

Description for the general public

***Deus absconditus – Deus revelatus.***

**The Problem of the Cognitive Inaccessibility of God and Ways to Resolve It**

In the Book of Isaiah – significant both for the Jewish as well as for Christian religious traditions – one reads as follows: “Truly, you are a God who has been hiding himself” (Isaiah 45:15). Indeed, the adherents of the great monotheistic religions treat God as not only revealing himself (*Deus revelatus*), but also as a hidden God (*Deus absconditus*). Without the former of a relationship with God would be impossible, without the latter one could hardly talk about a fundamental attribute of God, which is transcendence, a radical exceeding of the created world and human cognition.

Divine hiddenness, withdrawing, silence or cognitive inaccessibility are phenomena that caused fear and raised doubts among believers and became the subject matter of theological considerations. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the horrors of the Second World War (including the tragedy of Holocaust) on the one hand, and progress of natural science that made references to God superfluous, on the other, intensified the question about hiddenness of God. These challenges inspired some theistic philosophers to revise the classical concept of God. Some of the thinkers, sceptical to religion, began to see in the hiddenness of God a datum in favour of atheism. In this context, in 1993 John L. Schellenberg built the so called hiddenness argument, according to which the occurrence of reasonable non-belief in God speaks in favour of His non-existence. The argument stimulated a lively discussion that continues to this day among analytical philosophers of religion and is a point of reference for numerous philosophical publications.

The meaning of this discussion for the philosophy of religion, as well as its ideological significance prompted us to start this study that aims to: (1) reconstruct, summarise and assess Schellenberg’s argument; (2) develop our own responses to this argument; (3) present various aspects of the problem of hiddenness of God (and related issues), including issues concerned with the “silence of God” in the face of Holocaust and the methodological naturalism of contemporary science. The specific argument as the point of departure ensures its accuracy and the achievement of clear results. Embedding it in the aforementioned broader context mitigates, in turn, from limiting it to one philosophical or religious-theological tradition. It takes into account the various monotheistic traditions that allow us to assume that the key to solving the problem of hiddenness of God is the question of his transcendence. The great monotheistic religions jointly proclaim that God directly revealed himself to only a few, and in that way does not violate His transcendence. The consequence of this state of affairs is that most followers of a given religion have access to its revelation only through witnesses (testimonial knowledge). We believe, moving beyond the mainstream of the debate over Schellenberg’s argument, that the problem of divine hiddenness should be connected to the question of God’s transcendence and the nature of testimonial knowledge. Development of this connection will be our original contribution to the debate.

Our research is interdisciplinary and broad. For this reason, we set up a scientific consortium including John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin (as the Leader), Pontifical University of John Paul II in Cracow and the Pontifical Faculty of Theology in Warsaw. Creating the consortium allows us to gather philosophers from various research centres around the discussed research topic. They have academic achievements in the area of both philosophy of religion as well as some other philosophical disciplines such as metaphysics (ontology), epistemology, philosophy of science, philosophy of language and the history of contemporary philosophy. Two also completed theological studies.

The measurable result of our research will be three monographs written in Polish devoted to the subject matter, several papers in English published in international journals devoted to philosophy of religion, and a joint publication (in English), to which we intend to invite for a contribution J. L. Schellenberg, his debaters including Polish authors (both theists, as well as atheists or agnostics). We hope that these publications will mark the culmination of many years of debate over the hiddenness argument and will advance our understanding of the ideas of *Deus absconditus* and *Deus revelatus*. We also hope that our publications will be of interest not only to professionals in the philosophy of religion and related disciplines, but also to a wider audience. Particularly those who treat the dialogue between theists and atheists as socially important and significant to worldviews.