

The Clarity Coercion Mistake

Divine Hiddenness, Doxastic Freedom, and the Difference between Evidence and Allegiance

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Revised August 2026

Central claim

A generic free-will defense of divine hiddenness must show that every feasible form of clear, non-dominating disclosure would remove a meaningful freedom to refuse allegiance. Yet such evidence can settle whether a specified Christian deity exists while leaving evaluation, trust, worship, obedience, resentment, and resistance open. If pressure arises only when clarity is joined to punishment or manipulation, the threat rather than the evidence does the coercive work. This defeats the generic clarity-to-coercion inference, not every possible reason for hiddenness or every Christian God-concept.

Preview: The defense needs a universal bridge

Defense	Required bridge	Counterexample	Bounded result
Hiddenness preserves morally important freedom.	Every feasible clear, non-dominating disclosure must eliminate meaningful refusal of allegiance.	Non-dominating clarity can settle existence while leaving trust, worship, obedience, and resistance open.	The generic free-will defense fails unless it identifies an additional coercive mechanism.

An overpowering manifestation may pressure a person, but that establishes a ceiling on how disclosure should occur, not a need for ambiguity about whether the relationship partner exists.

Visual preview:

Clarity Is Not Coercion: Why Evidence Doesn't Kill Free Will



THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN FACTS AND ALLEGIANCE

EPISTEMIC REJECTION VS. VOLITIONAL REFUSAL

Knowing a fact is not the same as offering your heart or loyalty.



CLARITY ONLY ENDS IGNORANCE

Evidence settles the question of existence but leaves the choice of relationship open.



YOU CAN RESIST A KNOWN AUTHORITY

Just as citizens can resist a known king, humans can resist a known God.



IGNORANCE IS NOT FREEDOM

Hiding facts does not protect the will; it simply manufactures a state of ignorance.

WHY EVIDENCE ENHANCES AGENCY



INFORMATION IS THE BASIS OF CONSENT

Like medical or legal contracts, true freedom requires knowing exactly what you are choosing.



EVIDENCE ≠ FORCE

A fire alarm informs you of danger; it does not force you to leave.

IMPACT OF CLEAR EVIDENCE ON RESPONSE TYPES

TYPE OF RESPONSE	IMPACT	REMAINS FREE?
Epistemic (Belief)	Settles the facts	No (Rational necessity) 
Ideological (Values)	Clarifies the conflict	Yes 
Volitional (Will)	Informs the choice	Yes 

The brain, known authority, open gate, consent form, and fire alarm distinguish evidence-responsive belief from evaluative and volitional response. The bottom panel maps those differences across three response types. The image illustrates why knowing that an authority exists need not settle allegiance; it does not show that every disclosure is harmless or that any Christian deity exists.

Abstract

One familiar response to divine hiddenness says that clearer evidence of a Christian deity would compromise free will, genuine love, or morally significant response. The strongest version is not the implausible claim that evidence physically forces conduct. It is that sufficiently vivid knowledge, especially when joined to divine authority and punishment, would make refusal psychologically nonviable. This paper tests that defense by separating the truth-directed formation of belief from evaluation, allegiance, and action, and by separating evidential clarity from salience, threat, manipulation, and the removal of alternatives.

The generic defense fails unless it establishes a universal bridge: every feasible, non-dominating form of clarity must eliminate a meaningful freedom to refuse allegiance. That bridge is not established. Clear evidence can constrain what a person can responsibly believe without determining whether the person trusts, worships, obeys, resents, ignores, or resists the disclosed authority. If the alleged coercion appears only when clarity is combined with threatened punishment, then the threat supplies the pressure. Making the threatener's existence less credible may reduce felt pressure, but it does not turn threat into love or show that ambiguity is necessary for relationship.

The result is deliberately bounded. Overwhelming manifestation, manipulation, or explicit sanctions may impair agency, and a theist may propose other goods served by some hiddenness. The argument does not disprove theism or every Christian God-concept. It shows that the move from "clear enough to know" to "too clear to choose" requires a mechanism and a comparison that the generic free-will reply does not supply. A successful defense must specify the threatened freedom, compare concealment with the least coercive feasible disclosure, explain uneven access to evidence, and show why informed refusal is less morally valuable than refusal under ambiguity.

Keywords: divine hiddenness; free will; doxastic agency; coercion; nonresistant nonbelief; religious epistemology; allegiance

1 The Narrow Defense Under Examination

The contemporary problem of divine hiddenness begins from an apparent mismatch. A perfectly loving personal reality would seem open to relationship with capable, nonresistant persons, yet some such persons appear unable to believe that this reality exists. Schellenberg develops that mismatch as an argument against a perfectly loving personal deity; later collections show how widely the debate ranges across love, evidence, formation, suffering, cognition, and religious traditions (Schellenberg 1993; Schellenberg 2015; Howard-Snyder and Moser 2002; Green and Stump 2016). The present paper does not try to settle that larger argument. It examines one reply: clearer evidence would endanger morally important freedom.

For clarity, a *God-concept* is a specified conception of a deity with enough attributes to identify the account under discussion. The target is a Christian God-concept according to which a perfectly loving and authoritative deity seeks some form of human relationship yet permits substantial uncertainty about divine existence. The free-will defense says that this uncertainty protects a kind of response worth having.

Michael Murray offers the most disciplined version of the reply. His account does not merely equate evidence with physical force. It links vivid knowledge of the Christian deity and divine sanctions to the structure of a threat. The strength of the sanction remains fixed, while uncertainty lowers its felt imminence. On this proposal, a worldwide display would make the threat too psychologically forceful for morally significant conduct; general revelation must therefore remain limited (Murray 1993). This is much stronger than the slogan "proof would destroy faith" because it identifies a mechanism.

That strength also reveals the argument's cost. If a disclosure pressures because it makes punishment credible, the pressure comes from punishment joined to authority, not from evidence as such. Reducing confidence in the threatener's existence can attenuate pressure, but it does so by obscuring the situation

in which the person is expected to respond. The defense must explain why this loss of information improves freedom rather than merely making the consequences easier to discount.

The question is therefore not whether any imaginable manifestation could overwhelm. Of course it could. The question is whether every feasible disclosure clear enough for responsible belief would eliminate a morally important ability to refuse relationship. Only that universal claim can support hiddenness as necessary for freedom.

The governing burden

To justify hiddenness by appeal to freedom, the defender must identify a freedom worth preserving and show that the least coercive feasible form of clarity would remove it. Pointing to a terrifying display shows that one mode of manifestation is objectionable; it does not show that ambiguity about existence is required.

2 Separate the Variables

The phrase “free to reject” can refer to several different powers. A person may lack direct control over whether evidence produces belief yet retain control over inquiry, attention, public assertion, practical acceptance, allegiance, and action. Williams and Alston press classic objections to treating belief as directly chosen, while Hieronymi argues that belief remains answerable to agency even though one cannot simply believe at will (Williams 1973; Alston 1988; Hieronymi 2006). Cohen’s distinction between belief and acceptance further explains how someone may believe a proposition while declining to adopt it as a premise for policy or action (Cohen 1992).

These distinctions matter because clarity affects each response differently. Table 1 shows the basic map. It is not a complete theory of mind or freedom. It identifies where a freedom defense must do its work.

Table 1: Four responses that the clarity argument must not collapse.

Response	Question	Likely effect of strong evidence	What can remain open
Epistemic belief	Does the specified deity exist?	May strongly constrain reasonable denial when evidence is decisive.	Inquiry into attributes, interpretation, and implications.
Evaluative judgment	Is this authority good, just, or worthy?	Supplies an object for assessment but does not settle the assessment.	Approval, criticism, resentment, or moral protest.
Allegiance	Will I trust, worship, identify with, or submit to this authority?	Clarifies whom the response concerns.	Loyalty, refusal, estrangement, reconciliation, or conditional cooperation.
Action	What will I do?	Changes information and perceived stakes.	Obedience, resistance, concealment, bargaining, or mixed compliance.

The key asymmetry is simple. Evidence bears directly on a truth-directed attitude: belief. Allegiance answers a different question about trust, value, identity, and practical orientation. A person can know that an institution exists while judging it illegitimate. A citizen can recognize a government and resist it. A patient can believe a diagnosis and refuse treatment. These comparisons are imperfect, but their logical point is enough: existence belief does not entail evaluative endorsement or practical allegiance.

The defense can reply that divine disclosure would be unlike ordinary evidence because the disclosed authority would be perfect, omniscient, and able to impose ultimate consequences. That reply adds

content, but it concedes the distinction. Perfection would provide reasons for positive evaluation; omniscience would reduce the prospect of hiding; sanctions would raise the cost of refusal. None of those is simply the fact that evidence is clear. The argument must show how these additional features remove freedom, and whether the resulting pressure is compatible with the kind of love or trust the defense seeks to protect.

3 Evidence, Salience, and Coercion

Evidence changes what it is reasonable to believe. Salience changes what commands attention. Coercion, in central philosophical and legal uses, involves an agent using a threat or controlling proposal to make an option unacceptably costly; manipulation instead works by bypassing or distorting deliberation (Wertheimer 1987). These properties often travel together in dramatic thought experiments, but they can come apart.

A fire alarm is salient evidence of danger. It makes remaining in a building less reasonable, but the alarm does not itself threaten to create the fire if one stays. A robber's demand is different: an agent deliberately makes refusal costly. A quietly available public record may be strong evidence without spectacle. A vivid apparition may be spectacular without establishing a stable public fact. A threat-saturated revelation may combine evidence, salience, authority, and sanction in one experience.

The free-will defense becomes clearer once these dimensions are separated. If the objection concerns manipulation, the remedy is a mode of communication that leaves reflective capacities intact. If it concerns fear, the remedy is disclosure without punitive intimidation. If it concerns social domination, the remedy is room for criticism, distance, and refusal. If it concerns rational belief becoming unavoidable, the defense must explain why freedom to remain mistaken is essential to morally valuable relationship.

This yields a distinction between a *clarity floor* and a *clarity ceiling*. The floor is enough accessible evidence for a capable, sincere person to form a responsible belief about whether the relationship partner exists. The ceiling is a level or mode of manifestation so overwhelming that it disrupts attention, emotion, or deliberation. A good communicator can stay above the floor and below the ceiling. The mere existence of a ceiling does not justify remaining below the floor.

Murray recognizes part of this problem when he notes that his argument against a grand universal display does not show that one additional unit of manifestation would collapse freedom (Murray 1993). He proposes calibrating general disclosure to those most vulnerable to threat. Yet the calibration is driven by the traditional punitive story: stronger confidence makes eternal consequences harder to discount. That proposal may explain why a threatener would preserve uncertainty. It does not show why a loving relationship requires uncertainty, or why individualized, non-dominating clarity is unavailable.

4 The Threat Fork

The strongest defense faces a fork. On the first branch, clarity itself is said to remove freedom. On the second, clarity becomes freedom-threatening only when joined to authority, punishment, or psychological domination. Table 2 makes the options explicit.

Table 2: Two versions of the clarity defense and the non-dominating comparison.

Version	Claim	Pressure point	Evidential cost
Clarity alone	Settled existence belief eliminates meaningful response.	Belief is treated as though it were allegiance.	Must explain why informed resistance, protest, or refusal is not free.
Clarity plus threat	Credible authority and severe sanctions make refusal psychologically nonviable.	Threat strength and imminence, not evidence by itself.	Ambiguity protects choice by making the threat easier to doubt, which complicates love and accountability.
Non-dominating clarity	Existence is responsibly knowable without spectacle, manipulation, or punitive intimidation.	Ordinary reasons and open alternatives.	Defeats the necessity claim unless this option is shown infeasible.

The first branch fails without an additional bridge. Belief that a person exists does not logically entail affection for that person; belief that an authority exists does not entail endorsement; knowledge of a command does not entail obedience. The defender may say that a perfectly good authority would deserve allegiance. Even then, deserved allegiance and psychologically unavoidable allegiance are different. Moral reasons can be decisive without erasing agency.

The second branch is more serious because threats can undermine voluntariness. Yet it changes the diagnosis. Suppose a person would comply only because clear evidence makes endless punishment certain. The resulting action looks less like freely offered love, not more. Preserving uncertainty about whether the threatener exists reduces perceived pressure, but it also makes the relationship invitation and the threatened consequences less informed. Hiddenness then functions as a dimmer switch on a coercive arrangement.

The defender might answer that the sanction is not a threat but a natural consequence of separation, or that punishment is chosen by the resister. Those proposals deserve separate analysis. They do not restore the generic inference from clarity to coercion. They replace it with claims about the nature of harm, responsibility, and the causal structure of separation. The defense succeeds only if those claims are stated and supported.

This fork also clarifies what the paper does not claim. It does not say that fear never affects agency or that every person under pressure remains equally free. It says that a freedom defense cannot attribute the loss of agency to evidence when the operative mechanism is a threat, manipulation, or the removal of alternatives.

5 Belief Is Not Chosen, but Inquiry Still Matters

Direct doxastic voluntarism is the view that a person can choose a belief simply by deciding to have it. The familiar problem is transparency: when considering whether a proposition is true, one cannot ordinarily settle the matter by asking which belief would be convenient. Williams uses this connection to truth to explain why deciding to believe is not like deciding to raise a hand (Williams 1973). Alston draws consequences for epistemic obligation, and Hieronymi argues that attitudes remain governed by agency through attention to reasons, reflection, and revision even though they are not produced at will (Alston 1988; Hieronymi 2006).

This matters in both directions. If belief is largely evidence-responsive, then withholding evidence does not preserve a basic freedom to choose nonbelief. It changes the inputs to a truth-directed process. Yet people still exercise agency in whether they investigate, avoid, reinterpret, seek communities, and

expose themselves to counterevidence. A stronger defense can therefore focus on the freedom of inquiry rather than a mythical switch for belief.

But freedom of inquiry does not require an absent answer. Good inquiry needs accessible evidence, opportunities for correction, and protection against manipulation. A teacher does not preserve intellectual autonomy by making the subject's existence doubtful. A court does not protect deliberation by hiding whether a statute was enacted. Uncertainty can sometimes stimulate search, humility, or perseverance, but those goods require calibration and distribution. They do not follow from ambiguity as such.

Plantinga's model of a *sensus divinitatis*, a natural capacity that produces theistic belief under suitable conditions, creates internal pressure on the simple freedom defense (Plantinga 2000). If properly functioning recognition can be warranted and noncoercive, then awareness of a deity is not automatically a threat to agency. The model may explain nonbelief through malfunction or resistance, but that is a human-defectiveness account, not an argument that clarity itself destroys freedom.

6 Relational Freedom Requires a Recognizable Other

Relationship is not identical to belief, but belief that another exists is normally a gateway condition for reciprocal personal response. Schellenberg builds the hiddenness argument around this openness-to-relationship point: nonresistant nonbelief blocks relationship before allegiance can be considered (Schellenberg 1993; Schellenberg 2015). The free-will reply tries to protect relationship by limiting the very information that makes relationship available.

The tension is visible in ordinary consent. Informed consent does not guarantee agreement; it makes agreement or refusal answerable to the actual proposal. Trust requires a minimally identifiable trustee. Forgiveness requires some grasp of who wronged whom. Allegiance requires a recognizable object and terms. When identity, intentions, and stakes are persistently ambiguous, refusal may be less pressured, but acceptance is also less informed.

Moser offers a sophisticated alternative to purely public evidence. On his account, evidence of divine reality is purposively authoritative and calls for moral transformation, not merely assent to a detached proposition (Moser 2008). This view rightly denies that religious relationship is exhausted by bare existence belief. It also intensifies the need to separate disclosure from compelled response. An invitation can disclose both the inviter and the moral demand while leaving surrender open. If authoritative evidence by definition arrives only when a person is already willing to submit, the account risks making openness a condition for recognizing the evidence; it then owes an explanation of sincere seekers who remain unconvinced.

The same point applies to analogies of a hidden ruler who wishes to avoid status-based affection. Disguising rank can reveal character, but the relationship eventually requires a determinate person. Permanent uncertainty about whether anyone is present does not protect personal love; it prevents some people from reaching the stage at which love or refusal becomes possible.

Recent work on just accountability adds a related concern. If commands bind because of the authority that issues them, people need recognizable grounds for thinking the commander exists and issued the command (Elbert 2026). This does not by itself settle divine hiddenness. It shows that opacity has a moral cost. A defense that invokes freedom must compare that cost with the alleged benefit rather than treating ignorance as automatically liberating.

7 Strong Replies and Their Limits

The generic defense can be refined in several ways. Each refinement deserves credit for moving beyond the clarity slogan. Each also changes what must be established.

7.1 Overwhelming manifestation

A defender may limit the claim to terrifying or psychologically invasive disclosure. This is plausible: an experience that disables reflection can impair agency. The concession, however, is decisive for the generic argument. It justifies avoiding a mode of manifestation, not permitting widespread uncertainty about existence. Stable public evidence, reliable personal communication, and less culturally accidental access remain open comparisons.

7.2 Soul-making and moral formation

Ambiguity may create opportunities for courage, patience, humility, or the development of motives not dominated by reward and punishment. The broader hiddenness literature explores such goods and their relation to freedom and suffering (Howard-Snyder and Moser 2002; Green and Stump 2016). A refined defense must show more than possible benefit. It must explain why these goods require uncertainty about existence, why clearer but non-dominating conditions could not support them, and why their distribution tracks the actual distribution of evidence.

7.3 Victim-centered freedom and culpability

Dumsday develops a free-will response oriented toward victims of wrongdoing rather than simply the wrongdoer's freedom (Dumsday 2010). This is a useful warning against evaluating hiddenness only through the potential offender. Yet any victim-centered rationale must also count the costs of opacity: uncertainty about justice, accountability, repair, and whether help is available. The good served must be specified, not inferred from the bare possibility that some moral history goes better under ambiguity.

7.4 Resistance and human defectiveness

A defender may say that sufficient evidence is already available and that nonbelief results from culpable resistance or damaged cognition. This may fit some people. It cannot be assumed for every case without investigating the person's evidence, effort, and openness. Plantinga's model makes room for cognitive malfunction, and Murray combines free choice with self-induced distortion (Plantinga 2000; Murray 1993). Such accounts are alternatives to the claim that clarity would coerce. They say clarity is present but misprocessed.

The danger is self-sealing diagnosis: belief counts as successful recognition while nonbelief is explained as resistance. Maitzen's demographic argument presses the problem because theistic belief varies strongly with geography and culture, patterns for which ordinary social transmission is an available explanation (Maitzen 2006). A human-defectiveness account must explain why culpable resistance clusters this way and how sincere counterexamples could be recognized.

7.5 The freedom not to be morally exposed

Perhaps the valuable freedom is not disbelief but distance from an authoritative moral gaze. Clear awareness of a perfectly informed evaluator could change the texture of every choice. That is a real concern. It is also difficult to reconcile with accounts on which the evaluator is already omniscient and accountability already applies. Hiddenness changes the agent's awareness, not the alleged fact of observation. The defender must explain why less-informed agency is more morally valuable and why later judgment based on that agency is fair.

Across these replies, the same discipline applies: identify the good, specify the mechanism, compare feasible alternatives, and count the costs of opacity. A merely possible good does not establish that actual hiddenness is necessary or proportionate.

8 Uneven Clarity and Internal Counterpressure

Even if some ambiguity protected freedom, actual disclosure appears uneven. Some people report vivid religious experiences; others inherit confident belief through family and culture; others search without finding what they regard as adequate evidence. Maitzen argues that the geographical distribution of theistic belief creates a special challenge for hiddenness explanations (Maitzen 2006). Unevenness matters here because a freedom-preserving level should track vulnerability to coercion rather than accidents of birthplace, language, or religious community.

The Christian tradition also contains internal counterpressure against the claim that knowledge eliminates refusal. Biblical narratives portray agents who recognize divine authority yet resist it: the demons in James 2:19 believe and shudder; Israel's wilderness rebellions occur after dramatic deliverance; and several judgment narratives presume awareness without allegiance. These texts are not neutral historical proof, and their interpretation is contested. Their limited role is conceptual and internal. A defense that treats the narratives as coherent already grants that awareness and rebellion can coexist.

Plantinga's properly functioning awareness supplies a second internal pressure, while Moser's emphasis on morally transformative response supplies a third. In both cases, the valued religious state is not ignorance. It is a response to reality under appropriate conditions (Plantinga 2000; Moser 2008). The debate should therefore move away from whether clarity is possible and toward which form of disclosure respects reflective agency.

The distribution problem does not prove that no justifying reason exists. It places a burden on the freedom defense. If high clarity is compatible with freedom for some believers, the defender must explain why comparable clarity would be coercive for sincere nonbelievers. If individual calibration is possible, culturally patterned uncertainty needs explanation. If it is not possible, omniscience and personalized relationship appear to do less work than the defense usually assumes.

9 What a Successful Defense Still Owes

A disciplined freedom defense should answer five questions.

1. **Which freedom?** Is the concern direct belief, inquiry, evaluation, allegiance, action, or freedom from fear? These are not interchangeable.
2. **What mechanism?** Does agency fail through evidence, spectacle, threat, manipulation, cognitive overload, or removal of alternatives?
3. **Compared with what?** The relevant alternative is the least coercive feasible disclosure above the clarity floor, not a worldwide display joined to punishment.
4. **Why this distribution?** Why do confidence and ambiguity track culture, testimony, and personal experience rather than a recognizable calibration to vulnerability?
5. **What moral cost?** How does the proposed benefit outweigh less-informed consent, blocked relationship, uncertain accountability, and the burdens borne by sincere seekers?

These questions do not assume that every person deserves a spectacle or that evidence must compel belief. They demand the same comparative discipline used elsewhere: if ambiguity is said to be necessary for a good, identify the good, show the dependency, and rule out less costly routes.

The practical implication is direct. Apologists should stop moving from "proof might overwhelm" to "hiddenness protects freedom" without an intermediate argument. A coherent story about one dangerous mode of revelation is not yet an explanation of the present degree or distribution of uncertainty.

10 Conclusion

The clarity-coercion defense compresses several different relations. Evidence can constrain reasonable belief; salience can capture attention; threats can make refusal costly; manipulation can bypass reflection; and authority can create reasons for action. None of these by itself is allegiance, love, or obedience.

The generic free-will reply therefore needs a universal bridge: every feasible, non-dominating disclosure clear enough for responsible belief would have to eliminate meaningful refusal. The belief/allegiance distinction and the threat fork show why that bridge is not automatic. If clarity alone is blamed, informed resistance is a counterexample. If punishment makes clarity coercive, the threat does the work, and ambiguity functions by making the threat less credible.

This result does not disprove theism, every Christian God-concept, or every proposed good served by hiddenness. It rejects a shortcut. A serious defense must name the threatened freedom, identify the causal mechanism, compare concealment with non-dominating clarity, explain uneven disclosure, and count the relational and moral costs of uncertainty. Until those burdens are met, clarity threatens a weak explanation of hiddenness, not human freedom.

A Formal Reconstruction of the Central Thesis

Plain-language reconstruction

- P1.** If the generic free-will defense successfully shows that hiddenness is necessary for meaningful refusal, then every feasible form of clear, non-dominating disclosure removes a meaningful ability to refuse allegiance.
- P2.** At least one feasible form of clear, non-dominating disclosure leaves that ability intact: reliable, non-spectacular communication can make the specified deity's existence responsibly knowable without threat, manipulation, or removal of evaluative and practical alternatives.

Conclusion. Therefore, the generic free-will defense has not shown that hiddenness is necessary. This conclusion leaves open other defenses of hiddenness, the possibility that particular manifestations would impair agency, and the existence of the Christian God-concept under examination.

Symbols

- x : a disclosure mode feasible for the Christian God-concept under examination. The quantifiers below range only over these feasible modes, not over every imaginable display.
- D : the generic free-will defense succeeds in establishing that hiddenness is necessary for meaningful refusal. This symbol concerns what that defense establishes; it does not mean that every possible defense of hiddenness succeeds.
- $C(x)$: disclosure x makes the specified deity's existence clear enough for responsible belief. It need not settle every claim about the deity's character or commands.
- $N(x)$: disclosure x is non-dominating; it does not use threat, manipulation, cognitive disablement, or removal of meaningful evaluative and practical alternatives.
- $R(x)$: under disclosure x , a person retains a meaningful ability to withhold allegiance, criticize, disobey, or resist. Refusal may be unreasonable or blameworthy and still remain a possible response.
- S : the universal bridge required by the generic defense: every disclosure mode that is both clear and non-dominating removes meaningful refusal.

The operators are read as follows. $\wedge$ means “and”; $\rightarrow$ means “if this, then that”; $\neg$ means “not”; $\forall x$ means “for every feasible disclosure x ”; $\exists x$ means “there is at least one feasible disclosure x ”; $\equiv$ means “is logically equivalent here to”; and $\therefore$ means “therefore”.

Symbolic form

Let the defense's universal bridge be abbreviated as:

$$S \equiv \forall x [(C(x) \wedge N(x)) \rightarrow \neg R(x)].$$

In words, S says that every clear and non-dominating disclosure removes meaningful refusal. That universal claim has the following negation:

$$\neg S \equiv \exists x [C(x) \wedge N(x) \wedge R(x)].$$

This equivalence states the counterexample rule in compact form. To disprove the claim that *every* clear, non-dominating disclosure removes refusal, one needs only *one* feasible disclosure that is clear, remains non-dominating, and preserves refusal. In that one case, the condition $C(x) \wedge N(x)$ is met while the predicted result $\neg R(x)$ is false.

The complete inference is:

$D \rightarrow S$	Success by the generic defense requires the universal bridge.	(1)
$\exists x [C(x) \wedge N(x) \wedge R(x)]$	One feasible clear, non-dominating disclosure preserves refusal.	(2)
$\therefore \neg S$	That single counterexample makes the universal bridge false.	(3)
$\therefore \neg D$	So the generic defense does not establish necessity.	(4)

Why each step follows

1. $D \rightarrow S$ states a necessary condition, not a sufficient one. It says that the generic defense cannot establish necessity unless it rules out every feasible clear, non-dominating mode that preserves refusal. Even if S were true, more argument might still be needed for D .
2. The second line is the substantive counterexample premise. It identifies the exact kind of case defended in the body: clarity about existence without threat or manipulation, while evaluative and practical refusal remains open.
3. Line 2 entails $\neg S$ because a universal claim is false when one case meets its condition but not its predicted result. Here, one x satisfies $C(x)$ and $N(x)$ while also satisfying $R(x)$, contrary to S 's prediction $\neg R(x)$.
4. From $D \rightarrow S$ and $\neg S$, $\neg D$ follows by *modus tollens*: if success required the bridge, but the bridge is false, the generic defense has not succeeded.

Validity and premise support

The inference is deductively valid: if both premises are granted, the conclusion must follow. Its validity depends only on the logical form. It does not depend on whether a reader already accepts the paper's account of freedom or divine disclosure.

Validity does not settle whether the premises are true. Line 1 states the conceptual burden created by a necessity defense. Line 2 is a defeasible possibility premise: it claims that at least one relevant kind of disclosure is feasible. The body supports it by separating belief from allegiance, distinguishing evidence from threat, and describing clear communication that leaves evaluative and practical alternatives open. A defender can challenge line 2 by showing that the proposed disclosure is not genuinely feasible for the Christian God-concept under examination, is not clear enough for responsible belief, is dominating after all, or cannot preserve meaningful refusal.

Finally, $\neg D$ is deliberately narrow. It means that this generic free-will defense has not established hiddenness as necessary for meaningful refusal. It does not mean that hiddenness is unnecessary, that every actual disclosure is noncoercive, that hiddenness has no other justification, that theism is false, or that no Christian deity exists.

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