Moreover, Moser contends that “a change of receptive attitude to apprehend the available evidence in the right way” is often needed in order to have access to evidence constitutive of *filial knowledge*.¹⁵ According to Moser,

Reception of significant evidence, then, sometimes depends on the receptive attitude of people. In particular, failure to receive some evidence stems from psychological facts about the intended recipients, not from flaws in the available evidence itself.¹⁶

Consequently, Moser assumes that appropriately altering one’s receptive attitudes will lead to filial knowledge of God. That is to say, Moser’s version of **SEEK**

¹¹ Paul Moser, “Divine Hiding,” *Philosophia Christi* 2, vol. 3, no. 1 (2001), 101.

¹² Paul Moser, “Cognitive Idolatry and Divine Hiding”, in Daniel Howard-Snyder and Paul Moser (eds.) *Divine Hiddenness: New Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 137.

¹³ Moser, “Divine Hiding,” 105.

¹⁴ See also, Moser, *The Elusive God*, 23; 245-46.

¹⁵ Moser, “Divine Hiding,” 100.

¹⁶ Moser, “Divine Hiding,” 100.

requires the truth of **ACCESS**: If the atheist had sought after God only in harmony with how God reveals himself, then she would have had access to evidence of God by encountering God.

Arg. 2: Without ACCESS there is no rational motive for one to seek God

A second reason to think Moser's account is committed to **ACCESS** is that without it there is no rational motive for one to seek after God. **ACCESS** is at least part of what makes hope of finding God reasonable. Without the availability of encounters with God there is no reason to seek after Him. "The often overlooked supernatural sign of divine love," writes Moser, "is available (at God's appointed time) to anyone who turns to God with moral seriousness."¹⁷ "The outstanding question," according to Moser, "is whether humans are willing to open the door to a God of self-giving agape."¹⁸ Such claims make sense only if we have good reason to think that we can have successful access to God.

Therefore, without **ACCESS**, any **SEEK** type thesis is rationally unmotivated. We don't seek after what we don't think we have access to. It seems reasonable, then, to wonder what Moser's prospects are for advancing **ACCESS** without natural theology. We take this up in the next section.

II. On Behalf of the Exception

Let's take stock. If Moser is right, then something like the following is true: "All people who come to know God do so *only* as a result of being provided experiential evidence of God through an interpersonal encounter with God." All other ways of *seeking to know* God are cognitive idolatry (and thus sinful), as Moser himself points out.¹⁹ From this, we can formulate an argument highlighting the dismissal of natural theology as follows:

- M1. One must have experiential evidence of God in order to know God.
- M2. One has experiential evidence of God if and only if one has an interpersonal encounter with God.
- M3. Traditional arguments of natural theology (NT) cannot provide experiential evidence of God. (from M2)
- M4. Therefore, NT is useless ("distracting," "damaging" even) to the person who sincerely seeks to know God. (from M1, M3)

Immediately we might notice an odd consequence. It is strange to think that all other relevantly different religious epistemology projects, insofar as they seek to know God, are "sinful."

¹⁷ Ibid, 104.

¹⁸ Moser, "Religious Epistemology Personified: God without Natural Theology," in *The Blackwell Companion to Science and Christianity*, edited by J. B. Stump and Alan G. Padgett (Oxford: Blackwell, 2012), 161.

¹⁹ Moser, "Divine Hiding."

Moser's claim might be true if taken as a generic claim (e.g., "people come to know God in this way") in which case exceptions do not falsify it. However, if intended as a universally quantified claim, we think it is in the very least difficult to substantiate. And it may very well be false. Such a strong claim is implausible, as it takes only one exception to falsify. One reasonable exception would be those people for whom natural theology is an epistemic aid. (We will clarify what we mean by "epistemic aid" in what follows.) Thus, we offer the following counterargument on their behalf:

1. NT can epistemically aid the person who sincerely seeks God to be better positioned to begin (or continue) having interpersonal encounters with God.
2. So, NT can serve as an epistemic aid in gaining experiential evidence of God. (from 1, M2)
3. Therefore, NT can serve as an epistemic aid for the person who sincerely seeks to know God. (from 2, M1)
4. Therefore, M4 is false.

Obviously, the contentious premise is (1). But if it succeeds, the rest of the argument follows.²⁰ Premise (1) provides the plausible exception to Moser's universal claim that *all* people who come to know God do so *only* in this way. That is, as a result of being provided experiential evidence of God through an interpersonal encounter with God. Premise (1) alleges that there are some who come to know God as a result of being epistemically aided by arguments of natural theology. This does not claim that such arguments are either necessary or sufficient, only that for some people they help in an epistemically important way. Evidence from natural theology can call into question an atheist's commitments²¹ and thereby open her mind to consideration of theism that can lead to looking for positive evidence for God even in experience. Or, evidence from natural theology can be positively useful in the sense that theism can begin to seem a rational or plausible view after all. Such a change of mind can help open an atheist's heart (will) to more evidence for God's reality, which can lead eventually to theism. Thus, this avenue does not rule out, and in fact can lead to, the essential formative aspects of experiential evidence made available in interpersonal encounters with God (as premise (2) points out).

Set aside for a moment what being "epistemically aided" looks like practically. We shall give some plausible real-life examples in the next section (of

²⁰ There is a hidden premise between (3) and (4). "If *x* can serve as an epistemic aid for the person who sincerely seeks to know God, then it is not the case that *x* is useless (distracting, damaging) to the person who sincerely seeks to know God." This seems to be uncontroversial, and so we leave it hidden for purposes of readability.

²¹ Here we have in mind common commitments such as naturalism, the presumption of atheism, and the notion that talk of God is meaningless or any other commitment that would preclude one from earnestly seeking God. We understand these are not commitments all atheists share.

course, the inquisitive reader is free to read ahead). For now, allow us to motivate the possibility that God would create such a world in which agents are epistemically aided by natural theology. Consider two possible worlds:

W1: Natural theology is available as an epistemic aid to those who seek after God.

W2: Natural theology is not available as an epistemic aid to those who seek after God.

Has Moser given us a good reason to think W2 is the actual world? Might W1 be a better world than W2? That depends on the people in each world. If there are individuals in W1 and W2 who would be epistemically aided by natural theology, then those in W2 are not as well off as those in W1. That is, there is a good-making feature true of W1 and not true of W2. Therefore, in such a case, W1 is (*pro tanto*) the better world.

So, do we have *pro tanto* reason to think that God would create W1 over W2, that the actual world is W1? The answer seems to require two things. First, that there are individuals in the actual world who would be epistemically aided by natural theology. Secondly, that if there are such individuals God would not deny creatures in such a world the good—the evidential value—of natural theology. In the next section we make the case for an affirmative answer to the first question. As to the second, if there *are* such individuals, and if natural theology *does* provide an overriding good, then we think it is quite unlikely that God would deny them this good.

III. Rejecting Natural Theology Leaves ACCESS Rationally Unmotivated for Some

A Risky Endeavor

So, just what kind of person might qualify as an exception to Moser's universally quantified claim (from II.)? The recommendation to seek after God the way ACCESS describes poses no trouble for the theist who is already convinced of God's existence. But for those who are not, and who are so constituted or so predisposed that they would gain some epistemic benefit from arguments for God's existence,²² it leaves them with little to no rational motivation to seek after God in the way ACCESS describes. The same can be said of those who, rather than doubtful of God's existence, are uncertain as to whether to trust God. It's plausible

²² Moser has acknowledged that such arguments can provide psychological or aesthetic value to their user, but he denies that they have any epistemic value. See Moser, *The Evidence for God: Religious Knowledge Reexamined* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2010), 159-160. Discussion of the success of individual theistic arguments is not needed here. Rather, this paper's focus is on the value of theistic arguments generally. In short, this paper addresses the value of arguments of natural theology; it is not a project to evaluate soundness of a particular argument of natural theology, and whether a particular argument is sound. That is another project.

that arguments of natural theology can help even here, though, since understanding God's nature can lead to a greater trust in God.²³

Of course, Moser has a very negative view of nonbelievers' motives and strongly believes natural theology lends itself to being twisted in various ways by untransformed people. We find this view odd and difficult to defend. To hold this view suggests that traditional natural theology can produce or encourage idolatry. But that is trivially true. Of course, everything, including the words of Jesus can be and are twisted for nefarious purposes. Moser must hold the stronger view that the arguments of natural theology essentially promote idolatry or disbelief in God at least in the epistemological sense. The issue is not if tradition natural theology can be or has been used for ill purposes, but weather or not it does so in virtue of what it is. So, just how is it that traditional natural theology inherently produces idolatry? Given the historical use of traditional natural theology for epistemological good and unfortunately for bad, it seems improbable that traditional natural theology is essentially idolatry producing. It may accidentally do so, but that is hardly a reason to dismiss it. Traditional natural theology has been an epistemic aid to many in coming to trust and be transformed by God.²⁴

Seeking after God and trusting God is a risky endeavor. We normally do not think of it as being risky, in the sense of being rife with danger, but it does include paradigmatic features of risk. It involves trusting someone perhaps unfamiliar, with uncertainty, under less than ideal epistemic conditions. Following God requires serious changes to one's life and character in the form of moral and practical choices. This can result in certain other life changes in one's vocation or career. For the person who is not convinced that God even exists, or who has concerns over God's character and trustworthiness, it can take a monumental effort to seek after God the way **ACCESS** recommends. It is more likely that that person will simply opt out of such a task, seeing it as just too risky to undertake.

Moreover, even with the issue of risk set aside, there is still a problem. One would lack rational motivations altogether to seek evidence for God's reality if one is convinced that there is no such evidence. Contemporary atheists typically claim that there is no adequate evidence for God's existence and hence any serious motivation to seek for evidence for God would not be an issue. Without rational motivation what reason does one have for seeking filial knowledge of God? Even existential concerns provide rational motivation.

²³ It is likely that Moser would respond by arguing that the god of natural theology is not the God of the Bible, hence the god of natural theology fails to ground our trust. However, for our argument to run through it simply needs to be the case that traditional natural theology would epistemically help one in finding and ultimately trusting in the God of the Bible. We are not claiming that the arguments of natural theology alone can produce trust in the God of the Bible.

²⁴ To be clear, we hold a very high view of religious experience and knowing God in relationship. One of us has defended a type of interpersonal knowledge of God similar to Moser's filial knowledge of God. See, Brandon L. Rickabaugh, "Eternal Life as Knowledge of God: An Epistemology of Knowledge by Acquaintance and Spiritual Formation", *Journal of Spiritual Formation and Soul Care* 6, vol. 2 (Fall 2013): 204-228.

If only there were a way to become more convinced of God's existence or of God's trustworthiness. And indeed there is. It is reasonable to think that theistic arguments can raise a person's credence level to the point where she is willing to take the next step and seek after God in the way **ACCESS** describes.²⁵ For this person, new evidence in the form of arguments of natural theology raises the probability that God exists or that God is trustworthy. If she is appropriately rational, she then raises her credence to match that evidential probability.

At this juncture, Moser might object that what we've described is merely a case where the person's doubt is assuaged and she is reassured. And this betrays the psychological benefits of natural theology, but in no way ensures that it has any epistemic value. We have two replies to this objection. First, what we've described is indeed an epistemic situation: new evidence raises the probability of a proposition for a person, and she thereby raises her credence to match.²⁶ Second, if this person gets any psychological benefits in this situation (and we think she does), it is in part as a result of her epistemic improvement. However, this shouldn't be surprising. As Gregg Ten Elshof says, "As it turns out, a fair bit of our felt well-being is dependent on our beliefs."²⁷ That is, we feel better or worse as a partial result of what beliefs we hold or what thoughts we entertain.

Thus, to the degree that this person can obtain information and answers to her questions, she improves both epistemically and, in turn, psychologically. She thereby becomes more open to entering into a relationship with God, to receive the experiential evidence of God that comes from personal encounters with God. In this way, arguments of natural theology can serve as an epistemic aid to coming to know God. In the next two sections, we shall support this type of process by offering plausible examples of how third-person propositional arguments can aid in forming interpersonal relationships.

Timothy

Suppose that Timothy has never met his father, and has come to explain his father's lack of presence in his life as follows: either his father is alive and does not love him and so does not pursue a relationship with him or his father loves him, but is no longer alive and therefore unable to pursue a relationship with him. One day Timothy's aunt explains to him that she has come to learn that his father is alive and does in fact love Timothy, but has been misled to believe that Timothy died at birth.

What could help Timothy seek out his father seems to depend on Timothy's belief in the counterfactual that were he to seek out his father, doing so would likely result in forming a healthy relationship with him. But why should

²⁵ Concerns over the soundness of specific theistic arguments have a place, but not here. We mean only to build the case for natural theology arguments in general.

²⁶ Of course Moser would not grant this, as he is critical of the argument from natural theology. In his view arguments of natural theology do not even confirm theistic belief even for believers, especially belief in the God of the Bible. However, the success of natural theology arguments is a topic for another paper.

²⁷ Gregg Ten Elshof *I Told Me So* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans 2009), 3.

Timothy think this **ACCESS**-like thesis is true? Perhaps Timothy is more intellectually inclined and so would be significantly aided by propositional evidence that his father is not only alive but also desires and is capable of forming a loving relationship with him. That is, before Timothy is capable of honestly considering the notion that his estranged father wants to meet him, Timothy wants an evidentially helpful explanation of why his father is only now seeking him out. This seems entirely reasonable. In fact, in the absence of such evidence we might think it foolish for Timothy to seek out a relationship with his estranged father, as doing so requires great risk and changes in some of his core beliefs regarding his identity.

Such cases are not merely possible, but are an ordinary part of life where individuals are moved into relationship with another based, at least partly, on propositional arguments. Take, for example, a third-party referral to a therapist. A genuine seeker, one whose receptive attitudes are open to finding a good therapist, first acquires propositional knowledge, through third-person propositional argument(s), about her would-be therapist and in virtue of this enters into a relationship with the recommended therapist. It seems clear that the same process is at work in the formation of many other interpersonal relationships, for example, with a doctor, a mechanic, and so on.²⁸ In these cases it is the imparting of propositional knowledge through testimony or more formal argument that aid one in stepping forward into a trusting relationship.

Why not think this is similar to those who struggle with divine hiddenness? That is, why not think that traditional theistic arguments can provide some with the epistemic aid in helping to form an interpersonal relationship with God that Moser defends? This seems entirely plausible. Moreover, in so far as one thinks that interpersonal relationships are significantly analogous to aspects of divine-human relationships, a notion that is ubiquitous in Biblical texts²⁹, then these ordinary cases give us further reason to think that third-person propositional arguments can aid at least some in enjoying a filial knowledge of God. In fact, the availability of third-person arguments seems entirely compassionate. Surely God does not want to be known only at a distance, but it seems reasonable that reliable third-person indicators of a God of morally serious love can be expressed in propositional arguments. That is, we believe that a God of perfect love does not leave the seeker without reasons to take both **SEEK** and **ACCESS** seriously enough to begin the journey of turning toward God.

²⁸ Notice that such cases do not rule out those in which one enters into a relationship without prior propositional knowledge based on third-person arguments, such as normal encounters not initiated on persuasive testimony—e.g., a mixer, an office party, speed dating, new neighbors, and so on.

²⁹ Scriptures often speaks of the divine and human relationship in Father and child terms. For instance, Jesus refers to God as Father over 165 times in the Gospels (e.g., John 4:34), and the Pauline letters describe God as Father over 40 times, including the report that the Spirit of God is crying out in human hearts “Abba, Father” (e.g., Gal 4:6; cf. Rom 8:16). Similarly, Scripture talks in terms of a bride and bridegroom relationship (e.g., Rev. 19:7, 212).

IV. Additional Remarks

Two other points are worth mentioning, which offer additional support to what we have argued concerning the epistemic aid of natural theology to filial knowledge of God. First, natural theology could very well aid communities in priming and encouraging individuals for experiencing God. Notice that religious experiences happen within a community, which includes the shared beliefs of the community. These shared beliefs can help or hinder one's experiences. For example, T. M. Lurhmann, psychological anthropologist at Stanford, has shown that communities that believe God still speaks to His people today regularly practice and make progress in hearing God speak.³⁰ So, a community that believes (minimally) that the existence of God is a reasonable belief will include a large number of individuals that seek out experiences of God. One way natural theology can aid in this process is by supplying the plausibility structures for such a community. Individuals seek out what they find plausible. Communities and cultures where belief in God is thought to be irrational lower the perceived plausibility that **SEEK** is true. However, communities and cultures that embrace natural theology have in the past had a plausibility structure in place that aided people in seeking out experiences of God.

Second, and relatedly, what we have argued is consistent with a tradition of thought going back to the Church Fathers. This tradition holds that God providentially arranged the history of the world such that the philosophers before the time of Jesus cultivated the belief structures of certain cultures to aid them in receiving the Gospel of the Kingdom of God.³¹ The Apostle Paul used beliefs already present in Athenian culture, quoting from Stoic philosophers (Posidonius in Acts 17:28a and Aratus in Acts 17:28b), in order to aid these Athenians in seeking after the Unknown God, or what we might call the Hidden God.³² The implicit argument here is that seeking after God as Paul suggests is supported, at least partially, by a belief shared in that culture. The report we get is that some of these individuals were persuaded by Paul and believed (Acts 17:34). That is, third-person propositional evidence can be of aid in gaining filial knowledge of God.

V. Conclusion

In summary, we have argued that Moser's account of divine hiddenness lacks the kind of aid we would expect an all-loving God to give to a certain type of

³⁰ T. M. Lurhmann, *When God Talks Back: Understanding the American Evangelical Relationship with God* (New York, NY: Random House, 2012).

³¹ Augustine makes this argument in *The City of God*. See also, John Mark Reynolds, *When Athens Met Jerusalem: An Introduction to Classical and Christian Thought* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009).

³² New Testament scholar, Ben Witherington, states, "From a rhetorical point of view the function of the...quotations here is to cite an authority recognized by one's audience to support one's point." (Ben Witherington III, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998, 530).

person. That is, Moser doesn't offer the right kind of epistemic reason to some seekers to take **ACCESS** seriously.³³ This is due to his rejection of natural theology. Moreover, we have argued that natural theology does offer an epistemic reason or host of reasons for taking **ACCESS** as a serious live option. With this rational motivation in place, some persons are much more likely to seek God in the way **ACCESS** describes. Common cases of interpersonal interaction suggest Moser is wrong about natural theology. If his account of divine hiddenness is going to help those who could have known God had they sought Him out correctly, it will do so partly, and at least for some, by the epistemic aid of natural theology.³⁴

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³³ We have in mind here, as in fn. 20, the distinction between an epistemic reason and a psychological or aesthetic reason.

³⁴ We would like to thank Tedla Woldeyohannes, Trent Dougherty, and Trenton Merricks for providing helpful feedback on the first draft of this paper. We would also like to thank those who attended our presentation of this paper at the 2015 British Society for the Philosophy of Religion Conference on Divine Hiddenness, at Oxford University.

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