


WHY IS GOD'S REVELATION SO VAGUE? A MULTIVERSE THEORY OF REVELATION AND DIVINE HIDDENNESS

by Atle O. Søvik 

Abstract. This article has two main parts. The first part argues in favor of a multiverse theodicy. God has created our particular universe because it contains unique goods. While God could have made our universe better, that would in fact have turned our universe into another universe, which God has also created. Our universe remains as it is to actualize its specific goals. The second part uses this basis to defend why God's revelation is so vague. It could have been clearer, which again would have turned our universe into another universe, which also exists. Since our kind of independent universe with vague revelation actualizes unique goods, God has created our universe where the vague revelation serves specific purposes.

Keywords: divine hiddenness; multiverse theodicy; vague revelation

INTRODUCTION

If God exists, why is God not more clearly revealed to us? If there really is a God and a good afterlife, it would seem to be a great good that we knew this to be true. Previously, this question has been treated as part of the problem of evil.¹ More recently, it has been treated as a problem on its own, since it seems that there could have been a problem of divine hiddenness even if there had been no suffering in the world.²

The problem of divine hiddenness is best known through the work of John Schellenberg. His focus is on how divine love implies that God should be open to relationship for those who seek him. The idea that there are people who seek God but cannot find God implies that God does not exist, since a loving God would have been open to being found by such seekers. The argument goes like this:

- (1) If God exists, then God is perfectly loving toward such finite persons as there may be. [Premise]

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- (2) If God is perfectly loving toward such finite persons as there may be, then for any capable finite person *S* and time *t*, God is at *t* open to being in a positively meaningful and reciprocal conscious relationship (a personal relationship) with *S* at *t*. [Premise]
- (3) If God exists, then for any capable finite person *S* and time *t*, God is at *t* open to being in a personal relationship with *S* at *t*. [1, 2 by Hypothetical Syllogism].
- (4) If for any capable finite person *S* and time *t*, God is at *t* open to being in a personal relationship with *S* at *t*, then for any capable finite person *S* and time *t*, it is not the case that *S* is at *t* nonresistantly in a state of nonbelief in relation to the proposition that God exists. [Premise]
- (5) If God exists, then for any capable finite person *S* and time *t*, it is not the case that *S* is at *t* nonresistantly in a state of nonbelief in relation to the proposition that God exists. [3, 4 by Hypothetical Syllogism]
- (6) There is at least one capable finite person *S* and time *t* such that *S* is or was at *t* nonresistantly in a state of nonbelief in relation to the proposition that God exists. [Premise]
- (7) It is not the case that God exists. [5, 6 by Modus Tollens].³

There have been different ways of meeting this argument, mainly attacking premise two. One can argue that a loving God could have reasons for being hidden (Howard-Snyder 2015). One can argue that we cannot understand God's love or God's hiddenness because of God's transcendence (Rea 2018). Or can argue that with our limited mind, we have no reason to expect that we should understand why there is evil or hiddenness (Bergmann 2012).

Appealing to limited minds or divine transcendence is an easy way to defend many strange concepts of God, which has the problem that any of these alternatives gets a low probability of being true.⁴ The approach in this article is to say that there is a reason why God is hidden, but the reason is not of the common type where God chooses to hide in order to achieve something that is a higher good for us. I argue that it would be better for us if God had not been hidden, but will explain why we would not have existed in a universe where God was not hidden.

This article presents a new line of reasoning to explain why God is not more clearly revealed. It depends on a certain kind of theodicy where our universe is not the only universe God has created. God created our universe to achieve unique goods actualized only in our kind of universe, while other universes actualize other unique goods. I have previously defended such a theodicy elsewhere but will present it in part one of this article and add some new arguments in its support.

In part two of this article, I discuss the propositions that we could expect would be best and most important for God to reveal: That there is a good God, that there is a good life after death, that there will be a just judgment, that one can have salvation, that we should be good, and maybe extra knowledge as well. For each kind, I argue that it would not be good to reveal this in our universe with its specific goals. It would be good if our universe were the only universe there is, but not when our universe has a set of unique goals and other universes have other goals.

PART 1: A MULTIVERSE THEODICY

Elsewhere I have defended a theodicy based on the work of Keith Ward, but developed further (Ward 2007; Søvik 2011, 2018). It takes as its starting point that God is good. As good, God wants to actualize goods. While it would be good to actualize a great quantity of one good only, it would be even better to actualize a multitude of qualitatively different goods, since variation of goods is itself something good to be valued. While it is not necessary that God creates a universe with unique goods, it is good for God to do so if it is the only way to achieve certain goods and there are not stronger reasons for not creating that universe.

The type-token distinction is used to distinguish between something being the same in one sense and different in another sense. If I say “chair chair chair,” there is one *type* (“chair”), but three *tokens*. There is one *type* since each token word has the same monadic properties, but there are three *tokens*, since the type word is instantiated three times at different times or places.

God can actualize unique goods that are both *type* unique and *token* unique. Two things are *type* unique if they have different monadic properties, while they are *token* unique merely by being instantiated at different times and/or places. For example: me laughing yesterday and me laughing today are two *token* unique goods since they occur at different times and places, while me laughing and me being in love are two *type* unique goods since they have different monadic properties.

God can actualize both type and token unique goods in our universe compared to alternative universes. Imagine a heavenlike universe filled only with eternally unchangeable happy angels singing, and God in full control of everything that happens. Compared to that universe, our universe can actualize *type* unique goods like independence, creativity, surprise, and self-creation. Our universe thus contains unique type goods, which is in itself a reason for creating our universe.

In addition, our universe contains *token* unique goods like you and me and every conscious being and every valuable thing in it. I presuppose that you and I could not have existed anywhere else than as the children of our parents in this universe only. There is a philosophical debate on this topic

between substance ontology and various other ontologies, like relational ontology, process ontology, structuralist ontology, and so on. Substance ontologies defending haecceity can argue that you could also have been a chair or existed in another universe, while many alternative ontologies emphasizing the role of relations argue that your relations constitute who you are, implying that you could not have existed elsewhere. This debate is too big to take here, so the discussion in this article must just presuppose a rejection of substance ontology (which I also think we have many good reasons for rejecting).⁵

Ward discusses whether it is morally acceptable to allow the possibility of suffering for sake of reaching a good goal. He refers to many instances where we clearly think so, for example, allowing yourself or others to get wet shoes in order to save a child or win a million. Our universe contains much greater suffering, but the eternal life is assumed to be a much greater good. If the eternal life could be given to us without suffering, it would have been better, but Ward's point is that for us, our only opportunity for having eternal life is to come into existence in this universe only, with its possibilities of suffering (Ward 1982, 202);(Ward 1996b, 220); (Ward 2006, 139–40).

Since it is our only opportunity for having eternal life, Ward concludes that it was good for God to create our universe. One can accept that the token individuals and token goods in our universe could not have existed in another universe and still object that God should have created another universe instead of ours. Sometimes Ward also speculates on the possibility that there could be other universes with other kinds of beings—angels, perhaps—and that these universes could be all good (Ward 1996a, 192); (Ward 2006, 67). He even mentions the possibility that perhaps God has created all universes where good outweighs evil, ours being one of them (Ward 2008, 91–92). But he does not argue that God has actually created a multiverse, so his response to the objection is that it was good that God created us, and that we could only exist in this universe.

My argument in this article is that we should think that God created a multiverse. If God just created one universe, a good and omnipotent God should have created a better universe than ours. But if God also created other universes, it was good that God created our universe in addition. It is difficult to justify the claim that there is a good and omnipotent God if God only created our universe because it seems that such a God could and should have created a better universe. But if God did in fact create a better universe, God would have a good reason to create our universe in addition, since it contains unique type and token goods that could not have been actualized in any other way.

Note how that implies that God must in fact have created other universes. The existence of our universe is not compatible with a good and omnipotent God if our universe is the only one that exists (since God

should then have created a better universe), but it is compatible with a good and omnipotent God if God has created other universes (since God has then actually created a better universe). I am not suggesting that we should find comfort in knowing that there is a copy of us that does not suffer in another universe. I do not even suggest that there are copies of us. My point is merely to argue how it could be plausible to believe that a good and omnipotent God created our universe. The existence of better universes does not reduce our suffering, but it makes belief in a good and omnipotent God more coherent.

It may seem strange to suggest that God has created a multiverse since it is common to think of the multiverse as an alternative to God. For example, some argue in favor of God's existence by referring to the fact that our universe seems fine-tuned for life. The most common objection to this is to argue that fine-tuning is instead explained by our universe being part of a multiverse, where our universe is one of the few lucky ones.⁶ But others have argued that God may well have created a multiverse since also the best multiverse theories demand fine-tuning for life, and since it enlarges God's creation (Collins 2009). The known universe is already extremely large and empty of life, implying that God created much more than life on earth.

For different answers to objections and extra supporting arguments, I must refer to my other writings. But here I will answer some new objections and give one supporting argument, which I have not discussed before.

The first objection is as follows:⁷ If God has created a multiverse, it implies that there will be other universes with more suffering and where God is even more hidden than in our universe. The multiverse theodicy implies that good should outbalance evil in a universe created by God, meaning that God should not create universes that consist of intense suffering only. Is this compatible with a plausible multiverse theory, or does it require an ad-hoc multiverse theory?

Let us start with a brief survey of multiverse theories. Cosmologist Max Tegmark has helpfully sorted different multiverse theories into four levels (Tegmark 2007). The first level is simply our universe but understood to be infinite in size.⁸ The observable universe is the part of the universe where light can reach us, and it has a radius of 46.5 billion light years.⁹ How big is then the whole universe including the observable universe? Nobody knows, but speculations go from 250 times bigger (Vardanyan, Trotta and Silk 2011) to extremely large numbers (Page 2007), or that it is infinite. Being infinite in size, it would be like a multiverse in being larger than a finite universe, which is presumably why Tegmark includes it in a list of multiverse theories.

At level one, the laws of nature and physical constants are the same everywhere. The second level is a multiverse with the same laws of nature

but different constants in different universes, which adds variation to the content. The most common example of such a multiverse is that predicted by eternal inflation theories developed by Paul Steinhardt, Alexander Vilenkin, Alan Guth, and others, with the chaotic/eternal inflation theory of Andrei Linde as one of the most famous examples (Linde 1986). These theories have some support in the fact that they explain certain features of our universe, like its size, uniformity, and flatness. A similar kind of multiverse would be the one suggested by Lee Smolin, where universes are born from black holes, and every time a universe is born from a black hole in another universe, the laws and initial values are slightly changed (Smolin 1997). This theory also has some support in how it predicts many black holes and that no neutron stars should have a mass more than twice that of the sun.

A level three multiverse takes the universe or multiverse at level one or two and adds quantum branching. The clearly most famous example is the Everett interpretation of quantum mechanics (from 1957), which says that each time there is a measurement with two possible outcomes, the universe splits into two branches actualizing each outcome (Everett, Barrett and Byrne 2012). While it has become more popular in later years, it also has problems, like making sense of probabilities in quantum mechanics if everything always happens.¹⁰

Level four multiverse theories say that everything that can possibly exist actually exists. Max Tegmark defends a multiverse where every mathematically possible universe actually exists, since he does not then have to explain why just our possible universe should happen to exist. David Lewis is famous for his theory of modal realism, where he argues that what we call possible worlds actually exist—they are of the same kind as our world (Lewis 1986). This allows him to explain modality without using modal terms, even though it presupposes the existence of very many worlds.

While multiverse theories at levels one and two have empirical (though indirect) support, theories at levels three and four are supported by the theoretical virtue that they do not have to explain why a certain possibility was actualized since they say that all possibilities are actualized.¹¹

There is the most scientific evidence in support of level one and two multiverses. From the perspective of a multiverse theodicy, these seem to allow for much variation in life conditions, which was argued to be a motive for God to create. Of course, God could also change conditions at different places by intervening more, or God could create other universes or multiverses at level one or two from scratch.

What the multiverse theodicy needs is a multiverse with enough variation to allow for better universes than ours, while at the same time, there should not be universes consisting merely of intense suffering. The multiverse should preferably have scientific support and should not seem scientifically ad-hoc.

There are different versions that have different advantages and disadvantages. Instead of discussing them all, I suggest that the following response is the best: We know that the future of our universe is that it will end in either endless cold or intolerable heat.¹² Clearly, for humans to have eternal life, there must either be a transfiguration of the universe, or humans must continue to live somewhere else. It does not matter here which alternatives we choose. What matters is that if there is eternal life, there must necessarily at one point be a divine intervention ending the natural development of the universe or multiverse.

When should that intervention come? When does God have a reason to end the natural evolution of the multiverse? As long as new life evolves, this is a reason to let the development continue. The suffering involved must then be worth it, taking into account that it was the only possibility for those coming into existence to have eternal life. But at one point, the level of suffering can become so great that it would be ethically better for such life not to come into existence. God knowing moral truth knows when that point is, and God would then have an ethical reason to stop the evolution of the multiverse and instead start over with new conditions.

This is what I suggest as a non-arbitrary answer to how the multiverse theodicy ensures that intolerable suffering does not occur. It is not an interventionist picture of God since it only includes the one intervention that any believer in eternal life must accept.

The second objection is offered by Bradley Monton, who criticizes several kinds of multiverse theodicies. I agree with most of the criticism, but it does not frame the multiverse theodicy presented here. Monton does criticize a similar kind of theodicy, where our universe is said to produce token and type goods that it was good for God to create. Against such a theodicy, he offers the following objection:

Instead of our universe, God could have created an identical universe where people turned into zombies whenever they would experience pain. Instead of creating our universe for the sake of its token goods, God could create a duplicate of this other universe. There would then be no reason for God to create our universe (Monton 2010).

This objection does not work against the theodicy I suggest in this article. The mentioned unique type goods in our universe are a result of God not intervening to control details. That God should make sure to prevent suffering each time it was about to happen is not compatible with a universe evolving where indeterminism plays a big role. The unique type goods of our universe have produced unique token goods. They cannot be duplicated by God, since a crucial point was that they should come about without first being planned in detail.¹³ A universe where God controls outcomes (like Monton suggests with turning people into zombies when experiencing pain) is not a duplicate of a universe where God

does not control outcomes. One could still object that if God has created extremely many universes, all possible outcomes are actualized, and so by chance there would be a universe like ours except for the fact that people turn into zombies every time they experience pain. But I do not think that there could be a universe exactly like ours except for this difference. I assume in this article that our universe is indeterministic and that conscious experiences of pain have evolved to have a causal effect.¹⁴ This means that a universe could not evolve indeterministically, and let people experience no pain, with life still going on as before. It would be very different, and not a duplicate of our universe.

The next objection is as follows: It seems God could have created our universe with the unique token and type goods that it has and, even if God intervened more, we would still come into existence in this world (born by our parents) and would still have an independent and free will, even if God caused various events that reduced suffering in our world.

Here is a new way to reply to this objection when we assume that God has also created other universes different from ours: Let us first say that God could have made sure that no suffering occurred in our universe. That would in practice be the same as ending our universe as it is and turning it into the world we will live in after death. But that would also end the purpose of our universe with its unique type goods and bring forth the unique token goods of new individuals of the universe coming into existence. Our universe would turn into an already existing universe and cease to serve its purpose.

The same could be said if God did not end all suffering but improved matters a lot. For this theodicy, we assume that God has already made other universes with other conditions. If God made changes in our universe, God would turn it into a kind of universe that already exists. You and I would still be token unique individuals of our universe only, and so you and I would like this universe to exist even if there was a parallel universe elsewhere. But if merely being token unique was the point, God could create infinitely many, so it is an extra point that our universe should bring forth token unique goods on type unique conditions. Otherwise, the other universe suffices to bring forth numerous token unique goods. Since our universe does bring forth token unique goods and type unique conditions, it is good for God to create our universe.

Now I move from objections to presenting a new supporting argument to the belief that God has created several universes. The argument has the following steps: The first step is to notice that it seems very plausible that coincidences play an important role in how humans have evolved in our universe. We live on this planet in this universe on these conditions. Sometimes, big coincidences have major impacts on how evolution happens, like when a meteor hit earth, killed the dinosaurs, and made room

for humans. It seems unlikely that God planned to kill the dinosaurs, while it seems likely that it was a coincidence.¹⁵

The second step is to conclude that since coincidence is an important part of our evolution, it is probable that coincidence has influenced how our consciousness evolved. Our conscious experiences seem very dependent on what we need for survival of our conditions. We have a conscious experience of the electromagnetic waves we are most exposed to (Fernald 2001). We enjoy nutritious food and sex and other things good for spreading genes, while we dislike things that are bad for spreading genes.

But it seems that there are plenty of possible conscious experiences that no humans have had. The conscious experiences we have seem like a strange collection, which would make much more sense if they were only a few out of many. We know that people have experimented to discover new conscious experiences, like new colors (e.g., orange that feels black) or having conscious experiences of magnetic fields when implanting magnets in the body (Churchland 2007, chapter nine); (Berg 2012). It also seems like some conscious experiences are newcomers, like the conscious experience of the color blue (Loria 2015).

The third and final step is to reason that if God has created everything, it seems that God has created a lot of possible conscious experiences that no humans have ever experienced. But that seems to imply that God's plan for creation is more than the humans living today and Jesus returning soon. It would make much more sense that God created numerous possible conscious experiences if the goal is to create different kinds of beings having all these experiences.

One could argue that the rest of the conscious experiences are for us to enjoy in heaven, or for animals to experience. But given the kinds of conscious experiences that seem possible (like black orange or experiencing magnetic fields), it does not seem like this is something meant for angels or animals only. At least to me, it makes much more sense as a hint that we are not the whole creation.

Since the mentioned experiences result from the laws of nature and conditions in our universe, this suggests a multiverse model of level one or two, as opposed to God creating different universes from scratch. One big universe could suffice for there being parts of the universe with very different conditions from our part. We know the laws of nature guiding our part, but for all we know, they are derived from deeper laws, which means that things could be very different in regions of the universe far away.

That may seem like an ad-hoc support for my claim, but consider the following: We know that there are plenty of elementary particles that play no part in life in the universe we know. All matter is made from electrons and the up-quarks and down-quarks making protons and neutrons. But there are plenty of other quarks and particles that have no known role.

Every second, trillions of neutrinos pass your body with no interaction with anything.

We could thus make the same reasoning for the non-used conscious experiences and the non-used elementary particles, if they are all created by God; namely that they are (to be) used by others. Again, it supports a level one or level two multiverse. The chance events in universal history with great consequences, the enormous size of the universe, the many particles that seem to have no purpose, and the many possible conscious experiences, all point in the direction that if there is a God, God has created more beings than what can be found on this earth.

These empirical facts are not reasons for why God would create a multiverse, but they are reasons to believe that there is a multiverse, and they fit well with God's reason for creating a multiverse, namely to actualize many different types of goods. This is a multiverse theodicy as opposed to a universe theodicy, for what makes the theodicy work is that when someone objects that God should have created such or such universe instead of ours, the reply is that God has also created such and such universe, but that it was good to create our universe in addition.

PART 2: REVELATION IN OUR PART OF THE MULTIVERSE

This multiverse theodicy also functions as an answer to the problem of divine hiddenness in the following way: One can agree that a clearer revelation from God would be good but say that there already exist other universes where the presence of God is more obvious. Still, our universe with more independence and a less clear presence of God has produced unique type and token goods, making it good that this universe and its level of revelation exists.

Recall Schellenberg's argument and the premise that God's love implies that God is always open to relationship with humans who seek God. One could argue that divine love merely implies that God is open to being found in the future or in the life after death. But Schellenberg specifies that God's love implies that God must be open to being found at the time that somebody seeks God. This could seem like a reason for a loving God not to create a multiverse where humans could seek God without finding God. But is it true that God's perfect love would imply that all humans who seek God will find God?

My argument in this article is that there are exceptions to this claim by Schellenberg. The general exception is if it is a condition of our existence that God is hidden, since it could then be good for God to create us even if God cannot have an open relationship with us until after death. If God had to choose between creating a universe where God was not hidden and a universe where God was hidden, God should have created a universe where God was not hidden. But if God has already created a universe

where God is not hidden, it is good also to create a universe where God is hidden if that were the only possibility for the creatures there to exist.

Here is an analogy: Imagine a husband and wife who love children, and the wife gives birth once a year. Then the husband has to be away on a secret mission for ten years. Could it still be good for him to choose to have a new child even if he will not see that child before ten (or seventy) years has passed? It is the only way for that child to come into existence. The child will have its mother and siblings. And the child will (probably) eventually meet their father.

While it would not be morally wrong not to have this child, it does seem morally good also to have the child since it can have a good life and would not otherwise exist. One may object to the story that the analogy is poor since God is omnipotent, but my argument has been that not even an omnipotent God could have created the token individuals of our universe on other conditions: It would have been logically impossible since the conditions of our universe are the relations that constitute our identity.

One may also object that good parents would not hide from their children the fact that they exist (Schellenberg 2015b, 98–99). My response is that if uncertainty about the father's existence was a condition for the child to exist, and the child had its mother, it *is* compatible with being a good parent. The analogy is that God knows that we have our biological parents and other humans to have relationships with even if we do not have the same kind of relationship to God until after death.

This is the main reply offered in this article to the problem of divine hiddenness. But it still raises the question of how to think of revelation in our universe. If there is a revelation from God in our universe, it seems God has interacted with us and not left the universe completely independent. But how does that fit in with the overall understanding of this as an independent universe? Do we have reason to believe that there is a revelation from God at all in our universe, or should it instead be rejected?

The question of how to understand revelation properly would require a detailed discussion of goals, means, challenges, alternatives, and objections, which cannot fit into an article. But I want to offer a brief discussion to indicate some reasons to think that there could be good reasons for thinking that God has revealed Godself in our universe. In what follows, I will point out several goods that would follow from revelation being vague as opposed to clear. To this discussion we now turn.

As a point of departure, I point to the fact that even in an independent universe, it seems that it would be good for God to reveal to us that all will be good in the end, that there is a God, there is a meaning to life, and so on. What would be the most important things for God to reveal? I know that I would most appreciate to know that there will be a good afterlife where you can meet the ones you have lost and which will make life good for those who have had bad lives on earth. That would be like a safety net,

making evil less bad and reducing anxiety by knowing that in the end all will be well. Knowing that there is a God, a meaning, a salvation, that there is justice in the end, knowing what is good, and other kinds of knowledge would also be good, but less important than the first things mentioned.

Many of these things are closely connected. If there is a good afterlife, it seems to require an omnipotent God to create it. If the world is created by God, the world has meaning in the sense that it has a purpose behind its creation. If there is a good afterlife, it seems to require a judgment and transformation for the people of this life to continue living after death. If we have reason to believe that there is a good God, we seem to have reason to believe that there is an afterlife since we cannot understand how a good God could create only this life for the inhabitants of our universe.

What would happen if God were to reveal these different things clearly to us? I repeat that this is a huge question that cannot be given a full answer in an article, but I will focus on some central points relevant for the topic of theodicy and divine hiddenness. Let us start with the most important information: that there is a good afterlife. What would happen in our universe with its conditions if everyone knew with certainty that there is a good afterlife where people go after death? We would take that into consideration in all questions of what to do, especially in life-and-death situations.

Should we make a large effort in helping poor and sick people about to die when it seems much better just to send them off to a much better place? Should we bother to suffer and struggle ourselves when suicide is a safe road to paradise? Would not killing people—the sooner the better—in most cases be the best alternative? It seems so. But that would then ruin the purpose of our specific universe.

God could communicate clearly that it was against God's purpose of this universe that we kill each other. But in fact, it seems that in many cases it would be objectively ethically best for the persons involved to kill someone or to die and move on instead of suffering, and that this should not be something that God should punish. On the other hand, if life after death is objectively uncertain, it is objectively good not to kill, but instead to help each other and do all other things normally considered good since this life may be all there is. Put differently, the purpose of our specific independent universe might only work when life after death is uncertain.

To this one may object that even people who are certain that there is a life after death are opposed to euthanasia, and rightly so. I think that even if they feel subjectively certain, they should know that it is not objectively certain (i.e., very well justified) that there is life after death. The situation would be different if everyone knew that dying was like travelling to a new place where everything was well. Even then, a person in pain could have a good reason for not dying, for example continuing to be close to other loved ones.

I here assume that if there is life after death it is a gift, as opposed to being a reward for behaving well, such as underscored in the Lutheran version of Christianity, and that it is a gift that is equally possible for all to receive. I believe that to be the only plausible understanding of life after death given the very different conditions under which we are born. I do not have time to discuss that huge question in this article but must presuppose it.¹⁶

The insight on what would be the consequences of certainty about life after death influences all other things God could reveal clearly, since they all seem to imply a good life after death. If God reveals clearly to all that there is a God, God also by implication reveals clearly that there is a good life after death.

God could reveal more specific things about what the meaning of life is or what is good to do, but on the theodicy offered here, we live in an independent world where the meaning is to create individually meaningful lives and to find out what is good to do in different contexts. In an indeterministic world, it is not given what the best world concretely will be; we have to find out together what the best way of living together is. Keith Ward has argued that it is a purpose of revelation to make people seek the good (Ward 1994).

God could have revealed specific knowledge and facts, but again, we seem to live in a universe where some of the purpose is for us to discover what is true. This is argued by Robin Collins in his reasoning on fine-tuning for discoverability.¹⁷

While it would have bad consequences to be *certain* that there is a God, a purpose behind creation and a good afterlife, it would be good to have *hope* that there is. By hope, I mean an uncertain belief in something you would like to be true. One can then have the benefits of belief in God and the afterlife, although to a lesser degree. Examples would be comfort that all will be well, recognition that God loves you, gratitude for life as a gift, identity as God's child, meaning and motivation for living and doing good, and so on.

Because of the uncertainty involved one would (or at least should) at the same time be more open to being wrong, more open to what others think, and less likely to act in extreme ways, since we should take uncertainty into consideration when we decide how to act. If you believe that something about God and the afterlife is *certain*, self-deception is a great risk. But if you only believe that it is *possible*, there will be no self-deception (unless you believe something that is self-contradictory).

This was a list of benefits of being uncertain in religious questions. I do not mean to say that uncertainty is only positive since, as already mentioned, it has many negative sides as well. But I am suggesting that in our particular universe, where there must be this independent life before

the good life after death, the benefits of uncertainty might outweigh the disadvantages. I will comment on more disadvantages below.

God could provide such hope either by special divine actions that are vague, or by general divine actions that indicate that there is a God and a life after death. By special divine actions, I mean events caused by God with effect at special times and places (e.g., dividing the Red Sea, making water into wine, or raising Jesus from the dead), while general divine actions have the same effect everywhere (like creating and upholding a universe fine-tuned for life).¹⁸

As already hinted at, there are certain things we have reason to believe based on the general revelation resulting from general divine action. The different arguments for the existence of God give us reason to believe that there is a good God. If there is a God, there is meaning behind creation. We only have good reason to believe that there is a good God if there is a good afterlife. Belief in a good God thus implies belief in an afterlife. The afterlife is only good if there is a judgement with justice and transformation, but it is also only good if salvation is offered to all. What is good and meaningful at different times and places must be figured out by us, and it is even good that we do so instead of being told what to do.¹⁹

If God wanted to reveal a basis for hope instead of certainty, how could God do so? God could give us hope instead of certainty by communicating all this through special divine actions that were vague and open to different interpretations. But the result would not be more than what has already been given through general divine actions. Through general divine actions, we have reasonable arguments to believe in God and the afterlife, while vague, special divine actions would be open to alternative interpretations, for example, that maybe Jesus did not rise from the dead after all.

General divine actions seem like a fair and inclusive way for God to be revealed instead of some people being selected for special divine actions. Believing that God has chosen general divine action over special divine action gives less reason to lift oneself up as unique and chosen as opposed to other people in other religions. On the other hand, the same result follows if one believes that God is revealed through special divine actions in different religions.

Belief in general divine action does not exclude belief in special divine actions, but belief in special divine actions (like the resurrection of Jesus) should be accompanied by admitting that it is vague and open to interpretation, which should also make one more open to those who have other beliefs about God. That openness to others would in itself be good, and thus yet another reason for God to be less clearly revealed.

Often, special revelation is understood to be clear, while general revelation is vague. But it seems better to say that special revelation is detailed, while general revelation is general. In the case of Christianity, the fact that there are numerous Christian denominations suggests that the special

revelation is not very clear. Even when verses of the Bible say that something should be believed and not doubted, their status as revelation is still uncertain. Some say that they have had clear revelations from God. I have met many who do, but they say many strange and inconsistent things that God cannot have revealed to them. We should not confuse a subjective feeling of certainty with objective certainty.

Usually, it is a bad idea to argue that we may have an ethical reason to choose to believe something that is not best argued to be true. In general, we should believe that which is best argued to be true.²⁰ If you convince people that they should believe something that is not best argued to be true, it easily becomes a way of legitimizing believing things that have bad ethical consequences. An example would be to argue that people should believe that it is God's will that women have less worth than men and that we should accept it even if it is not the best justified view.

This problem is avoided here since I am only advocating *hoping* something while admitting that it is uncertain. That would be a good reason to listen to ethical critique and no reason for dismissing such critique, since maybe God has revealed that which the critic suggests instead. When we decide how to act, we must take uncertainties (e.g., about whether there is an afterlife) into consideration as a relevant fact for the ethical judgment. This hope approach strikes a very good balance: It gives an ethical justification for believing in something (since it is good to believe it) even if it is not best justified as true by the available data, while at the same time admitting the uncertainty, which means that one should be open for critique and other beliefs.

I agree that one should generally believe that which is best justified, but I have argued that religious belief in a universe with our conditions may be an exception. In our universe, an uncertain and self-critical hope with regard to revelation seems to have better consequences overall. We would still have reason to thank and worship God for the creation and to have a relationship with God, but combined with the attitude of hope instead of certainty. We should feel less certain about what the will of God is and have lower expectations that miracles should occur or petitionary prayers to be answered.

While I am arguing that something is good to believe, I do not think that it is possible for people to choose what they believe to be true and good. You can choose to run for five minutes and then choose not to run for five minutes, but you cannot choose to believe in five minutes that God exists and then choose to believe in five minutes that God does not exist. Nevertheless, arguments for what is true and good influence what we believe and can give people arguments they have been looking for. Arguments influence us, and we can also choose what we say and do when we talk about our beliefs. Even if we cannot choose what we believe to be true, it is rational to discuss what would be good to believe.

Two alternatives have been presented: to believe only in revelation through general divine action or also revelation through both general and special divine actions. Believing in special divine actions would add extra positive dimensions to the hope, like believing in an active God who is close, and maybe other specific claims like God offering forgiveness through Jesus or desiring church community. It would still be good to admit the uncertainty of such beliefs, which can also be a way to be more relaxed when facing criticism without dismissing it.²¹

The approach to religion I am describing is not a choice of self-deception or a recommendation of wishful thinking. First of all, revelation through general divine action gives reasons enough to say that belief in God is not just an ad-hoc hypothesis without support. In addition, it is possible to offer rational defense for *hope* (as opposed to highly justified belief) in special divine actions since there are things that are difficult to explain in the world, thus pointing to the possibility of special divine actions. For example, the shroud of Turin has mysterious properties,²² certain stories of reincarnation are difficult to explain (Stevenson and Samararatne 1988), and people experience very peculiar and unlikely answers to prayers or callings from God (Keener 2011).

In this section, we have seen first that a multiverse theodicy can be used as a reply to the argument of divine hiddenness. While it would be good for God to create a universe where the presence of God is clearer, it was also good that God in addition created our universe where God's presence is *not* clear since so many token and type unique goods are actualized in our universe. While this solution would not require that vague revelation is good, I ended with pointing out that there are also goods following from a vague revelation in a universe with our conditions.

CONCLUSION

In this article, I have defended that it would be good for God to create our universe as part of a multiverse since our universe actualizes unique type and token goods. It is a multiverse theodicy since it accepts that our universe could have been better in many ways, but that God has also created other such universes. God then has a reason for creating our universe in addition because of its unique goods.

The same line of reasoning can be used as reply to the problem of divine hiddenness. Vague revelation is part of the unique conditions of our universe as an independent and self-creating universe guided by laws. While vague revelation could have been justified as a side effect of the conditions of our universe, several unique goods following from the vague revelation was also pointed out.

What I have advocated is a hopeful religious life in the world as an ethically and epistemically justified position while acknowledging uncertainty.

Uncertain religion is good religion—both a basis for hope and openness to others.²³

NOTES

1. See for example how John Hick or Richard Swinburne offers reasons why God should not be more clearly present in Hick (1977) and Swinburne (1998).

2. On the one hand, one could argue that seeking God and not finding God is a form of suffering in itself. On the other hand, we can imagine that people did not experience negative feelings when not finding God but treating it as a theoretical problem that it seems inconsistent that such a God should be hidden.

3. (Schellenberg 2015a, 24–25)

4. For example, young earth creationists argue that God created the world in six days about 6000 years, and that all death and suffering came after and because two humans (not knowing the difference between right and wrong) ate forbidden fruit—and that we should trust the Bible instead of science on this. Another example is in the Lutheran Formula of Concord, in the Solid Declaration, which says that God has determined who should be saved and not, and that this is an incomprehensible fact that we should not try to understand (SD 11.63–64, in Kolb, Wengert, and Arand (2000, 650)).

5. See critique of substance dualism, for example in Puntel (2008).

6. For a good overview of this discussion, see Collins (2009).

7. I am grateful to an anonymous *Zygon* reviewer for this objection.

8. After this, when I use the term “our universe,” it refers to the (possible part of a multiverse, which is the) 13.8 billion-year-old, causally connectible, observable universe that we live in.

9. Some might think that the observable universe must have a radius of 13.8 billion light years, because the universe is 13.8 billion years old and light travels at 1 light year per year. The explanation is that light from the edge of the observable universe started its travel when it was 42 million (with an “m”) light years away from us, but the universe has expanded (Bennett et al. 2013).

10. For a good critique, see Maudlin (2019).

11. I assume that the multiverse is not infinite since infinite universes are riddled with problems, like the Boltzmann brain objection or that rationality and science break down when all possibilities are real (Collins 2009). A finite multiverse then raises the question of why it has the size it has. But if the multiverse has expanded from a point (as it arguably has) on life-friendly conditions (as it obviously has), it has the size it has right now because we are asking the question of its size right now. One could ask further questions about size, but given the indeterminism of the multiverse, there may be no answer to why the exact size is what it is, without that making the theory incoherent.

12. (Russell 2008, 281)

13. One could argue that they could be indirectly duplicated by God by God making a multiverse that by chance produced a universe with similar type goods as in our universe. This is no problem for this theodicy. What the theodicy needs is that our universe could not be duplicated without suffering, and that there are better universes, which explains why it is good that we exist in addition to the other universes.

14. For arguments defending this claim, see Søvik (2022).

15. This claim about dinosaurs and coincidences does not imply that God did not plan to create humans, but it does imply that God did not plan in detail when humans should be created or exactly what they would look like. God created conditions that would make life evolve, and become more and more complex with skeletons, brains and consciousness. Evolution is full of examples of how similar traits evolve independently because the surroundings favor it.

16. For a thorough defence of a Lutheran view on salvation, see Pannenberg (1991; 1998). One could add that vague revelation is in itself an argument against the threat of damnation since the risk of damnation should have been made so clear that nobody could doubt it.

17. <http://home.messiah.edu/~rcollins/>

18. This is a common distinction, described for example in Saunders (2002).

19. If our universe is to a high degree indeterministic and open, it may be the case that not even God knows what the best world for humans would be in concrete detail. But even if not, it is good that we develop autonomy through making choices based on experiences of what is good and right.
20. As famously argued by Clifford (1877).
21. This approach to religion would also give a very different approach to apologetics. One can admit all the uncertainties and still promote the religion as good in virtue of the uncertainty.
22. (Søvik 2013). An English translation of this article can be found at <https://www.shroud.com/papers.htm>
23. I am very grateful to two anonymous *Zygon* reviewers for many comments and objections that have significantly improved the quality of the article. Thanks also to Asle Eikrem for useful comments and suggestions.

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