



A Study and Critique of John Schellenberg's Divine Hiddenness Argument based on the Finiteness of Divine Active Attributes and Wisdom

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Abstract

God's limited and conditioned attributes of action are the manifestation and expression of His essential absolute attributes of action; however, their limitedness is due to their simultaneous working with each other and in relation to creation. Among the attributes of action, the attribute of wisdom – the manifestation of the essential attribute of knowledge – is dominant over other attributes and constraints them. John Schellenberg, in the Divine Hiddenness Argument, has been heedless of the distinction between these two categories of attributes; something that has resulted in firstly, that he assigns Divine love to an absolute form of human love by employing an analogous approach and secondly, by confusing the different forms of love, i.e. agape and eros, that he have an incorrect understanding of Divine love and the level of their absoluteness and thirdly, even with the validity of Schellenberg's emphasis on the distinction between the Hiddenness Argument and the Argument for Evil, his use of the former as a disaffirmation of Divine infinite love somehow takes a person's mind to the Argument of Evil and is an incorrect use of it. Based on the action attribute of wisdom, one can show that in contrast to Schellenberg's claim, Divine hiddenness does not only not disaffirm Divine love; rather, it is a manifestation of God's wise love for man and we will be indicating some of this wisdom in this paper.



Keywords

John Schellenberg, Divine Hiddenness Argument, Divine love, Argument for Evil, Divine wisdom.

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Introduction

Man's request for God's revelation, His visibility, a direct connection to Divine angels or at least, being shown with more experiential evidence by God has been one of man's historical demands from Divine prophets. Human beings' great inclination to make idols or choosing totems rises from this very demand for the tangibility and visualization of gods. John Schellenberg, an analytic philosopher, taking inspiration from this historical demand, for the first time in 1993 presented the Divine Hiddenness Argument as a reason for the inexistence of God.

According to him, one of the requisites of Divine absolute love is that God is not indifferent to His enlightened, sincere seekers and in case they are unable to find convincing evidence, He would deal responsibly regarding their fate by presenting them with more evidence and prevent their tending towards atheism; however, God failed in this regard and proof of that is the existence of logical unbelievers or agnostics. Therefore, through a deductive argument, one can consider Divine hiddenness as a contradiction to Divine absolute love and ultimately, as proof of the inexistence of God.

Summary

Schellenberg's supposition in his argument is the absoluteness of the attribute of God's love. If one is able to challenge this foundation of his argument in terms of the extent of absoluteness and that Divine absolute love is not absolute in the action aspect, his argument, in order to reach his sought conclusion, would fail. The goal of this study is to respond to the following questions: how is Schellenberg's approach in understanding the meaning and instance of Divine absolute love? Are Divine essential attributes absolute in the action aspect and in relation to creation? Has Schellenberg paid attention to the distinction between God's essential and action attributes in presenting his argument?

By adopting an analogous view in understanding the attribute of Divine love, Schellenberg has considered Divine love to be an absolute form of human love and he believes their difference to only be quantitative. Accordingly, he believes that since in human love, the perfection of the beloved is the manifestation of responsible behavior and is because of a commitment to the sincere expression of the love of his lover and he too must seek to establish a relationship with his lover; therefore, God must also deal responsibly in regards to His lovers and sincere seekers and by presenting more evidence, seek to establish a relationship with them. Since between the two forms of love – agape and

eros – the best state is love without expectations, i.e. agape; Schellenberg considers God's love to be agape. This is while the necessity of establishing a relationship is not one of the requisites of agape love. Therefore, the lack of establishing a relationship on God's part with His sincere seekers – even in case of the validity of Schellenberg's claim – is not a proof of a contradiction in Divine love. It seems Schellenberg has confused the two forms of love to adopt an analogous view.

One of the classifications of God's attributes is the division of His attributes into essential and action attributes. Essential attributes are the sources of the action attributes; God's action attributes derive from a position of action and in respect to being attached to material existents which form one side of the association, they are bound to temporal and locative conditions; even though in respect to being attached to God who is the other side of the association, they are free of such limits and conditions. It seems that Schellenberg has not paid heed to the receptive limits of existents. Another matter that has caused these attributes to be limited is the simultaneous application of these attributes in regards to existents, which has caused these attributes also to limit each other. However, among Divine action attributes, wisdom – the manifestation of the essential attribute of knowledge – is dominant over His other attributes and is the constrainer and guarantor of God's absolute perfection. Therefore, one can consider Divine hiddenness to be a manifestation of His wise love and present defenses based on man's free will - in the two areas of cognition and action – from in.