



Research Paper

Investigating the evolution of the meaning of divine hiddenness in the proofs of divine hiddenness from the perspective of Western and Islamic thinkers

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Abstract

Atheists have raised different ranges of arguments in line with their claim, one of these ranges of arguments is the argument based on the hiddenness of God, which they believe is a sign of the non-existence of such a being. One of the elements of the formation of this range of arguments, which are known as proofs of divine concealment; It is a special meaning and understanding that comes from divine concealment. Therefore, the meanings of divine concealment should be well defined so that, based on that, a correct review and criticism can be made on what the defenders of the divine concealment argument have raised against belief in God. Through the investigation, it is clear that in some of his works, a brief reference is made to the meaning of divine concealment; But no work has independently analyzed the meaning of divine concealment and its developments; Therefore, this article aims to capture the evolution of the meaning of divine concealment from the perspective of Western and Islamic thinkers in an analytical-documentary way, so that based on that, a correct position can be adopted in dealing with this range of arguments.. Through the investigation, it becomes clear that among the meanings of divine concealment, the meaning of being covered by the senses, the meaning of non-perception and the truth of the essence of truth, as well as the meaning of non-finding due to finding, can be combined with belief in God and is compatible with it.

Extended Abstract

1. Introduction

Based on the analysis, it appears that among the meanings discussed in the Islamic context, the first, second, and fifth meanings are compatible and consistent with theism. Inevitably, the third and fourth meanings are not compatible with theism because, concerning the third meaning, gaining awareness of God through intuitive and rational means is possible only within human capability. Similarly, the fourth meaning is invalidated based on the numerous arguments presented by Islamic theologians and philosophers as sufficient evidence for proving God.

Regarding the meanings formed in the Western context, appropriate attention should be given to the critiques of the arguments from divine hiddenness, and by making necessary adjustments in their interpretation, a correct basis should be established. As a result, among the meanings discussed in the West, the third meaning, which is a radical interpretation of divine hiddenness, and the second meaning, which is

Schellenberg's focus in his argument, are not acceptable. Ultimately, it seems that in Christian theology to achieve a correct interpretation of divine hiddenness, one must suffice with the first meaning: "the lack of experience of God's presence in the traditional and pre-modern sense, where divine hiddenness in this sense arises from human limitations and deficiencies in perceptual faculties."

Atheists and non-believers have presented arguments and reasoning against theism and challenged its claims. In this regard, "divine hiddenness" is a new term in the philosophy of religion, based on which an argument against theism has been proposed and gained the attention of some scholars and scientific communities. Examining the roots of the beliefs of its proponents reveals a longer history. In pre-Islamic religions, there are instances indicating the constant impossibility of perceiving and experiencing God's presence in human life. For example, we can refer to David's laments, where he complains to God about the lack of divine support against the harassment, insults, and occasional blasphemy of his people due to his beliefs and constantly fears being killed or having



his property confiscated and divided among them.

In the realm of Western thinkers, traces of the issue of divine hiddenness can also be found in the early centuries of Christianity, in the works of theologians such as Saint Anselm. Despite being renowned for his high spiritual status, he occasionally voiced complaints about divine hiddenness and in his prayers sought closer encounters with God. These individuals, although they mentioned the issue of divine hiddenness and expressed grievances about it, never considered it a reason to deny the existence of God. However, in modern times, some Western scholars, focusing on this point, have tried to present an argument against theism and to prove the nonexistence of God.

The first philosopher who extensively and comprehensively elaborated on this issue and framed it as a logical argument is John L. Schellenberg. His argument, known as the argument from divine hiddenness or the argument from reasonable nonbelief or the argument from inculpable nonbelief, has been referred to in some of his works as the argument from nonbelief. Schellenberg seeks to show that either God exists and reveals Himself in human experience, or humans lack direct and personal experience of God, and therefore such a God essentially does not exist.

One of the key elements in the formulation of the argument from divine hiddenness is the specific meaning and interpretation given to "divine hiddenness." It is evident that to provide a proper critique of what the proponents of the argument from divine hiddenness have presented against theism, we must clarify the meaning of hiddenness from their perspective.

Among the works addressing the issue of divine hiddenness, none have thoroughly and independently examined the evolution of the meaning of divine hiddenness in both Christian and Islamic theological contexts, as well as the

aspects that could be compatible and aligned with theism. Since analyzing the potential meanings of divine hiddenness and assessing their compatibility or incompatibility with the existence of God can undermine the claim that the arguments from divine hiddenness confirm the nonexistence of God, it is necessary to explore these meanings and their evolution.

2. Research Methodology

The present study aims to extract the evolution of the meaning of divine hiddenness from the perspective of Western and Islamic thinkers using an analytical-documentary method based on library research.

3. Findings

The analysis reveals that among the meanings of divine hiddenness, the meaning of being hidden from the senses, the meaning of the impossibility of perceiving the essence and truth of God's nature, and the meaning of invisibility resulting from visibility are compatible and consistent with theism.

4. Conclusion

One reason for the ineffectiveness of the arguments from divine hiddenness in their claim is the lack of precision regarding the meaning of hiddenness that theists adopt. Consequently, the meaning considered should be the one most compatible with the beliefs of theists.

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Authors' contribution

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Conflict of interest

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