



Problems of Creation

Overview

Reminder

Problems of creation

- General problem

- Special problem

Creation, Conservation, Concurrence

Remaining questions

Is religious faith rational, or can it be?

- It is difficult to talk about God (perhaps we can, by analogy)
- What does it take a belief to be rational? Does it need sufficient evidence? If yes, what counts as sufficient evidence? If not, can we believe what we will?
 - Arguments for God's existence: ontological, cosmological, design, ... – if these work, that would count as sufficient evidence
- Maybe it is rational to believe in God even if we cannot demonstrate his existence, and even then this belief would not be completely arbitrary
- Or maybe: religious belief is irrational if it leads to absurdities.
 - e.g., you may think that divine foreknowledge leads to denying human freedom.
 - if there is a God, God is a creator. But can we make any sense of creation?
 - perhaps the existence of evil negates God's existence

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Problems of Creation

Creation poses a lot of questions. Among others:

- the “**general problem of creation**”: why would God (a perfect being) create *anything*?
- the “**special problem of creation**”: why would God create this precise world?
- **creation, conservation, concurrence**: if God created the world, does that mean that he keeps it in existence? Can we make sense of creaturely causation in that case?
- is it meaningful to say that God created the world *from nothing*? What does that mean?
- what is the relationship between **creation and temporality**?

Reminder

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General problem

Special problem

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Concurrence

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The General Problem

Judaism, Christianity, Islam all agree that God, an absolutely perfect being, created the world. **But why would an absolutely perfect being create?**

Two lines of thought:

- “because it’s a result of God’s perfect nature” – **necessitarian line**
- “because he freely chose to do so” – **libertarian line**

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Concurrence

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“In the beginning, God created heaven and earth.” (Gen. 1.1)

- why? – **because he willed so.**
- Cf. Augustine: creation is out of nothing; the volition to create is also out of nothing (= cannot be derived from previous causes)
- according to this thought, **God's will cannot be explained**: every explanans would have to be greater than the explanandum, and there is nothing greater than the divine will. [Is this a good argument?]

Reminder

Problems of creation

General problem

Special problem

Creation, Conservation,
Concurrence

Remaining questions

- Cf. Plato, *Timaeus* (even though the demiurge is not omnipotent, doesn't create *ex nihilo*): creation is an overflowing of goodness.
- Dionysius: “goodness is by its very nature diffusive of itself and hence of being.” – but if this is true, then a perfectly good being cannot but create!
- One possible solution (arguably Aquinas, Bonaventure): Trinitarian application of the principle, and then a libertarian explanation of creation.

All in all, the tension remains: God is essentially good, but also essentially self-sufficient. Perhaps it is necessary that God creates, and his free choice is limited to choosing *which world* to create exactly.

Reminder

Problems of creation

General problem

Special problem

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Concurrence

Remaining questions

The Special Problem of Creation

Why would God create this world?

- Is this the best possible world? If not, how could have God chosen it?
- If it is, it has a lot of evil in it – why did God choose to create it at all?

In other words, *does God have free choice to create whatever world he wants to create?*

- the “standard” position: no; he must choose the best possible world.
(Plato, Leibniz, . . .)

Reminder

Problems of creation

General problem

Special problem

Creation, Conservation,
Concurrence

Remaining questions

Is There a Best Possible World?

Aquinas: not really. The goodness of a world depends on its order and on the parts that are ordered.

- there may be a best *order*;
- but there are no best *parts*.

ST I.25.6., ad 3

“In virtue of the most appropriate order bestowed on these things by God, in whom the good of the universe is founded, the universe—supposing these things [to be in it]—cannot be better. If any one of these things were better, the proportion of the order would be destroyed, just as the tunefulness of a harp would be destroyed if one string were stretched more than it had to be. Nevertheless, God could make other things, or add others to these things after they were made, and in that case the universe would be better.”

additive vs intensive improvements

Reminder

Problems of creation

General problem

Special problem

Creation, Conservation,
Concurrence

Remaining questions

So Why Choose This World?

God is free to choose whatever world is “good enough”: whatever world resembles at least partly his own goodness.

No further explanation can be given [?].

→ problem of evil

Reminder

Problems of creation

General problem

Special problem

Creation, Conservation,
Concurrence

Remaining questions

- **creation** = the action by which God brings something into existence
- **conservation** = the action by which God maintains the existence of an object over time.

Judaism, Christianity, Islam: God both created the world and maintains it in existence (no “existential inertia”!).

- But are creation and conservation the same action?
- Aquinas, Suárez, Descartes, Malebranche, Leibniz, Berkeley, . . . : yes; **conservation = continuous creation.**

Reminder

Problems of creation

General problem

Special problem

**Creation, Conservation,
Concurrence**

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Creation = Conservation?

There are some good reasons to maintain that conservation = creation.

- ① **Divine atemporality**: since God is outside of time as immutable, his creating and conserving act must be the same.

Aquinas, ST I.104.1, ad 4

“The preservation of things by God is a continuation of that action by which He gives existence, which action is without either motion or time; so also the light in the air is by the continual influence of the sun.”

- ② **No distinction** (e.g., Suárez): both the origin and the terminus of the actions are the same; hence the actions must be the same also.

Reminder

Problems of creation

General problem

Special problem

Creation, Conservation,
Concurrence

Remaining questions

Creation = Conservation?

- ③ **No existential inertia** (e.g., Descartes): creatures need the same power to maintain their existence as to create them.

Descartes, *Principles of Philosophy*, 200:

“From the fact that we now exist, it does not follow that we shall exist a moment from now, unless there is some cause—the same cause which originally produced us—which continually reproduces us, as it were, that is to say, which keeps us in existence. For we easily understand that there is no power in us enabling us to keep ourselves in existence.”

Reminder

Problems of creation

General problem

Special problem

Creation, Conservation,
Concurrence

Remaining questions

Creation and Conservation Distinct?

Worry: how can created things have any causal efficacy if creation and conservation are identical?

Theories of divine concurrence:

- 1 occasionalism
- 2 concurrentism
- 3 (mere) conservationism

Reminder

Problems of creation

General problem

Special problem

Creation, Conservation,
Concurrence

Remaining questions



- how can occasionalism be false if God creates everything at every instant of its existence?
- but then occasionalism seems to make the problem of evil worse; also makes it difficult to account for free will.

Reminder

Problems of creation

General problem

Special problem

Creation, Conservation, Concurrence

Remaining questions

Some Remaining Questions

- 1 It is usually believed that God created the world *from nothing*.
 - what does that mean exactly?
 - is it a meaningful claim at all? ('Nothing' does not seem to have a reference.)
- 2 Does creation imply that the world had a temporal beginning? (Aquinas: no; Bonaventure: yes)

Reminder

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General problem

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Creation, Conservation,
Concurrence

Remaining questions