

EVALUATING A NEW LOGICAL ARGUMENT FROM EVIL

Bruce Langtry

J. L. Schellenberg, in “A New Logical Problem of Evil,” argues that (if God exists) God has, of necessity, a disappreciation of evil, operating at a meta-level in such a way as to give God a non-defeasible reason to rule out actualizing a world containing evil. He also argues that since God’s motive in creating the world is to share with finite beings the good that God experiences prior to creation, which is good without evil, it follows that God will create a world that contains no evil. I investigate in detail the foregoing lines of argument and provide grounds for rejecting them.

J. L. Schellenberg’s chapter “A New Logical Problem of Evil”¹ extends his earlier substantial work on God and evil by arguing that the proposition *There is evil in the world* is incompatible with the conjunction of the following three propositions:

- * *Unsurpassable greatness (UG)*: God is the greatest possible being.
- * *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.

Schellenberg offers two different “approaches” to establishing the incompatibility.² Each of these consists of a core argument which is nested within lines of thought directly supporting its premises and defending it from likely objections. Both approaches rest on intuitively appealing assumptions, and are worthy of respect. Nevertheless, I will argue that neither approach is sustainable.³

¹After note 3, all my references to Schellenberg’s work will be to this chapter.

²In this paper, talk of necessity and possibility (and accordingly talk of compatibility, incompatibility, and equivalence) always concerns *metaphysical* possibility and necessity.

³I will not discuss Schellenberg, “New Logical Problem Revisited.” It provides a fresh exposition of the line of argument of the 2013 chapter, questioning the view “that a correct understanding of God’s nature must cohere with the notion that God would actualize a world at least very similar to ours, right down to the inclusion of physical things and human beings”; what Schellenberg says stands or falls with what he had said earlier. The 2018 paper also replies to criticisms of its predecessor in Gellman, “On a New Logical Problem.”



1. THE MODELING APPROACH

1.1 The Core Modeling Argument (CModA)

- (1) Every possible non-Divine good is greatly exceeded by a good of the same type existing in God prior to creation. [premise]
- (2) Every good *in a world* is greatly exceeded by a good of the same type existing in God prior to creation. [from 1 by OI]
- (3) All goodness found in God prior to creation is pure goodness: goodness-without-evil. [from PP]
- (4) Every good in a world is greatly exceeded by a *pure* good of the same type existing in God prior to creation. [from 2, 3]
- (5) Every worldly good *that permits or requires evil* is greatly exceeded by a pure good of the same type existing in God prior to creation.⁴ [from 4]
- (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. [premise]
- (7) Any world with goods permitting or requiring evil is exceeded by a world modeling the corresponding pure goods in God (call the latter a “greater world”). [from 5, 6]
- (8) God can ensure the existence of greater worlds, and can do so limitlessly. [premise]
- (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. [premise]
- (10) 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. [from 7, 8, 9]
- (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. [premise]
- (12) God has no good reason to permit evil in the world. [from 10, 11]
- (13) If there is evil in the world, then God has a good reason to permit it. [premise]
- (14) There is no evil in the world. [from 12, 13]

Schellenberg infers that the conjunction of UG, OI, and PP, which he regards as fundamental commitments of theism, is incompatible with the existence of evil.⁵ So he must accordingly treat premises (1), (6), (8), (9), (11), and (13) as necessary truths.

⁴A good’s *requiring* evil is presumably to be understood as its necessitating that there be evil. It is not clear what Schellenberg means when he talks of a good’s *permitting* evil.

⁵In his footnote 5, Schellenberg explains that the phrase “if God exists” is tacitly present, in appropriate places, throughout the CModA.

1.2. A Puzzle About the CModA

Consider the result of replacing, throughout (1)–(14), talk of evil by talk of humans and talk of pure goods by talk of *human-neutral goods*, where a human-neutral good is a good that does not entail that there exists at least one human. It might seem that the premises in the parallel argument are not less plausible than those in (1)–(14), and that if (1)–(14) is a sound argument for the incompatibility of *There is evil* with *God exists* then the parallel argument is a sound argument for the incompatibility of *There are humans* with *God exists*.

Let us assume, however, that Schellenberg does not regard his new logical problem of evil from evil as merely a case study for a broader logical problem of contingent “worldly” states of affairs such as *There being humans*. So either there is some reason why each of premises (1), (6), (8), (9), and (13) is much more plausible than the corresponding premise of the parallel argument, or else there is at least one unstated premise located *within* (1)–(14), a premise which does not have a plausible variant involving humans.⁶

1.3. Clarifying Terminology and Assumptions

1.3.1. Worlds

[Quote 1] In this chapter, “world” normally refers to an imagined or actual reality that would be or is ontologically distinct from God and that, if God exists, depends or would depend for its existence on God’s creative activity. “The” world (or “this” world or “our” world) is the world in which we live. When instead I have in mind the larger notion of a possible world, such as the actual world, which for theists includes both God and any created reality, I shall make this clear through the relevant use of such words as “possible” or “actual.”⁷

⁶Is Schellenberg’s (13) much more plausible than (13*) *If there are humans in the world, then God has a good reason to permit them?* Since Schellenberg’s expression “good reason” means “good reason all-things-considered” and permission concerns voluntary non-prevention, the conditional is to be understood to be, if true, necessarily true. Now necessarily, if humans exist then God permits them: he voluntarily refrains from preventing their existing. And, necessarily, God does not permit humans for a bad or inadequate reason. But might God do so without having *any* reason all-things-considered? How might this be the case? Not by God’s acting on an unmotivated desire to permit humans, since God would not act on such a desire if it were somehow outweighed or defeated, and an unmotivated desire to permit them which is neither outweighed nor defeated would provide God with a good all-things-considered reason to permit them. Might God permit humans *by chance*? The arrival of humans, even if it were not determined by the preceding state of the world (and so foreknown by God) must surely at some stage, perhaps a late stage, be expected by God. Since the existence of humans would be of axiological importance, it is hard to see how God could accidentally fail to consider whether to prevent it. I conclude that we have strong grounds for believing that if God exists then (13*) is true.

⁷Schellenberg, “New Logical Problem,” 35n. The “larger notion of a possible world” that is common to various rival accounts of the metaphysics of alethic modality developed over the last 60 years does not involve God’s bringing the possible worlds into existence. God, if God exists, does not bring the actual world into existence, though God may have brought into existence the Milky Way, Earth, and the atoms that are now parts of your hands.

Schellenberg's talk of worlds other than "our" world, and of a role for imagination, is presumably just a convenient manner of speaking rather than serious realist metaphysics. Even so, puzzles arise concerning how Schellenberg's many worlds are to be individuated, and whether "we" live not only in "this" world but in others as well. For our purposes the important point is this: whether one particular world exceeds another, and whether one of them models pure goodness in God, supervene not only on which objects and what kinds of objects exist in it, but also on what states these objects are in at various times, how they interact with each other, and (in the case of finite persons at least) what actions they perform, their reasons for performing these actions, and so on. Therefore, when Schellenberg compares worlds with respect to value, he really has to compare world-histories—not narratives but wholes whose parts are token states of affairs, events and processes involving the objects included in the relevant worlds. So in Schellenberg's paper the expressions "create such-and-such a world" and "ensure the existence of such-and-such a world" must be interpreted, charitably, as equivalent to "actualize such-and-such a world-history." He does not consider whether God might opt for exercising merely loose supervision of whatever universe God brings into existence.

Perhaps Quote 1 excludes states of affairs such as *God's conversing with Abraham* from all world-histories. If so, the exclusion is problematic, because many of them might be constitutively (as well as causally) relevant to how good a particular world is.

1.3.2. Modeling Goods and Modeling Worlds

The CModA's proposition (3) identifies *pure* goodness with goodness-without-evil. The idea of one good's *modeling* another, pure good in God is introduced in the following way:

[Quote 2] A world could contain goods that "model" Divine goods both in richness and purity: any good that purely resembles or images or mirrors or reflects a pure good in God we might think of as *modeling* that good. (I understand this notion broadly. Notice especially that while every worldly good instances a higher goodness in God, the modeling goods need not be instances *of the goods they model*: the latter is but one way in which modeling can occur.)⁸

[Quote 3] Now just which goods we are speaking about here—goods that are modeled and goods that do the modeling—may of course be difficult to say . . . But even without being able to identify particular relevant goods, we can still quickly identify at least three ways in which a world with finite creatures but without evil could be made to grow *ceaselessly* in its pure reflection of the higher goods that exist without evil in God: through creatures'

⁸Schellenberg, "New Logical Problem," 38. Schellenberg does not assert that every worldly good, or even every worldly pure good, models the pure goods in God in virtue merely of falling under some good-type existing in God prior to creation.

propositional understanding of the pure nature of God being ever more enlarged; through their experiential “knowledge by acquaintance” of God’s pure reality being ever more enriched; and by the higher goodness that is in God being ever more fully embodied by creatures through what they do to become like God and to make their world reflect God’s pure goodness. And we can add a fourth way if we think of these three combined. Accordingly, let us assume hereafter that any world whose goods are modeling goods attains a level of goodness no less pure or rich than would result from the realization of this fourth way.⁹

I am unsure how to interpret Quote 3’s final sentence. Surely Schellenberg is not asserting that if a world lacks evil and all of its goods fulfill Quote 2’s criterion for modeling goods then it has at least the level of goodness available via the fourth way. For Quote 2 leaves it open whether some worlds, each of whose goods models a pure good in God, are quite sparsely endowed with goods. I will treat the sentence as stipulating that a *world* is to count as modeling the pure goods in God if and only if it lacks evil and its modeling goods confer on it at least the level of rich goodness available via the fourth way. On this account, there might be many such worlds differing from each other in their respective degrees of goodness and in the specific bundles of goods they contain.

1.3.3. Orderings of Worlds

As the CModA’s proposition (6) indicates, Schellenberg uses the word “exceeds” for a relation between goods and also for a relation between worlds. He does not formally define “exceeds” but he offers an informal explanation of its meaning in the paragraph that introduces premise (1). It is fair to say that he regards “exceeds” as equivalent to “better than.” I assume that “exceeds” expresses the converse of the relation expressed by “is less great than” in Quote 4. For proposition (7) stipulates that a world modeling the pure goods in God is to be called a “greater” world in virtue of its exceeding any world with goods permitting or requiring evil.

There is also at least one other value-based way of ordering worlds that Schellenberg recognizes. Commenting on (9), he says:

[Quote 4] There are some important conceptual distinctions to take account of in understanding the content of its antecedent. It is one thing for X to be less great than Y, another for X to contribute less well than Y to representing the good that is in God, and yet another for X, unlike Y, to permit or require evil. If the antecedent of (9) is true, then for any world X that requires or permits evil, there is always some world Y God can produce in relation to which it falls short in all three of these ways. In such circumstances, God could not acquire a good reason to create X rather than Y.¹⁰

Quote 4 involves the view that God’s reasons for choosing a specific world to create include, or might include, not only its location in a series of

⁹Schellenberg, “New Logical Problem,” 38–39.

¹⁰Schellenberg, “New Logical Problem,” 40–41.

worlds ordered by *exceeds* but also its location in a series of worlds ordered by *contributes better to representing the good that is in God than* (which is presumably equivalent to *more deeply reflects the goods possessed by God*). Let us call an infinite series of worlds ordered in the first way an *E-series*, and call a world's location in an E-series its *E-rank*; let us call an infinite series of worlds ordered in the second way a *C-series*, and call a world's location in a C-series its *C-rank*.¹¹ Schellenberg would say that for any world X that contains evil there is a world Y that contains no evil and has both a higher E-rank and a higher C-rank than X has.

1.4. What if God is Faced with a Sigma-Series or a Tau-Series?

Let a *Mod-world* be a world that models the pure goods in God. Let a *non-bad world* be a world in which the goods are not collectively outweighed by evils. Let *X-worlds* be non-bad worlds containing both good and evil. And let a *Sigma-series* be an E-series such that

- * its first rank is occupied by at least one non-bad world,
- * the second rank is occupied by at least one X-world,
- * each X-world is followed (immediately, or after some higher ranks occupied by X-worlds) by a Mod-world that exceeds every preceding world, and
- * each Mod-world is followed (immediately, or after some higher ranks occupied by Mod-worlds) by an X-world that exceeds every preceding world, and
- * God can actualize any member of the series.¹²

Neither Quote 3 nor anything else that Schellenberg has said provides a way for him to rule out all the non-bad worlds' making up a Sigma-series. Consider any Mod-world M, and let X_a contain the same created persons as M, each of whom possesses all the goods he or she possesses in M and many additional rich modeling goods, though some of these created persons also experience some fairly mild evils that are greatly outweighed by the goods that he or she possesses. (Given that there is at least one Mod-world, there is no reason to doubt that there is at least one world fulfilling the foregoing description of X_a .) Although X_a is not a Mod-world, Schellenberg would find it hard to maintain that X_a does not exceed M.

If the non-bad worlds constitute a Sigma-series, then for every Mod-world there is an X-world that exceeds it. If we were to regard the CModA's argument for its proposition (9) as confining itself to considerations about

¹¹I also stipulate that in E-series and C-series different worlds can have the same rank, that differences in rank cannot supervene on infinitely small differences between other features of the worlds, and that a greater difference in rank must supervene on a greater difference with respect to other features of the worlds.

¹²All bad worlds are exceeded by worlds occupying the first rank of an E-series; stipulating that bad worlds are not part of the series simplifies the exposition.

E-ranks, and to assume that non-bad worlds constitute a Sigma-series, then we would be able to construct a parallel, equally meritorious argument of which the following is the part relevant here:

(7*) Any Mod-world is exceeded by some X-world

(8*) God can ensure the existence of any X-world in the Sigma-series

(9*) If God can ensure the existence of any X-world in the Sigma-series, then for any Mod-world M there is at least one X-world such that God has no good reason to create M rather than the X-world¹³

(10*) For any Mod-world M, there is some X-world such that God has no reason to create M rather than the X-world. [from 7*, 8*, 9*]

But Quote 4 indicates (and my Section 1.2 confirms) that the CModA is not adequately represented by propositions (1)–(14) and it does not confine itself to considerations about E-ranks.

Points essentially the same as those made in the preceding two paragraphs could also be made in terms of Tau-series instead of Sigma-series, where (I stipulate) a Tau-series has a structure similar to that of a Sigma series, but the relation in terms of which a Tau-series of worlds is ordered is *better represents the good that is in God*. To see this, consider worlds M and X_a, fulfilling the conditions specified a few paragraphs ago. M is *with respect to purity* a better representation of divine goodness than X_a. But M is not in every respect so. For surely X_a is *with respect to abundance of goods included in the respective worlds* a better representation of the richness of divine goodness than M. So the way is open for the conjecture that M and X_a are members of a Tau series. In that case, alongside Schellenberg's argument for the CModA's proposition (10), there is an argument for (10*) that involves *better represents the good that is in God* rather than *exceeds*.

Suppose that both (10) and (10*) were true. If God has resolved to *create a world* rather than to exercise somewhat loose supervision of whichever universe God brings into existence, what considerations would guide God's decision about which world to create? In one respect, the situation would be similar to other cases in which an agent faces a choice from an infinite series of better and better alternatives: for any given option, there is an alternative one such that the agent has no reason to choose the former rather than the latter. The agent should satisfy.¹⁴ Plainly, some divine decisions of which world to actualize would be superior to others; but what further considerations should guide God's choice?

At this point, we should take into account the following remarks, made in Schellenberg's discussion of proposition (9):

[Quote 5] Given Prior Purity together with Unsurpassable Greatness, there is no limit to the richness of value assimilable, without evil, by finite persons in

¹³In (9*) "reason" means "all-things-considered reason," just as in (9) it does.

¹⁴I argued at length in favour of this claim in Langtry, *God, the Best, and Evil*, Chapter 3.

pursuit of the infinite. The point is that to improve itself, a finite world must, as it were, seek to close the distance between itself and God—an incompletable task, to be sure, and one that could find limitlessly many forms, but this is nonetheless the direction such value-related endeavor must take, and in this direction there is no evil to be encountered.¹⁵

[Quote 6] [For any worlds X, Y such that X requires or permits evil and Y models pure goodness in God,] X will also win a less deep noncomparative appreciation from God than Y, and, unlike Y, which warrants no disappreciation at all, X or its conditions must furthermore win some *disappreciation*, insofar as they are bound up with evil. Such facts contribute to the overwhelmingly powerful defeater that a God would have for any reason apparently supporting the permission of evil.¹⁶

[Quote 7] Perhaps some philosophers would contest the idea that the presence or possibility of evil is something that would in itself be given weight by a Divine mind. But consider the infinitely good life of God, as imagined by theism. Suppose—perhaps *per impossibile*—that there could be a counterpart life *as* valuable, though included in it was some evil-turned-to-good. If the relevant facts about evil were not independently foreful, should it not be a matter of indifference *which* life God led? And yet for the theist it emphatically is not. God, as we have seen, realizes the unblemished ideal of a reality unlimitedly and exclusively good. There appears to be an intuition about purity, and perhaps also about simplicity, operating at a meta-level here. God is a less pure reality if evil as well as good is realized in God—and God is a less simple being if, of the available options, evil and good, both appear in God. The logical argument from evil can make use of these ideas. For is not the presence or possibility of its diminished purity and simplicity, in these senses, going to detract at the meta-level in question from what God sees when God considers X [a world that contains evil]?¹⁷

Quotes 6 and 7 indicate that Schellenberg would say that if God were faced with a Sigma-series or a Tau-series, God would exclude from candidature for creation all worlds containing evil. The rest of this section explains why Quotes 5–7 fail to provide much support either for the foregoing claim or for the one made in the last clause in Quote 5.

Quote 5's second sentence seems to entail that for any two worlds if one is an improvement on the other then the former contains less evil than the latter. But worlds M and X_a, described earlier in this section, jointly provide a counterexample. Furthermore, in general one world might in some respects be closer to God than some other world, but in other respects more distant from God. Why does the presence of evil in some specific world establish that it is more distant *all-things-considered* from God than

¹⁵Schellenberg, "New Logical Problem," 40.

¹⁶Schellenberg, "New Logical Problem Evil," 41. Schellenberg uses "disappreciate" for the opposite of "appreciate," where "to appreciate" obviously means "to value."

¹⁷Schellenberg, "New Logical Problem," 41–42.

any world from which evil is absent? Since no answer is provided in Quote 5, we should consider whether Quotes 6 and 7 provide one.¹⁸

Let Y_a be a world containing no evil, but having a very low E-rank and a very low C-rank—for example, in virtue of the fact that it contains a small population of animals who lead short but good lives, and contains no created persons. Schellenberg would say that God has a low degree of appreciation for Y_a but does not disappreciate it at all. Compare Y_a with X_a . Since X_a contains much more to appreciate than Y_a does, a lot to *greatly* appreciate, and very little to disappreciate, why would God not appreciate X_a more than Y_a ? And if God were to appreciate X_a more than world Y_a , then surely God would not disappreciate X_a (even though, no doubt, God would mildly disappreciate the evils *in* X_a). Since neither Quote 6 nor Quote 5 does much to counter the foregoing line of thought, neither quote provides a good argument for Schellenberg's opinion that God possesses an overwhelmingly powerful defeater for any reason apparently supporting God's permitting the evil that world X_a contains.

Quote 7 involves a thought-experiment concerning which, Schellenberg says, an intuition about purity appears to be operating at a meta-level, i.e., operating above or outside considerations merely about worlds' locations in an E-series and/or a C-series. The thought-experiment involves two imagined alternative life-histories of God which have the same E-rank or C-rank but which differ because in one yet not the other there is some evil-turned-to-good. Now, necessarily, God never performs an evil action and is never in an evil state. So one of the imagined lives must involve God's life's being in some *other* way involved with evil—perhaps by God's allowing evil or intentionally causing it, and thereby conferring on finite persons various outweighing goods. Schellenberg has to claim that necessarily, any imagined life of the latter kind is incompatible with God's purity, with God's own life's fulfilling "the unblemished ideal of a reality unlimitedly and exclusively good." But he does not *argue* that this is so. He needs to. He also needs to explain and support his assertion that God

¹⁸Two other remarks on pp. 40–41 are worth brief attention. (i) *As for less faithfully representing the pure goodness of God: how could this quality fail to be given weight by a theist who has reflected sufficiently on Unsurpassable Greatness and who is devoted above all to appreciating God?* Few theists will fail to give some weight to the quality; but what is required is an account of exactly how the weight is to be assessed and taken into account alongside other weighty considerations about the relevant worlds. Anyway, why should we believe that, in my example, world X_a less faithfully represents the pure goodness of God, all things considered, than world M does? (ii) *The good of finite beings in a world including God is bound up with growing more fully into a multifaceted awareness of God, and this, given Prior Purity, evil could only hinder.* Why mightn't there be cases in which the arrival of evil in an individual's previously evil-free life opens up opportunities for, rather than hindering, the individual's growing more fully into a multifaceted awareness of God? (Notice that the issue here is not whether God could produce a multifaceted awareness of God without allowing evil in the individual's life: it is whether italicised remark (ii) is true. In this paper I am not engaging in theodicy, but in "defence" against a logical argument from evil.) Furthermore, is growth into a multi-faceted awareness of God the only good-type that is relevant?

is a less simple being if God has the option of causing or allowing evil: replace “evil” by “humans” or “horses”; if the original assertion about divine simplicity is true, why isn’t the new one?

The CModA’s proposition (8) implies that there is at least one E-series $E(mod)$ composed entirely of worlds that model the corresponding pure goods in God. But this is compatible with $E(mod)$ ’s members’ constituting a subset of the members of a Sigma-series and/or of a Tau series, in which case each member of $E(mod)$ is exceeded by a world which contains evil (and which therefore is not a member of $E(mod)$). If so, then Schellenberg’s argument for (10) is matched by a parallel argument for (10*). So Quotes 6 and 7 do not provide support for the proposition that if the non-bad worlds constitute a Sigma-series and/or a Tau-series then God will satisfy by choosing a world without evil.

This section has identified two major problems with Schellenberg’s line of argument:

* God’s formal presentation of the CModA, i.e., (1)–(14), fails because there is no apparent way of ruling out the non-bad worlds’ constituting a Sigma series and/or a Tau series, and hence the CModA’s case for lemma (10) is paralleled by an equally meritorious case for (10*);

* it is not implausible to suppose that there are good worlds V and W such that V contains evil and W does not, yet V is an improvement on W and better represents the good that God intends than W does, and God appreciates V more than W.

1.5. A Variety of Meta-Level Considerations

If disappreciation of evil operates somehow at a meta-level in divine planning, then perhaps there are also other concerns that do. Humans often have well-grounded non-deontological, value-based sensitivities, of kinds that are respected and sometimes admired by people who do not share them, and that lead individuals who have them to depart from what will maximize net goodness. Consider, for example, a doctor working in a refugee camp accommodating many very sick people: she learns that her husband is ill and likely to die within a month or two, and leaves two days later to return home, acting on a meta-level concern to care for her husband and family. That is, even if she takes into account the total value expected to result from the various alternatives open to her, her concern to care for her husband and family generates reasons for action that are above and beyond considerations merely about total expected value.

Perhaps, then, God has a special, contingent concern that there be finite persons of a certain kind—for example, that they have emotions, that they seek and flourish in intimate relationships, and that many of them possess the natural endowments that foster the creation and love of great poetry, drama, and music—even if any world that contains persons of that kind is exceeded by a world that doesn’t. The specific way God implemented the concern might take account of how the fulfilment or non-fulfilment of such concerns in a world was related to a world’s E-rank and to its C-rank

but would not be fixed solely by their effects on E-rank and C-rank. There might also be other meta-level considerations, and trade-offs might be made.¹⁹ I will focus here on the following conjecture, (β), of which I claim merely that it is epistemically possible that (β) is true:

(β) If God exists then God has a strong concern that there be persons whose lives involve both (i) a significant degree of freedom and moral responsibility for actions greatly affecting their own or other people's level of well-being, and also (ii) intimate relationships involving mutual vulnerability and trust.

The claim that (β) is epistemically possible receives some degree of support from widely-shared beliefs about what is valuable in human lives. In our world, vulnerability to close friends and family members, accompanied by trust in them, are treasured gifts that each individual bestows on the other. The trust is not merely of instrumental value. If intimate family relationships, for example, typically involved little need for trust, not merely because of each member's belief that the others were virtuous and competent, but instead because, typically, everyone in the family knew that nothing important could go badly wrong in the family whatever the character and level of competence of each individual, then parent-child interaction and marriages would lack much of the significance we hope for when we enter them.²⁰

Schellenberg's main conclusion is:

(γ) *Necessarily, if God exists then there is no evil.*

Necessarily, if (γ) were true, and if God were to exist, then the following would be true:

(δ) There is no evil, and if there are finite persons then they have no control over whether, and no freedom or moral responsibility with respect to whether, they cause or voluntarily refrain from preventing at least one evil event or state of affairs; furthermore, if there are finite persons then for every finite person FP, whether or not FP causes evils or voluntarily refrains from preventing them is fixed independently of FP's character traits, desires, intentions, beliefs, skills, and other distinctive characteristics.

Compatibilists are apt to object that this is not so. If God were to causally determine that you never caused or allowed an instance of evil then God might well have decided to do so in the light of your character traits, desires, and so on; and God might implement God's decision via causal

¹⁹Various points made in the rest of this section were developed in greater detail in Langtry, *God, The Best, and Evil*, Chapter 7.

²⁰If God were to exist and people living in communities were to believe that nothing important could go wrong in interpersonal relationships and their belief was false, then their belief would have to be due to either massive cognitive bad luck, very widespread, serious cognitive malfunctioning, or gross deception by God, each of which would be difficult to reconcile with the truth of (γ).

chains that included these distinctive matters in ways such that you would be free and morally responsible with respect to many of your actions and omissions.

The foregoing compatibilist points, however, do not rule out my claim that (γ) and *God exists* together entail (δ) . Compatibilists distinguish between two kinds of circumstance that determine that finite persons do not perform a specific action: (i) those that are compatible with our freely refraining from performing it, and being morally responsible for refraining, and (ii) those that are not. Everyday examples of kind (ii) include, for example, human physiological characteristics that prevent anyone's running a marathon in 30 minutes, and various neurological conditions that prevent people with advanced dementia from doing things they could previously do with ease.

Given the truth of (γ) , God's existing would be a circumstance of kind (ii). It would not be an "initial condition" relevantly similar, say, to the state of a healthy, unmanipulated person's brain and body immediately before she acts or does not act: instead, it would be amongst the most fundamental structural features of reality. God's existing would be a circumstance fixing the complete absence of evil from the world, and its doing so would be metaphysically prior any finite person's coming into existence, and *a fortiori* prior to the person's character traits, desires and other distinctive characteristics. So even compatibilists should acknowledge that given the truth of (γ) , God's existing would be incompatible with finite persons' being free and morally responsible in refraining from causing evil.

If God has the concerns identified in (β) , and God brings into existence complex communities of finite persons, then God has a substantial pro tanto reason to refrain from preventing there being any evil. It is *prima facie* possible that God has those concerns and thus the pro tanto reason. But if God were to know that (γ) is true then God would not have the pro tanto reason, just as if a human person knows that it is impossible that there be a greatest prime number then he or she does not have a genuine pro tanto reason to prove that there is one—however much he or she likes to daydream about becoming famous by discovering a proof. Hence there is a good case, based on the possibility that God has the concerns identified in (β) , for believing that (γ) is false.

Section 1.4 established that Schellenberg's arguments for (γ) are at best seriously incomplete—perhaps irremediably so. Therefore the case for believing that God has a good reason all-things-considered for allowing there to be evil is undefeated by those arguments.

1.6. *Summing Up: The Modelling Approach*

Suppose that you are disappointed that your daughter does not want to study Philosophy as part of her university degree, or you have an unpleasant half-hour walking home soaked by the heavy rain, or you make an arithmetical error when working out how much you spent on

food last week. Such occurrences, considered in themselves, are typically unwelcome, but surely they lack the axiological seriousness required for counting as evils. Although none of them occur in God's own life, presumably they could have a place within a finite person's life that involves increasingly great and rich goods, amongst which is an increasingly deep experience of God. If so, then why couldn't the presence of some *evil* be accommodated within a finite person's life of the foregoing kind? *With respect to the evil*, the individual's life would not be mirroring the goods in God's life, just as with respect to disappointment, and so on, it would not be mirroring God's own life; but *in many other respects* it would be. If Schellenberg were to say that a life that involves increasingly great and rich goods including an increasingly deep experience of God could not also involve disappointments, and so on, then it would seem that Schellenberg's New Logical Problem of Evil foreshadows supposed new logical problems of many features of human life that do not count as evils. Schellenberg has not provided a way of dismissing the hypothesis that the non-bad worlds constitute a Sigma-series or a Tau-series. Accordingly, the wonderful nature of the Fourth Way does not rule out God's actualizing an X-world selected from one or both series. Schellenberg would say that God has, of necessity, a special concern for purity in created reality, and accordingly a disappreciation of evil, operating at a meta-level in such a way as to give God a non-defeasible reason to rule out God's actualizing an X-world. But as I have indicated, he has not established that this is so.

In short, Sections 1.4–1.6 have shown that the Modeling Approach does not deliver its main conclusion (γ).

2. The Motives Approach

After explaining the main ideas of the approach, Schellenberg says, "I am now ready to put all of this into the form of a logical proof." Although it presupposes UG, OI, and PP, the "proof" (to be read as a *reductio* of the existence of God) is as follows:

- (1) God's motive in creating the world is the motive to share the good with finite beings (and/or relevantly similar motives). [premise]
- (2) The unsurpassable good God experiences precreation—the only good God might wish to share in creation—is good-without-evil. [premise]
- (3) God's motive in creating the world is the motive to share with finite beings good- without-evil. [from 1, 2]
- (4) If God's motive in creating the world is the motive to share with finite beings good-without-evil, then there is no evil in the world. [premise]
- (5) There is no evil in the world. [from 3, 4]
- (6) There is evil in the world. [premise]
- (7) There is evil in the world and there is no evil in the world.²¹ [from 5, 6]

²¹Schellenberg, "New Logical Problem," 44–45.

Let us call (1)–(7) *the core Motives argument* (cMotA). Proposition (1) is advanced in the following context:

[Quote 8] Here are the motives standardly ascribed to God. God, it may be said, creates to share the good with finite beings. Or, more specifically, God may be said to create finite beings to enter into a relationship of love with them and to facilitate their love for each other. Somewhat differently, it may be said that God's creation amounts to an overflowing or diffusion of the good that is in God (the motive here would presumably be something like a desire to expand the range of the good for its own sake), or that God creates to display the glory of God. These answers have been quite popular in the various theological traditions of theism, and it seems that an inclusive disjunction referring to them all will be necessarily true. For either God creates for its own sake or for the sake of created things or for God, or else God is motivated in all of these ways. There are no other options.²²

Schellenberg would say that although God does not possess bodily health, it is "fundamentally realized" in God, in some non-physical form.²³ Even so, the cMotA's proposition (2) says that God wishes to share in creation *only those goods that God experiences precreation*; and God does not experience bodily health precreation. So Schellenberg seems committed to maintaining that God does not wish to share bodily health in creation. In that case, premises (1) and (2) together commit him to

(3a) God's motive in creating the world is the motive to share with finite beings both good-without-evil and good-without-bodily-health.

And since Schellenberg affirms (4), it is hard to see how he can deny

(4a) If God's motive in creating the world is the motive to share with finite beings both good-without-evil and good-without-bodily-health, then there is no bodily-health in the world, and avoid maintaining that he has a sound argument from bodily health against the existence of God.

Plainly, there is some error in (1)–(3). Let us agree with Schellenberg's that God's *primary* motive in creating the consists of one, or the conjunction of several, of those listed in Quote 8. There might surely, however, also be secondary motives as well: for example, to observe and occasionally interact with rich, interesting communities of finite persons. If in the cMotA's proposition (1) "God's motive" is to be understood as meaning "God's only motive" then (1) is suspect. If, however, in (1) and (3) "God's motive" means "God's primary, most important motive," then (4) is suspect because the conjunction of (1) and (2) fails to rule out God's having some additional motive whose fulfilment entails God's not preventing there being some evil.

If in propositions (1)–(4) "x shares good g with y" is to be interpreted as merely "x confers good g on y" then it is highly doubtful that premise

²²Schellenberg, "New Logical Problem," 43.

²³Schellenberg, "New Logical Problem," 44, where the two sentences beginning "God is not physical . . ." are surely to be interpreted in the light of the CModA's proposition (2).

(2) is true, since surely God might be motivated to confer various goods on finite beings that are not part of the unsurpassable good that God experiences prior to creation—e.g., the capacities underlying proficiency at playing piano sonatas—and that are neither entailed nor explained by the motives identified in Quote 8. So should we interpret “x shares good g with y” as “x already possesses g and brings it about that y has g as well?” If so, then consider the second divine motive identified in Quote 8, namely, *to enter into a relationship of love with them [finite beings] and to facilitate their love for each other*. The fact that unsurpassable good God experiences precreation is good-without-bodies is obviously no barrier to God’s fulfilling this motive; and though some specific kinds of evil might be a barrier, there might be particular instances of evil that need not be—for example, such-and-such an individual’s blindness. So God’s acting on the motive is compatible with there being evil. For related reasons, so is God’s acting on the other motives mentioned in Quote 9.

Let us now take into account the following remarks, which complement Quote 3:

[Quote 9] Take away free will as we (seem to) know it, with all the concomitant possibilities of evil, introducing more acquaintance with the purity of God, and what do you have? A flat insipid existence? Hardly! Finite persons at whatever level, in terms of capacities, could in such circumstances strain *everlastingly* to reach new levels in the experience and embodiment of God, potentially achieving new glories with every step through the pertinent exercise of free will. As my word “strain” suggests, we have significance and dignity aplenty—in part because of innumerable opportunities for jubilant and invigorating work, intellectually, emotionally, spiritually, imaginatively, and so on—in a scenario of the sort I have laid alongside the theodictist’s overfamiliar picture involving free will and evil.²⁴

Section 1.6 expresses my response to Quote 9, and also to a generalization of Schellenberg’s point namely that there is nothing that might motivate God to permit evil in the world, when (i) God can actualize a wonderful world without evil, containing finite persons whose lives are always very good, and (ii) for every world that contains evil there is a better one that does not. My own view is that if (γ) were true, then the scope of free will (whether seen in libertarian or compatibilist terms) could be wide, including choices affecting the levels of good finite persons enjoyed at any given time but not including an individual’s causing evil or allowing evil to occur; nevertheless, as I argued in Section 1.5, considerations concerning free will provide God with a pro tanto reason to refrain from ensuring that no finite persons ever cause evil.

Thus the Motives Approach is no more successful than the Modeling Approach as an argument for atheism.

University of Melbourne

²⁴Schellenberg, “New Logical Problem,” 43–44.

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