

# Dr. James S. Spiegel, Philosophy of Religion, Session 11, Divine Hiddenness Resources from NotebookLM

1) Abstract, 2) Audio podcast, 3) Briefing Document, 4) Study Guide, and 5) FAQs

## 1. Abstract of Spiegel, Philosophy of Religion, Session 11, Divine Hiddenness, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

This philosophy lecture addresses the **problem of divine hiddenness**, questioning why a God who desires human knowledge of his existence does not make that existence obvious. Scholar Peter van Inwagen frames this as a potential reason to doubt God's existence, distinct from the problem of evil. Michael Murray proposes that God's hiddenness is necessary to preserve **human free will** in choosing to follow him by reducing the compulsion that a clear threat of hell might create. However, Lovering critiques this view, arguing that divine hiddenness leads to **inculpable ignorance of moral truths**, hindering the development of morally significant character and potentially implying God's non-existence, a point the lecturer counters by suggesting humanity possesses an **innate understanding of basic morality**.

**2. 13 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of  
Dr. Spiegel, Philosophy of Religion, Session 11 – Double click  
icon to play in Windows media player or go to the  
Biblicalelearning.org [BeL] Site and click the audio podcast link  
there (Theology → Apologetics → Philosophy of Religion).**



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sion11.mp3

### 3. Briefing Document: Spiegel, Philosophy of Religion, Session 11, Divine Hiddenness

#### Briefing Document: The Problem of Divine Hiddenness

**Overview:** This document summarizes Dr. Jim Spiegel's lecture on the philosophical problem of divine hiddenness, a challenge for theists, particularly Christians. The problem centers on the apparent lack of clear and obvious evidence for God's existence and how this aligns with the theistic belief that God desires humanity to know Him. The lecture explores the formulation of the problem, its distinction from the problem of evil, and several proposed solutions and critiques, focusing on the perspectives of Peter van Inwagen, Michael Murray, and Lovering.

#### Main Themes and Important Ideas:

##### 1. Defining the Problem of Divine Hiddenness:

- The problem, popularized by scholar Schellenberg, questions why God has not made His existence more obvious to everyone.
- It is debated whether this is a subset of the problem of evil (focusing on suffering related to a lack of belief) or a distinct epistemological problem (focusing on the lack of knowledge).
- Peter van Inwagen articulates the core of the problem as a logical argument:
- Premise 1: "if God existed, then that would be a very important thing for us human beings to know."
- Premise 2: "If God existed, he could provide clear signs of his existence."
- Conclusion 1: "Therefore, if he existed, God would provide clear signs of his existence."
- Premise 3: "However, there are no such unmistakable signs of God's existence."
- Conclusion 2: "Therefore, there is reason to doubt that God exists."

##### 2. Distinction from the Problem of Evil:

- Van Inwagen argues that divine hiddenness could be a problem even in a world devoid of moral evil and suffering. He poses a hypothetical world without sin, sickness, or injury where people might still question their origins and God's existence.

- In such a scenario, "the problem of the hiddenness of God is a purely epistemological problem."

### 3. Van Inwagen's Perspective on the Solution:

- Van Inwagen rejects the idea that God is indifferent to *how* or *why* people come to believe in Him.
- He suggests that "ubiquitous miracles, such as constant divine messages in the sky or something like this, ... would only prompt a bare belief in God, not personal transformation."
- He posits that God's hiddenness contributes to the significance of personal transformation, implying that freely choosing to believe in the absence of overwhelming evidence is more meaningful.

### 4. Michael Murray's Free Will Theodicy Applied to Divine Hiddenness:

- Murray applies a free will defense, arguing that divine hiddenness is necessary for genuine human freedom in choosing to follow God.
- He focuses on the concept of "threat significance," particularly concerning the threat of hell. For a truly free choice, individuals must not be compelled by an overwhelming and immediate threat.
- Murray identifies factors influencing threat significance:
- **Threat Strength:** The degree of perceived harm.
- **Threat Imminence:** The likelihood and timing of the consequences. This includes:
  - **Probabilistic Threat Imminence:** Likelihood of consequences.
  - **Temporal Threat Imminence:** How soon consequences will follow.
  - **Epistemic Threat Imminence:** How clear and unambiguous the threat is.
- **Wantonness of the Threatened:** The degree to which a person disregards their own well-being.
- Murray argues that God mitigates the compulsion of the threat of hell primarily through **epistemic threat imminence**, by making His existence somewhat ambiguous and the threat less certain in terms of absolute, undeniable knowledge.

- "God makes the threat epistemically ambiguous by hiding himself." This allows individuals to choose God more freely, without being overwhelmed by the fear of immediate and certain punishment.
- Dr. Spiegel quotes Isaiah 45:15: "surely you are a God who hides himself," suggesting scriptural precedent for this idea.

### **5. Lovering's Critique of Murray:**

- Lovering argues that Murray's approach ultimately fails and can lead to the conclusion that God does not exist.
- He summarizes Murray's argument as:
  1. We have the ability to develop morally significant characters.
  2. If God is not hidden, we would be compelled to believe and act, hindering moral development.
  3. Therefore, God must be hidden for moral growth.
- Lovering posits that while coercion hinders moral development, so does "inculpable ignorance of the moral status of actions."
- He argues that if God is hidden, some people will justifiably lose belief in God, becoming "inculpably ignorant of what the good is" and potentially moral nihilists.
- "If God is hidden, then some people will justifiably give up belief in God and thus become inculpably ignorant of what the good is. They will become moral nihilists."
- Without a belief in objective moral truths grounded in God, individuals cannot intend to do good actions and therefore cannot develop morally.
- Lovering concludes that whether God is hidden or not, the ability to develop morally significant characters is undermined, creating a contradiction and suggesting God does not exist.

### **6. Spiegel's Rebuttal to Lovering: The Concept of Natural Law:**

- Dr. Spiegel believes Lovering overlooks the concept of natural law, a prominent theme in scripture.

- He argues that "God has written on the human heart a basic understanding of right and wrong, what the good is. He's woven that into the human understanding so that people do basically understand the difference between right and wrong, good and bad, and good and evil."
- This innate moral awareness, through conscience or "the law of God written on the heart," means that even if individuals do not explicitly believe in God, they still possess a fundamental understanding of morality.
- Therefore, divine hiddenness does not necessarily lead to inculpable moral ignorance, as Lovering suggests.
- Spiegel criticizes Lovering for dismissing the natural law argument too quickly, having only considered one version related to divine revelation through the natural order, and not the idea of an inherent moral understanding within human cognitive structure.

### **Conclusion:**

Dr. Spiegel's lecture introduces the complex problem of divine hiddenness and examines various attempts to reconcile the apparent lack of clear divine evidence with theistic beliefs. While acknowledging the validity of the initial problem as articulated by van Inwagen, the lecture delves into Murray's free will defense, which posits that God's hiddenness is crucial for genuine human freedom in choosing Him by mitigating the compulsion of the threat of hell. However, Lovering's critique challenges this view, arguing that divine hiddenness can lead to moral ignorance and undermine moral development. Dr. Spiegel concludes by defending against Lovering's argument through the concept of natural law, suggesting an innate human understanding of morality that persists even in the absence of explicit belief in a readily apparent God. The lecture highlights the ongoing philosophical debate surrounding this challenging issue for theism.

## 4. Study Guide: Spiegel, Philosophy of Religion, Session 11, Divine Hiddenness

### Study Guide: The Problem of Divine Hiddenness

#### Quiz

1. According to Peter van Inwagen, what is the core issue of the problem of divine hiddenness, and what logical structure does his summary of the problem take?
2. Explain Peter van Inwagen's point about the distinction between the problem of divine hiddenness and the problem of evil. Provide an example to illustrate this distinction.
3. According to the text, why does Van Inwagen believe God cares about *how* people come to believe in Him? What does he suggest ubiquitous miracles would prompt?
4. How does Michael Murray utilize a free will theodicy to address the problem of divine hiddenness? What is he primarily concerned with preserving?
5. Describe Michael Murray's concept of "threat significance." What three main factors does he identify as contributing to its strength?
6. According to Murray, which of the factors influencing threat significance does God primarily mitigate to preserve human freedom? Explain his reasoning for this conclusion.
7. Summarize Lovering's critique of Murray's argument. What is the central problem Lovering identifies with divine hiddenness in relation to moral development?
8. According to Lovering, what is necessary (but not sufficient) for developing morally significant character, and how does divine hiddenness undermine this?
9. What is Dr. Spiegel's main critique of Lovering's argument? What concept does he introduce as a potential way God could ensure knowledge of the moral good without eliminating free will?
10. How does Dr. Spiegel describe the nature of the moral understanding he believes God has instilled in humanity? Does it require explicit divine revelation?

#### Quiz Answer Key

1. Van Inwagen argues that if God exists, it is crucial for humans to know, and God would provide clear signs of His existence. However, since there are no such unmistakable signs, there is reason to doubt God's existence. His summary takes the form of a valid deductive argument with premises and a conclusion.
2. Van Inwagen states that the problem of divine hiddenness could exist even in a world devoid of moral evil and suffering. For example, in a utopian world with no sin or pain, people might still question their origins and God's existence due to the lack of obvious divine presence, making it a purely epistemological issue.
3. Van Inwagen believes God cares about the *how* of belief because He is interested in significant personal transformation, not just bare intellectual assent. He suggests ubiquitous miracles would only prompt a superficial belief in God, lacking the depth of personal change God desires.
4. Murray applies a free will theodicy by arguing that divine hiddenness is necessary to preserve human freedom in choosing to follow God. He believes that an overly obvious God would compel belief, negating genuine free choice and a meaningful relationship.
5. Threat significance refers to the degree to which a potential threat compels a person's actions. Murray identifies threat strength (severity of consequences), threat imminence (likelihood and timing of consequences), and the wantonness of the threatened (how much the person cares about their well-being) as key factors.
6. According to Murray, God primarily mitigates epistemic threat imminence by hiding himself. He reasons that the threat of eternal damnation (strength) remains, and humans do care about their well-being (wantonness), while making the threat epistemically ambiguous reduces compulsion and allows for freer choice.
7. Lovering argues that while Murray believes divine hiddenness preserves free will for moral development, it simultaneously undermines the knowledge of what is morally good. If God is hidden, some will justifiably lose belief and become inculpably ignorant of morality, hindering their ability to choose good actions.
8. Lovering states that choosing freely between good and evil is necessary for moral development, but so is the *intention* to choose morally good actions. If God is hidden, individuals may become moral nihilists, lacking belief in objective good and thus the ability to intend to do good.

9. Dr. Spiegel critiques Lovering by suggesting that Lovering overlooks the concept of natural law – the idea that God has instilled a basic understanding of right and wrong in the human heart. This innate moral awareness, through conscience, could allow people to know the moral good even without explicit divine revelation, thus countering Lovering's argument.
10. Dr. Spiegel describes this innate moral understanding as a basic awareness of right and wrong, virtue and vice, good and bad, which is built into the human cognitive structure. He believes this understanding is present in all people through conscience or a "law of God written on the heart" and does not require explicit written revelation.

### **Essay Format Questions**

1. Critically analyze Peter van Inwagen's formulation of the problem of divine hiddenness. What are the strengths and potential weaknesses of his argument? Consider the implications of the claim that the argument is valid.
2. Compare and contrast Michael Murray's free will theodicy as a response to divine hiddenness with Lovering's critique. Which argument do you find more compelling and why?
3. Evaluate Dr. Spiegel's appeal to natural law as a solution to the problem raised by Lovering. How effectively does the concept of an innate moral understanding address the concern that divine hiddenness leads to inculpable moral ignorance?
4. Discuss the relationship between the problem of divine hiddenness and the problem of evil. Are they distinct issues, as van Inwagen suggests, or are they fundamentally intertwined? Support your position with arguments from the provided text.
5. Consider the implications of divine hiddenness for religious belief and practice. If God's existence is not obvious, how might this affect individuals' faith, their engagement with religious communities, and the nature of religious experience?



## Glossary of Key Terms

- **Theism:** The belief in the existence of God or gods, especially belief in one god as creator and ruler of the universe.
- **Divine Hiddenness:** The philosophical problem concerning the fact that God's existence is not obvious to everyone, raising questions about God's nature and intentions.
- **Epistemological Problem:** A problem related to knowledge, belief, and justification. In the context of divine hiddenness, it concerns the lack of clear evidence for God's existence.
- **Free Will Theodicy:** An attempt to justify God's allowance of evil by appealing to the value of free will. It suggests that God permits evil because it is a necessary consequence of granting humans free choices.
- **Threat Significance:** In Michael Murray's argument, the degree to which a potential threat (like hell) compels a person's actions. It is influenced by threat strength, imminence, and the wantonness of the threatened.
- **Probabilistic Threat Imminence:** The perceived likelihood that the consequences of a threat will occur under certain conditions.
- **Temporal Threat Imminence:** The perceived nearness in time of the consequences of a threat.
- **Epistemic Threat Imminence:** The clarity and unambiguousness of a threat.
- **Wantonness of the Threatened:** The degree to which the person facing a threat disregards their own well-being.
- **Inculpable Ignorance:** Ignorance for which a person is not blameworthy. In the context of morality, it refers to a non-culpable lack of awareness of what is right and wrong.
- **Moral Nihilism:** The view that morality does not exist in any objective sense, and thus there are no truly good or bad actions.
- **Natural Law:** The theory that there is a moral order inherent in the universe or discernible through human reason, often believed to be divinely ordained and universally binding.

## 5. FAQs on Spiegel, Philosophy of Religion, Session 11, Divine Hiddenness, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

### Frequently Asked Questions: Divine Hiddenness

**1. What is the problem of divine hiddenness, as described by Peter van Inwagen?** The problem of divine hiddenness, according to Peter van Inwagen, is the apparent contradiction between the belief that God exists and wants humanity to know this truth, and the fact that God has not made his existence obvious or provided unmistakable signs for everyone. Van Inwagen argues that if God exists, it's a crucial piece of information for humans, and a capable God would provide clear evidence. The lack of such universally recognized and unambiguous signs, therefore, gives reason to doubt God's existence.

**2. How is the problem of divine hiddenness distinct from the problem of evil?** While some consider divine hiddenness an aspect of the problem of evil, it can also be viewed as a separate epistemological issue. Even in a hypothetical world devoid of moral evil and suffering, the question of why God's existence isn't more apparent would still arise. People might still wonder about their origins and the nature of reality, and the lack of clear divine revelation in such a world would still constitute a form of "hiddenness," independent of the problem of suffering.

**3. According to Michael Murray, how does divine hiddenness relate to human free will?** Michael Murray argues that divine hiddenness serves a vital purpose in preserving human freedom to choose or reject God. If God's existence and the consequences of disbelief (like hell) were overwhelmingly obvious and imminent, individuals might feel compelled to believe and obey out of fear, rather than genuine free choice and personal transformation. By making his existence somewhat ambiguous, God reduces the "epistemic threat imminence," allowing for a more genuinely free decision to follow or not follow Him.

**4. What are the factors that Michael Murray identifies as contributing to the significance of a threat, and how does God allegedly mitigate the threat of hell?** Murray identifies several factors related to threat significance: threat strength (how harmful the consequences are perceived to be), threat imminence (how likely and how soon the consequences are expected to follow), and the wantonness of the threatened (how much the person cares about their own well-being). He argues that God does not reduce the threat strength (eternal damnation) or diminish people's concern for their well-being. Instead, God primarily mitigates the threat through epistemic threat

imminence by making his existence and the associated consequences less clear and unambiguous.

**5. How does Lovering critique Michael Murray's argument regarding divine hiddenness and free will?**

Lovering argues that while Murray is correct in suggesting that compulsion would undermine morally significant character development, divine hiddenness itself creates another obstacle: inculpable ignorance of the moral status of actions. If God is hidden, some individuals may justifiably lose belief in God and consequently become uncertain about what constitutes good and evil. Without a clear understanding of moral truths, they cannot intentionally choose good actions, thus hindering moral development. Lovering concludes that both God's hiddenness and non-hiddenness lead to an inability to develop morally significant characters, suggesting a contradiction and thus grounds for atheism.

**6. What is Dr. Spiegel's primary counter-argument to Lovering's critique?**

Dr. Spiegel argues that Lovering overlooks the concept of natural law – the idea that God has instilled in human beings an innate understanding of basic right and wrong, often referred to as conscience or the law of God written on the heart. This inherent moral awareness allows people to generally discern good from evil even without explicit or universally obvious divine revelation. Therefore, even if God is somewhat hidden, individuals still possess a foundational moral compass that enables them to develop morally significant characters.

**7. According to the sources, why might God prioritize personal transformation over mere belief?**

The sources suggest that God's aim is not simply to have people acknowledge his existence, but to foster significant personal transformation in individuals. Ubiquitous and undeniable displays of divine power might lead to a superficial belief based on overwhelming evidence, rather than a deeply personal and freely chosen relationship with God. Divine hiddenness, by requiring faith and a genuine seeking of God, creates an environment where such meaningful transformations are more likely and more significant.

**8. What are the key tensions and unanswered questions that arise from the discussion of divine hiddenness?**

The discussion highlights the tension between God's purported desire for humanity to know Him and the apparent lack of universally clear evidence. It raises questions about the nature of human freedom in relation to divine knowledge, the necessity of belief for moral understanding, and the extent to which innate moral awareness is sufficient in the absence of explicit divine revelation. Ultimately, the problem of divine hiddenness challenges theists to reconcile their belief in a loving and communicative God with the reality of widespread doubt and unbelief.