



A Critique of Schellenberg's New Logical Argument from Evil

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Abstract

In a new formulation of the logical problem of evil, J. L. Schellenberg attempts to develop a new version of the logical form of the problem of evil through the logical inconsistency of the conjunction of three theistic claims with the existence of evil. Schellenberg, by appealing to three commitments of theism: *Unsurpassable Greatness* (UG), *Ontological Independence* (OI), and *Prior Purity* (PP), adopts two approaches *the Modeling* and *the Motivation* to demonstrate the inconsistency of the conjunction of these theistic claims with the existence of evil. To pursue this aim, Schellenberg develops his argument by adding supplementary propositions to the four claims. Therefore, what is shown from the conjunction of the three theistic claims and additional propositions is that there is no evil in the world, whereas this is logically inconsistent with the existence of evil in the world.

This paper through an analytical-critical approach aims to show Schellenberg's argument is not sound. To show its falsity, this paper has focused on premise (8) as the central premise of Schellenberg's argument. By showing its falsity, it would also be vulnerable to the free will defense. In addition to Gellman's critique over premise (8), this paper also poses a dilemma over (8) to show Schellenberg's argument is not sound and it cannot avoid Plantinga's rebuttal.

Keywords: John Schellenberg, the logical problem of evil, the good, free will, Plantinga's defense.

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Introduction

Among analytic philosophers, there have been various formulations of the objection to evil. These objections can be distinguished in two distinct ways: the logical problem and the evidential problem.

What this paper aims to examine is the logical version of the problem of evil. The essential point of this argument is that there is an inconsistency between certain theistic claims about God and evil. The theist affirms both that: 1) An omnipotent, omniscient, perfectly good God exists and that, 2) Evil exists in the world.

Mackie insists that these two statements are logically inconsistent with each other, and they both cannot be true. If there is inconsistency in theistic claims, then it is irrational to believe both. To show contradiction, some supplementary propositions are needed to add to the theistic claims. These supplementary propositions complete the logical reasoning to show that the theist's claims, both that God exists and that evil exists, are inconsistent.

Alvin Plantinga is well known for his attempt to rebut this inconsistency. His Free Will Defense offers a way of proving the consistency of the theistic claims. Plantinga attempts to show that it is logically possible and both claims can be true, although he need not show that they are in fact true. Plantinga's strategy to prove consistency between any two propositions through finding a third proposition (3) that is possibly true, consistent with (1), and in conjunction with (1) implies the second proposition. Of course, (3) need not be true or known to be true; it need not even be plausible. Plantinga's search for the third proposition begins with the idea of a possible world. Then, he concludes:

(3) God would create a world of free creatures that choose to do evil.

In other words, for any world God might create free creatures, it is not within God's power to bring it about that those free creatures never choose evil.

J. L. Schellenberg has recently offered a new logical problem of evil. He claims his argument is immune to Plantinga's Defense. What is new about the new argument is the premises from which Schellenberg intends to show a logical contradiction between evil and God. In this paper, I want to show that Schellenberg fails in his attempt to develop a new logical problem of evil.

Schellenberg's argument

Schellenberg aims to demonstrate a logical inconsistency among three theistic principles about God and the existence of evil — any evil.

He begins his argument by introducing three claims about God which theists must regard as necessary truths.

1. Unsurpassable Greatness (UG): God is the greatest possible being.
 2. Ontological Independence (OI): No world created by God (or any part thereof) is a part of God.
- Prior Purity (PP): Prior to creation (whether "prior" be taken logically or temporally) there is no evil in God of any kind.

He argues that the conjunction of these three claims is implicitly inconsistent with a fourth, to which theists are committed: There is evil in the world.

Schellenberg presents two different approaches related by some common features to develop his argument. These approaches are the "Modeling" Argument and the "Motivation" Argument.

By adopting these approaches, he offers some supplementary propositions. He insists that each additional proposition is clearly identified as a necessary truth.

The Modeling Argument, as the most important approach, assumes that the goodness of any world created by God would model God's goodness. Where any good that purely resembles or reflects a pure good in God we might think of as modeling that good.

Schellenberg argues that from UG and OI, it follows that prior to all creation:

a) All goods are already contained in God.
 b) For every possible good, among the good types it tokens, or instances, one is instanced by God. Thus, by assuming these two propositions, additional propositions that develop the argument to show the contradiction are as follows:

(1) Every possible good is greatly exceeded by a good of the same type existing in God prior to creation.

(6) If every worldly good that permits or requires evil is greatly exceeded by a pure good of the same type, existing prior to creation in God, then any world with goods permitting or requiring evil is exceeded by a world modeling the corresponding pure goods in God.

(8) God can ensure the existence of greater worlds and can do so limitlessly.

(9) If any world with goods permitting or requiring evil is exceeded by a world modeling the corresponding pure goods in God and the existence of greater worlds can limitlessly be ensured by God, then for any world X that requires or permits evil, there is some world Y that models pure goodness in God such that God has no good reason to create X rather than Y.

(11) If for any world X that requires or permits evil there is some world Y that models pure goodness in God such that God has no good reason to create X rather than Y, then God has no good reason to permit evil in the world.

(13) If there is evil in the world, then God has a good reason to permit it.

Schellenberg treat premises (1), (6), (8), (9), (11), and (13) as necessary truths.

Objections to the argument

Gellman wants to show that the new logical problem of evil is vulnerable to the Free Will Defense offered by Alvin Plantinga. He focuses on Premise (8) and assumes that in Schellenberg's world, if people have freedom, they might have closed libertarian freedom. Closed libertarian freedom allows the person to choose between good options, without the freedom to choose evil. He argues that in this state of affairs, the person must choose between good alternatives, each of which signifies moral advance. In this way, the person's closed libertarian freedom will be limited only in choosing to advance. However, one might think that the value of worldly good is at its most when chosen in open libertarian freedom.

This paper also shows Schellenberg's greater worlds face a dilemma that either involves self-contradictoriness, or it is inevitable to implicitly assume the alternative of evil alongside the alternative of good.

Conclusion

Schellenberg's claim is that since the conjunction of those premises with necessary truths entails that there is no evil, and since there does exist evil, then at least one of the theistic commitments must be false. Since the goods of this world include ones that permit evil, on the Modeling Argument, Schellenberg concludes theists must give up at least one of the three initial theistic commitments. It seems that by applying the logic of Free Will, God cannot ensure the existence of greater worlds, and can do so limitlessly (premise 8)

With Plantinga's idea of possible worlds and his emphasis on the correct understanding of the logic of free will, the logical form of the problem of evil is vulnerable to the Free Will Defense.

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