



The Problem of Evil



Overview

The Problem

Responses

- Refutation

- Theodicy

Aquinas on the Problem of Evil

- Main claims

- Evil as Privation

- Evil: natural and moral

 - Natural evil

 - Moral evil

The Problem of Evil

How is evil possible if God is all-powerful, all-good, and all-knowing?

- 1 If God exists, then God is omnipotent, omniscient, and morally perfect.
 - 2 If God is omnipotent, then God has the power to eliminate all evil.
 - 3 If God is omniscient, then God knows when evil exists.
 - 4 If God is morally perfect, then God has the desire to eliminate all evil.
 - 5 Evil exists.
 - 6 If evil exists and God exists, then either God doesn't have the power to eliminate all evil, or doesn't know when evil exists, or doesn't have the desire to eliminate all evil.
- ∴ Therefore, God doesn't exist.

The Problem

Responses

Refutation

Theodicy

Aquinas on the Problem of Evil

Main claims

Evil as Privation

Evil: natural and moral

Natural evil

Moral evil

Bambi in the Forest Fire



The Problem

Responses

Refutation

Theodicy

Aquinas on the Problem of Evil

Main claims

Evil as Privation

Evil: natural and moral

Natural evil

Moral evil

Deductive vs Inductive Formulations

2 different versions:

- **Deductive**: the existence of evil is *incompatible* with God's existence;
- **Inductive (Evidential)**: the existence of evil in the world makes God's existence unlikely.

Cf. P4 above: "If God is morally perfect, then God has the desire to eliminate all evil."

- but maybe there are goods that outweigh evils, but these evils are necessary for them.

P4*: there are certain evils that an omniscient and omnipotent person could have prevented the existence of such evils without thereby either allowing equal or greater evils, or preventing equal or greater goods.

- this (modified) premise can only be supported by inductive reasoning → **inductive problem of evil**.

The Problem

Responses

Refutation

Theodicy

Aquinas on the Problem of Evil

Main claims

Evil as Privation

Evil: natural and moral

Natural evil

Moral evil

The Evidential Problem of Evil

- 1 **Direct inductive argument** (cf. William Rowe): between theism and the denial of theism, the latter is more likely. (Inductive instantiation generalization)
- 2 **Indirect inductive argument** (cf. Hume, Draper): theism is unlikely an alternative hypothesis that is more likely and incompatible with theism. (Inference to the best explanation)
- 3 **Bayesian approach** (cf. Rowe): based on probability theory, we derive the probability of the claim 'God exists', and it turns out to be low.

The Problem

Responses

Refutation

Theodicy

Aquinas on the Problem of Evil

Main claims

Evil as Privation

Evil: natural and moral

Natural evil

Moral evil

Responses to the Problem of Evil

PoE:

- there are facts about the evils in the world that make it *prima facie* unreasonable to believe in the existence of God;
- the situation is not solved by our other justified beliefs (→ belief in God is unreasonable given our total evidence).

3 main kinds of response:

- 1 **Refutation:** challenge claim (1) above.
- 2 **Theodicy:** accept (1), but then argue that for every evil in the world we can find a justifying reason why God would allow it.
- 3 **Defense:** to show that God is not *incompatible* with evil; that we can give a possibly true story that contains both God and the existing evils.

The Problem

Responses

Refutation

Theodicy

Aquinas on the Problem of Evil

Main claims

Evil as Privation

Evil: natural and moral

Natural evil

Moral evil

Refutations can take multiple forms:

- 1 Human epistemological limitations (skeptical theism)
- 2 There is no “best possible world”
- 3 If the ontological argument is correct, then evil doesn't matter.

The Problem

Responses

Refutation

Theodicy

Aquinas on the Problem of Evil

Main claims

Evil as Privation

Evil: natural and moral

Natural evil

Moral evil

- **Soul-making theodicy** (John Hick): the world is designed by God as an environment in which people can undergo spiritual growth by their own free choices.
- **Free will defense**: it's better to create a world with libertarian free will, but libertarian free will leads to bad choices.
 - Augustine: evil is the result of free choice
 - Anselm: evil is the result of free choice, which comes about from the bad interaction between the will for beatitude and the will for justice.
 - Aquinas, in general, is not a fan of the free will defense – more metaphysical explanation
- The need for **natural laws**: having natural laws is good; but these laws sometimes lead to suffering.

The Problem

Responses

Refutation

Theodicy

Aquinas on the Problem of Evil

Main claims

Evil as Privation

Evil: natural and moral

Natural evil

Moral evil

Overview

The Problem

Responses

Refutation

Theodicy

Aquinas on the Problem of Evil

Main claims

Evil as Privation

Evil: natural and moral

Natural evil

Moral evil

The Problem

Responses

Refutation

Theodicy

Aquinas on the Problem of Evil

Main claims

Evil as Privation

Evil: natural and moral

Natural evil

Moral evil

Overview: Claims and Assumptions

- Evil is not a positive thing (cf. Augustine; evil is a lack of good)
- Evil does not have a proper cause
- Evil is accidentally caused by good
- God is a cause of sinful acts, but is not a cause of sin

The Problem

Responses

Refutation

Theodicy

Aquinas on the Problem of Evil

Main claims

Evil as Privation

Evil: natural and moral

Natural evil

Moral evil

Evil is not a positively existing thing

“For what is that which we call evil but the absence of good? In the bodies of animals, disease and wounds mean nothing but the absence of health; for when a cure is effected, that does not mean that the evils which were present – namely, the disease and wounds – go away from the body and dwell elsewhere: they altogether cease to exist; for the wound or disease is not a substance, but a defect in the fleshly substance” (*Enchiridion*, ch. 11).

The Problem

Responses

Refutation

Theodicy

Aquinas on the Problem of Evil

Main claims

Evil as Privation

Evil: natural and moral

Natural evil

Moral evil

“Like night from day, you learn about one opposite from the other. So you take good in order to grasp what evil means. Now we have accepted the definition that good is everything that is desirable. Well, then, since each real thing tends to its own existence and completion, we have to say that this fulfils the meaning of good in every case. Therefore evil cannot signify a certain existing being, or a real shaping or positive kind of thing. Consequently, we are left to infer that it signifies a certain absence of a good” (ST I, q. 48, a. 1).

- This does not mean that evil is not *real*: if I have a hole in my sock, even though it is a lack of wool, it is a perfectly real hole. (Example is from Herbert McCabe)
- It also does not mean that whatever is bad is lacking some parts. Having extra parts that shouldn't be there may just as bad! (E.g., if I fill my keyboard with glue...)

The Problem

Responses

Refutation

Theodicy

Aquinas on the Problem of Evil

Main claims

Evil as Privation

Evil: natural and moral

Natural evil

Moral evil

Evil Cannot Be the Cause of Evil

- Evil is a privation. So what kind of cause can it be?
- The 4 causes: material, formal, efficient, and final. But a privation cannot be any of these.
- If there was an evil cause, it would tend toward an effect that is proper to it, namely evil. But (see last time!) *everything* tends towards the good.

Conclusion: only good can cause evil. But how?

The Problem

Responses

Refutation

Theodicy

Aquinas on the Problem of Evil

Main claims

Evil as Privation

Evil: natural and moral

Natural evil

Moral evil

Natural Evil and Moral Evil

There are 2 kinds of Evils, and they will require slightly different explanations.

1. **Natural evil:** forest fires, illnesses, etc.



2. **Moral evil:** stealing, wickedness, etc.



So, how can the good cause natural evil and moral evil?

The Problem

Responses

Refutation

Theodicy

Aquinas on the Problem of Evil

Main claims

Evil as Privation

Evil: natural and moral

Natural evil

Moral evil

Natural Evil: A bit of Metaphysics

How do we explain things, and what do we mean by 'causes'?

- 4 causes: efficient, formal, material, final
- causes are *things* (substances), causing other things (substances or accidents)
- causes have *proper effects*, which are commensurate with them and are explained by them
- Example: heat is a proper effect of fire. A painting is a proper effect of a painter (or his painting skill).
- When we give a causal explanation of a thing, we usually look for its proper efficient cause (like in the examples above).

Since evil is not a positive thing, it cannot have a proper efficient cause!

The Problem

Responses

Refutation

Theodicy

Aquinas on the Problem of Evil

Main claims

Evil as Privation

Evil: natural and moral

Natural evil

Moral evil

Besides proper efficient causes, there are also **accidental causes**, which are somehow accidentally related to the cause or to the effect.

- ① On the side of the agent: e.g., when Mozart composed the *Magic Flute*, we can say that a white man composed the *Magic Flute*. But of course Mozart was not composing it by his whiteness but by his musical talent.
- ② On the side of the patient:
 - ① Relative to its matter: e.g., when I bake a cake and frost it, I am causing whiteness. But causing whiteness was not the primary aim of my action, but instead, causing a cake was!
 - ② Relative to its form: e.g., when I bake a cake, I destroy the substantial form of an egg when introducing the substantial form of a cake.¹

¹Artifacts are not real substances, but we can disregard that issue for the example.

Evil can have accidental causes in all these ways.

- ① On the side of the agent: when the agent's power is deficient, it produces a deficient effect (e.g., if I'm a deficient painter, my painting will be deficient; a deficient stomach causes indigestion). Still, I'm not painting with my deficiency but with my painting skill; so it is an accidental cause.
- ② On the side of the patient:
 - ① Relative to its matter: if the matter is not disposed to receive the agent's imprint (e.g., if I try to paint on sand; or if an animal is born with some defect).
 - ② Relative to its form: the generation of one thing always entails the decomposition of another. E.g., the flourishing of cancer cells may accidentally involve the decomposition of a human being.

The Problem

Responses

Refutation

Theodicy

Aquinas on the Problem of Evil

Main claims

Evil as Privation

Evil: natural and moral

Natural evil

Moral evil

What we have established so far:

- Natural evil has no proper efficient cause but only a “deficient cause”, i.e., it is caused accidentally.
- This accidental causation may be a result of the agent’s deficient power, or of certain indisposition in the patient on which the agent is acting, or some other unintended consequence of the agent’s action.
- Again, in these cases evil is a deficiency – and nothing intends or acts for the sake of deficiency.

The Problem

Responses

Refutation

Theodicy

Aquinas on the Problem of Evil

Main claims

Evil as Privation

Evil: natural and moral

Natural evil

Moral evil

What about Moral Evil?

- Moral vice can't be the same as weakness (since we don't blame as much for weakness as for vice)
- Moral evil cannot be ascribed to effects but only to actions and to the agent.
- 4 causes of action: (1) perceived object → (2) judgment of the perceptive power → (3) will → (4) executive (motive) power.
- Out of these 4, the only one that makes us morally imputable is the will: (4) already presupposes moral goodness or badness; and we don't blame someone for the mistake of their perception.

The Problem

Responses

Refutation

Theodicy

Aquinas on the Problem of Evil

Main claims

Evil as Privation

Evil: natural and moral

Natural evil

Moral evil

Problem: for a will to be evil, there must be some defect in it.

- Is this defect natural? – No, because then the will would *a/ways* be defective, but that does not seem to be the case.
- Is this defect voluntary? – If it is, then it seems to presuppose a previous evil will, and so on *ad infinitum*.

Solution: the defect is voluntary but not itself a moral fault (hence we avoid the infinite regress).

The Problem

Responses

Refutation

Theodicy

Aquinas on the Problem of Evil

Main claims

Evil as Privation

Evil: natural and moral

Natural evil

Moral evil

“When the will tends to action moved by a reasoned perception representing to it its due good, right action will result. But when will breaks out in action under the stimulation of sense-perception, or of reason itself but presenting the will with some other good than its due good, morally faulty action will ensure. . . . What precedes the faulty action in the will is thus a *defect of orderedness to reason and a due goal*” (ScG 3.10, p. 288–289).

- Thus, the defect is voluntary: the will has in itself the power to will or not to will, or make reason consider one thing or stop considering.
- But it is not a moral fault: reason can consider this or that or nothing at all, without any fault, until the will tends towards the undue goal.

The Problem

Responses

Refutation

Theodicy

Aquinas on the Problem of Evil

Main claims

Evil as Privation

Evil: natural and moral

Natural evil

Moral evil

Evil as such has no proper efficient cause.

- 1 Natural evil: incidentally caused by the agent, or by the indisposition of the patient, or as a “side-effect”.
- 2 Voluntary evil: caused by the inordered will – inordered with respect to reason and its due goal. The inorder itself is voluntary, but not yet morally blameworthy. God is cause of these deficient acts insofar as they are acts, but God is not cause of them insofar as they are deficient.

The Problem

Responses

Refutation

Theodicy

Aquinas on the Problem of Evil

Main claims

Evil as Privation

Evil: natural and moral

Natural evil

Moral evil