

God's Purpose for the Universe and the Problem of Animal Suffering

The problem of animal suffering asks the question, "If God is all-good, all-powerful, and all-knowing, then why did He create a world with millions of years of animal suffering and death?"¹ This problem is interesting because it can be aggravated by traditional answers to the general problems of natural and moral evil. For example, historically theists have claimed that both moral and natural evil are the product and/or punishment of human sin.² However, this seems to be a poor reason for God allowing millions of years of natural evil in the animal kingdom prior to the arrival of humans and sin. Bertrand Russell's oft-quoted passage summarizes the problem well:

We are told that "through the ages one increasing purpose runs," and that evolution is the unfolding of an idea which has been in the mind of God throughout. It appears that during those ages. . .when animals were torturing each other with ferocious horns and agonizing stings, Omnipotence was quietly waiting for the ultimate emergence of man, with his still more exquisite powers of torture and his far more widely diffused cruelty. Why the Creator should have preferred to reach His goal by a process, instead of going straight to it, these modern theologians do not tell us (1997, pp. 79-80).

As Russell emphasizes, it seems counterintuitive that God would use millions of years of animal suffering with the sole intention of creating a home for humanity.

Proponents of the problem of animal suffering claim that the vast amount of animal suffering throughout natural history provides evidence against the existence of an all-good, all-knowing, and all-powerful God.³ Instead, they claim that naturalism provides a better

¹ For monograph treatments see Southgate 2008, Murray 2011, Creegan 2013, and Dougherty 2014.

² Murray (2011, pp. 73-80) discusses the historical background of the belief that natural evil is a result of the Fall. For an interesting example of a contemporary argument in this regard see Dembski 2009.

³ For examples see Darwin 1969, p. 90; Rowe 1979, pp. 335-341; Smith 1991, pp. 159-174; Hull 1991, pp. 485-486; and Francescotti 2013, pp. 113-127.

explanation of the world. So much animal suffering is more likely to be the product of random, unguided processes than the product of an omnibenevolent Designer.

There are several strategies that theists have used to answer the problem including the neo-Cartesian denial of animal suffering and arguments for the necessity of nomic regularity. To date, it seems that few philosophers outside the theistic camp have been persuaded by either of these strategies. However, most strategies merely provide an explanation for the existence of animal suffering. Few theists have tried to counter the argument that the evidence points more toward a naturalistic world than a theistic world.⁴

This is important because even if a satisfactory explanation for the existence of animal suffering is provided, the question of whether the evidence is better explained by theism or naturalism remains. Although he did not have the problem of animal suffering in mind, Thomas Aquinas proposed an explanation for the diversity and corruptibility of nature in several places in his writings. His arguments involve God's reason for creating and God's willing the perfection of the universe. Aquinas' conclusions contradict the claim that naturalism is the best explanation for the natural history of the Earth.

In this essay, I will analyze several arguments in this regard from Aquinas' writings. First, I will discuss the claim that naturalism is the preferred position given animal suffering. Next, I will introduce several preliminary concepts needed to understand Aquinas' arguments. After this I will explain Aquinas' arguments and defend them against a major objection. Finally, I will discuss the implications the arguments have for the claim that animal suffering points to the superiority of naturalism.

⁴ The concept of nomic regularity is an example of an attempt to predict the kind of universe that a theistic God would create. But no contemporary philosophers have made arguments that are similar to Aquinas' arguments for a hierarchy of beings.

Arguments for Naturalism from Animal Suffering

Paul Draper has defended several types of arguments for naturalism from animal suffering.⁵ His various arguments are formulated as evidential arguments from evil. They usually emphasize the nature of pain and pleasure and the truth of evolutionary theory to build a case for naturalism against theism.

One pertinent argument of Draper's is found in his essay titled "Darwin's Argument from Evil." Draper states that the theory of natural selection

. . . can serve as a good 'atheodicy': an explanation of various facts about good and evil that works much better on the assumption that an alternative to theism — in this case the no-design hypothesis — is true than on the assumption that orthodox theism is true (2012b, p. 58).

In one of three arguments (which are derived from the writings of Charles Darwin) Draper says that ". . . Darwinian explanations of good and evil are less complete when Darwin's theory is combined with theism than when it is combined with the no-design hypothesis" (2012b, p. 63). Here he is arguing that the truth of evolutionary theory provides evidence for naturalism rather than theism because ". . . Darwin's theory comes closer to solving the puzzle of good and evil faced by the proponent of the no-design hypothesis than the puzzle of good and evil faced by the theist" (Draper 2012b, p. 65).

In other words, the existence of good and evil will never be explained because ". . . any complete explanation of facts about good and evil, if theism is true, include God's moral justification for allowing those facts to obtain" (Draper, 2012b, p. 65). Given God's hiddenness, we may never know why He allows evil in most situations. So if theism is true, then we may

⁵ See Draper 1989, pp. 331-350; 2004, pp. 311-321; 2012a, pp. 306-316; 2012b, pp. 49-70; and 2015, pp. 271-282.

never be able to explain facts about good and evil. However, evolutionary theory does explain the occurrence of good and evil, assuming the truth of the no-design hypothesis.

An even more pertinent argument comes from Draper's essay titled "Christian Theism and Life on Earth." In this essay, Draper's thesis includes the argument that the specific amount of "flourishing and floundering" of sentient organisms on earth provides evidence for naturalism over theism. He emphasizes that

What we find when we examine our biosphere is that, for a variety of biological and ecological reasons, organisms compete for survival, with some having an advantage in the struggle for survival over others; as a result, many organisms, including many sentient beings, never flourish because they die before maturity, many others barely survive, but languish for most or all of their lives, and those that reach maturity and flourish for much of their lives usually flounder in old age; further, in the case of human beings and very probably some non-human animals as well, floundering or languishing often involves intense and prolonged suffering (Draper 2012a, pp. 312).

Given that the God of Christianity should want His creatures to flourish and has the power to make this so, Draper concludes that ". . .the fact that huge numbers of human and other sentient beings never flourish at all before death and countless others flourish only briefly, is extremely surprising given CT [Christian theism]. It is not what one would expect to find in a living world created by the Christian God" (2012a, p. 313).

These are good examples of arguments that emphasize the earth's natural history and conclude that naturalism is the preferred explanation for such a vast amount of animal suffering. They are mainly concerned with the explanatory power of naturalism and theism and assume that all else being equal, animal suffering points to theism being most likely false. So the basic argument for naturalism from animal suffering can be formulated as

- (1) Either theism or naturalism is true.
- (2) The God of theism would more than likely create a world in which sentient creatures always flourish.

(3) However, sentient creatures have suffered and died for millions of years on the earth.

(4) Therefore, naturalism is more likely than not to be true.

As mentioned earlier, some theists have attempted to provide reasons for the existence of animal suffering, but few have attempted to show that theism anticipates a world that contains animal suffering. So although there are arguably plenty of philosophical, scientific, and historical reasons to accept theism (and Christian theism in particular), the argument for naturalism from animal suffering seems to stand. However as mentioned above, the philosophy of Thomas Aquinas can provide an answer to this problem.

Preliminaries to Aquinas' Arguments

In several places in Aquinas' writings, he argues that in order to accomplish God's purpose for the universe, He must create a hierarchy of beings with differing grades of perfection.⁶ At *ST* I, 47, 1, Aquinas summarizes this argument when he says,

Hence we must say that the distinction and multitude of things come from the intention of the first agent, who is God. For He brought things into being in order that His goodness might be communicated to creatures, and be represented by them; and because His goodness could not be adequately represented by one creature alone, He produced many and diverse creatures, that what was wanting to one in the representation of the divine goodness might be supplied by another. For goodness, which in God is simple and uniform, in creatures is manifold and divided and hence the whole universe together participates the divine goodness more perfectly, and represents it better than any single creature whatever.⁷

Aquinas is arguing that for God to best communicate His goodness, God must create "many and diverse creatures." Aquinas believes that this is something God must necessarily do to

⁶ Aquinas presents these in detail at Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles* (SCG) II, 45; and Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* (ST) I, 47.

⁷ All quotes from the *Summa Theologiae* are from Aquinas 1947.

accomplish His purpose for the universe. If God did not do this, His creation would not be perfect, which is impossible because God is perfect.

Of course this argument is more detailed than Aquinas' summary, and in fact Aquinas has several arguments to this regard. So it will be necessary to examine several arguments in detail. However, before this it is necessary to discuss several concepts that Aquinas presupposes in the arguments.

Those who are unfamiliar with Aquinas will probably find several aspects of his summary puzzling. Aquinas mentions that God wants to communicate His goodness and to accomplish this He must create diverse creatures. There are three main concepts that need explaining here. The first is what Aquinas means by God's 'goodness'. The second is God's reason for creating and purpose for the universe. The third is the metaphysical hurdle that God encounters while accomplishing this purpose.

God's Goodness

First, it is important to understand what Aquinas means by 'goodness' when he says that God aims to communicate His goodness. Aquinas believes that God is 'Infinite Goodness'. This is because of the metaphysical implications resulting from Aquinas' arguments for God's existence (i.e. the 'Five Ways').

Aquinas agrees with the Aristotelian principle that goodness and existence are identical. In the first part of the *ST*, Aquinas argues that

The essence of goodness consists in this, that it is in some way desirable. Hence the Philosopher says (*Ethic. i*): "Goodness is what all desire." Now it is clear that a thing is desirable only in so far as it is perfect; for all desire their own perfection. But everything is perfect so far as it is actual. Therefore it is clear that a thing is perfect so far as it exists; for it is existence that makes all things actual, as is clear from the foregoing. Hence it is clear that goodness and being are the same really (*ST I, 5, 1*).

Here Aquinas is arguing that something is only 'good' as far as it is a desirable example of what it is supposed to be. The term 'good' is an attributive adjective (as opposed to a predicative adjective) in that its meaning changes according to the noun it is intended to modify (Geach 1956). So for example, the term 'good' in the phrases 'good human' and 'good dog' mean completely different things. Not only are the physical attributes of a good human and a good dog different, but also humans are held to a moral standard that dogs are not.

But if something does not exist in reality, then it cannot be desirable in any way. This is why Aquinas says that "something is perfect so far as it is actual." A non-existent thing is not desirable in any way because it is not actual. Thus, implied in the perfection of anything is actuality, or existence, and this entails that existence and goodness are interchangeable concepts.

Aquinas' cosmological arguments conclude that there must exist a Being which is not limited in any way. For example, in Aquinas' First Way (*ST I*, 2, 3), he reasons that there must ultimately be something without potentiality to explain the *per se* ordered series of the actualization of potencies in the world. But something without potentiality would be Pure Actuality. As explained above, something is good in so far as it is actual and this entails that God is Infinite Goodness.

Also, in Aquinas' Second Way (*ST I* 2, 3), he reasons there must be something without an efficient cause (i.e. something that depends on nothing else for its existence) to explain the *per se* ordered series of efficient causality in the world that causes contingent things to exist. But because all contingent things have an essence that is conjoined with existence through efficient causality, something without an efficient cause can only be something in which its essence is existence. So the ultimate efficient cause of the existence of all contingent things must be Existence Itself, or Pure Existence, which Aquinas took to be God. As explained above, because

existence and goodness are interchangeable, if God is Pure Existence, then God is also Infinite Goodness. This is foremost a metaphysical goodness and not a moral goodness that most modern readers would think of when hearing that God is Infinite Goodness.

God's Reason for Creating and Purpose for Creation

So this is the goodness that Aquinas is referring to when he says that God aims to communicate His goodness. But it might remain puzzling to some why Aquinas is saying that God wants 'to communicate His goodness'. The explanation is that Aquinas believes this is the only reason for why God would have decided to create.

One of Aquinas' reasons for believing this is his understanding that God is perfect. Because God is without potentiality and is Pure Actuality (i.e. Infinite Perfection), lacks nothing, and is complete in Himself, there is nothing that God could ever need. This means that if God were to choose to create, there can be no cause for His choice to create. There can be no cause, but there can be a reason for why God chooses to create.

But why would an infinitely perfect Being ever choose to create anything? The answer lies in the Dionysian principle that goodness is inclined to communicate itself: "But it belongs to the essence of goodness to communicate itself to others, as is plain from Dionysius (Div. Nom. iv). Hence it belongs to the essence of the highest good to communicate itself in the highest manner to the creature. . ." (*ST III*, 1, 1). Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange provides an illustration as to why Aquinas might have agreed with this principle:

Goodness is essentially communicative; good is diffusive of itself. In the material order, we observe that, the sun imparts its light and vivifying heat to all that comes in contact with it. In the intellectual order, when the intellect has arrived at the knowledge of truth, it spontaneously seeks to impart this to others. In the moral order, those with a holy ardor for goodness, like the Apostles, have no rest until these same aspirations, this same love, are aroused in others (1949, p. 2:99).

So reasoning from effect to cause, Aquinas concludes that because goodness is naturally diffusive of itself, God must also be naturally inclined to create given His infinite goodness. Thus, the reason for why God creates is that He freely chooses (because He is naturally inclined) to communicate His goodness. This entails that the purpose of the universe and the entire created order is the communication of God's infinite goodness.

A Metaphysical Obstacle to Communicating Infinite Goodness

However, although Aquinas believes that God is omnipotent, Aquinas does not believe it is possible for God to communicate His goodness in certain ways. For example, Aquinas (*SCG* II, 25) argues that although God is perfect, He cannot create an infinitely perfect world. The reason for this is because, as Pure Actuality, only God is infinitely perfect. Anything besides God will be contingent and fall infinitely short of His perfection. In this regard, Aquinas argues that for any world we can imagine, we could just as easily imagine a world with one or two more good things (*ST I*, 25, 6, ad 3). Thus, there is an infinite number of worlds that God could possibly create which would each fall infinitely short of His perfection.⁸

But Aquinas does not think this means there is nothing perfect about what God creates. Although God cannot create an infinitely perfect world, Aquinas believes that God can create a perfectly ordered world. The mere existence of the world is not enough to communicate God's goodness, so God must order the world so that it fulfills His purpose. Aquinas explains that

. . . as "it belongs to the best to produce the best," it is not fitting that the supreme goodness of God should produce things without giving them their perfection. Now a thing's ultimate perfection consists in the attainment of its end. Therefore it belongs to the Divine goodness, as it brought things into existence, so to lead them to their end: and

⁸ Aquinas (*ST I*, 7, 4) agrees with Aristotle and believes that an actual infinite multitude is impossible. Thus, Aquinas believes that God cannot create a universe with an actually infinite number of beings. If this possibility is eliminated, God must choose between the infinite number of universes that do not include actually infinite multitudes.

this is to govern. . . For since the end of the government of the world is that which is essentially good, which is the greatest good; the government of the world must be the best kind of government (*ST I*, 103, 1; *ST I*, 103, 3).

Thus, the perfection of the universe lies in God's perfect ordering of its parts to the whole with God as its end. Aquinas (*SCG III*, 114-115) believes that to do this, God must create a world with a natural law (to govern inanimate objects, plants, and animals) and a moral law (to govern humans, which have free will). All of these considerations help to explain why Aquinas says that God wants to communicate His goodness and to accomplish this He must create diverse creatures.

Aquinas' Arguments at *SCG II*, 45

This greatly helps the transition to discussing Aquinas' arguments for the necessity of a hierarchy of beings. In Aquinas' earlier work, the *Summa Contra Gentiles*, he provides several arguments to this regard. At *SCG II*, 45 in particular, he proposes seven arguments that God must create a hierarchy of beings to accomplish His purpose for creating.

First, Aquinas argues that

. . . created things cannot attain to a perfect likeness to God according to only one species of creature. For, since the cause transcends the effect, that which is in the cause, simply and unitedly, exists in the effect in composite and multiple fashion—unless the effect attain to the species of the cause; which cannot be said in this case, because no creature can be equal to God. The presence of multiplicity and variety among created things was therefore necessary that a perfect likeness to God be found in them according to their manner of being (*SCG II*, 45; cf. *ST I*, 47, 1).⁹

As mentioned above, God is faced with a metaphysical hurdle with His intention to imbue His likeness into creation. God is perfect, simple, and immaterial while His creation is imperfect, contingent, and mostly material. It does not make sense for God to make one kind of creature to

⁹ All quotes from the *Summa Contra Gentiles* are from Aquinas 1975.

accomplish this. One type or two types of creatures would do a poor job of representing His goodness. As Norman Kretzmann suggests, God's goal in creating is the equivalent of trying to "represent a geometer's straight line (which is continuous, infinite, and invisible) by nothing but pencilled dots" (1999, p. 217). One or two dots would not serve very well to represent the invisible line. God must create a diverse number of species because contingent creatures can only possess so many perfections. None can contain all perfections as is the case with God. Instead it follows that God would make a large variety of creatures to better demonstrate His goodness.

Next, Aquinas argues that

. . . just as things made from matter lie in the passive potentiality of matter, so things made by an agent must exist in the active power of the agent. The passive potentiality of matter, however, would not be completely actualized if only one of the things to which matter is in potentiality were made from it. Therefore, if an agent whose power extends to a number of effects were to produce only one of them, its power would not be as fully actualized as when it produces several. Now, by the fact that the active power is actualized the effect receives the likeness of the agent. Hence, there would not be a perfect likeness of God in the universe if all things were of one grade of being (*SCG II*, 45).

This argument is similar to his first but emphasizes all of the potencies contained within matter. Matter has the potentiality to receive any number of forms and it would be contrary to God's purpose if He only actualized one of these forms. God is Unlimited Actuality so if He wants to imbue His likeness into creation this will entail actualizing a great variety and number of forms.¹⁰

In Aquinas' third argument, he says that

. . . a thing approaches to God's likeness the more perfectly as it resembles Him in more things. Now, goodness is in God, and the outpouring of goodness into other things. Hence, the creature approaches more perfectly to God's likeness if it is not only good,

¹⁰ As mentioned earlier, Aquinas (*ST I*, 7, 4) rejects the possibility of an actual infinite multitude. So this would not entail that God must create an infinite number of forms.

but can also act for the good of other things, than if it were good only in itself; that which both shines and casts light is more like the sun than that which only shines. . . In order that there might be in created things a perfect representation of God, the existence of diverse grades among them was therefore necessary (*SCG II*, 45).

It would be contrary to God's purpose of communicating His goodness to create only one type of creature. But in addition to creating a variety of creatures, it follows that God must include creatures that can act for the good of other creatures. This is because God's goodness includes acting for the good of other beings.

Next Aquinas emphasizes something that has already been explained. He says that

. . . a plurality of goods is better than a single finite good, since they contain the latter and more besides. But all goodness possessed by creatures is finite, falling short of the infinite goodness of God. Hence, the universe of creatures is more perfect if there are many grades of things than if there were but one. Now, it befits the supreme good to make what is best. It was therefore fitting that God should make many grades of creatures (*SCG II*, 45).

Again, God is intent on imbuing His goodness into creation and it would be contrary to His purpose if He created only one creature. This entails that it would be fitting for Him to create a great variety and diversity of creatures. However, although any world He creates will fall infinitely short of this goal, it would greater fulfill His purpose to create a variety of creatures since a variety is better than only one.

Aquinas' fifth argument for the necessity of a hierarchy of beings is that

. . . the good of the species is greater than the good of the individual, just as the formal exceeds that which is material. Hence, a multiplicity of species adds more to the goodness of the universe than a multiplicity of individuals in one species. It therefore pertains to the perfection of the universe that there be not only many individuals, but that there be also diverse species of things, and, consequently, diverse grades in things (*SCG II*, 45; cf. *ST I*, 47, 2).

At *ST I*, 47, 2, Aquinas explains that if a species is incorruptible, there is no need for God to create more than one of its kind. God creates many individuals of corruptible species to ensure the preservation of the species. It would be insufficient to communicate God's goodness if He

simply made one species. Instead, God must create a variety of species as well as a numerical abundance of individuals within each corruptible species.

Aquinas' next argument emphasizes God's intellect:

Whatever acts by intellect, moreover, represents in the thing made the species present in its intellect, for thus does an agent that causes things by art produce his like. Now, as we have already shown, God, acting as an intellectual agent and not by natural necessity, made the creature. Hence, the species present in God's intellect is represented in the creature made by Him. But an intellect which understands many things is not adequately represented in only one thing. Therefore, since the divine intellect knows many things, as was proved in Book I, it represents itself more perfectly if it produces many creatures of all grades than if it had produced only one (*SCG* II, 45; cf. *ST* I, 47, 1, ad 1-2).

Because God is all-knowing, it would not be sufficient for Him to simply create one type of creature. Instead, creating a large variety of creatures better communicates God's goodness. The product of an intelligent cause reflects the intellect of the cause. So just as an unsightly building shows that its architects are not good at their jobs or a poorly designed building badly reflects the skills of its engineers, so would a universe with only one type of creature badly communicate God's goodness, which includes omniscience.

Aquinas' last argument says that

The highest degree of perfection should not be lacking in a work made by the supremely good workman. But the good of order among diverse things is better than any of the members of an order, taken by itself. For the good of order is formal in respect to each member of it, as the perfection of the whole in relation to the parts. It was not fitting, therefore, that God's work should lack the good of order. And yet, without the diversity and inequality of created things, this good could not exist (*SCG* II, 45; cf. *ST* I, 47, 2, ad 1).

Here Aquinas emphasizes that God cannot create a universe that would perfectly communicate His goodness. Because God cannot create a perfect universe, God must perfectly order the universe to Himself. But an ordering would be impossible without the diversity and inequality of created things. Thus, God must create a universe with various grades and types of creatures.

To summarize, Aquinas provides seven brief arguments for the necessity of a hierarchy of beings in God's creation:

1. As Pure Existence, He must create a world with diverse creatures because it is impossible for one species to represent His goodness.
2. As Pure Actuality, God must actualize a great diversity of forms to best communicate His goodness.
3. As loving, God must include creatures that are able to act for the good of others in the universe to better communicate His goodness.
4. Although it is impossible for God to ever create a world that will fully communicate His goodness, it is still better to include a great amount and diversity of creatures because more species of creatures is better than one species.
5. God must create a diversity of creatures because a diversity of forms is better than merely diversity of matter (diversity in matter only being necessary for the preservation of a corruptible species).
6. As all-knowing, God must actualize a great diversity of forms to best communicate His goodness.
7. The universe must include gradation and diversity to have order, which is necessary to show God's perfection (because God cannot perfectly communicate His perfection through an imperfect medium).

Implications for a Theistic Universe

These arguments have many implications for a theistic universe. It will be good to briefly discuss these implications to show what a theistic universe should include. This will help to show why arguments for naturalism from animal suffering are mistaken.

First, it is good to remember Aquinas' concept that God must order the universe to Himself using a natural law. This entails that whatever universe God decides to create, it will be governed by natural laws. This will ensure that objects without intellects within the universe fulfill their intended purposes.

Of course, the biggest implication from Aquinas' arguments at *SCG* II, 45 is that whatever world God decides to create, it will include a great diversity and number of creatures. This entails that God must create a world with a hierarchy of beings. Aquinas' explains this at *ST* I, 47, 2:

Now, formal distinction always requires inequality, because as the Philosopher says (*Metaph.* viii, 10), the forms of things are like numbers in which species vary by addition or subtraction of unity. Hence in natural things species seem to be arranged in degrees; as the mixed things are more perfect than the elements, and plants than minerals, and animals than plants, and men than other animals; and in each of these one species is more perfect than others.

Here it must be remembered that existence and actuality are interchangeable with desirability and goodness. So implied within the concept of differing forms is the concept of inequality. The essence or form of a thing explains the actuality of the thing. When the forms of things differ, the actuality and thus the goodness of the things will differ as well. This of course results in inequality. So if God must create a world with a large variety of forms, this necessarily entails that there will be a hierarchy of beings from the less perfect to the more perfect. Aquinas emphasizes that we see such a hierarchy in nature. There is an obvious hierarchy ranging from fundamental particles to elements, elements to plants, plants to animals, and animals to humans. In each case, the latter has more actuality, and thus more goodness, than the former.

This also contains something important for the current discussion. Entailed within the concept of a hierarchy of beings is the principle that the lower creatures of the hierarchy exist for the good of the higher creatures. Aquinas explains this in the *ST* when he says that

Now if we wish to assign an end to any whole, and to the parts of that whole, we shall find, first, that each and every part exists for the sake of its proper act, as the eye for the act of seeing; secondly, that less honorable parts exist for the more honorable, as the senses for the intellect, the lungs for the heart; and, thirdly, that all parts are for the perfection of the whole, as the matter for the form, since the parts are, as it were, the matter of the whole (*ST* I, 65, 2).

Because the hierarchy of beings exists to communicate God's goodness, each species within the hierarchy exists for the perfection of the whole. Aquinas illustrates this by emphasizing the parts of human beings. Most vary in actuality and goodness, while all of the parts exist for the good of the complete human. Although the various parts possess unequal amounts of goodness, most are essential. Moreover, it would be detrimental if all of a human's parts possessed equal amounts of goodness. For example, the eye bestows the ability of sight to humans while finger nails are not as important although they also are conducive to survival. However, humans would be less good if they were simply a collection of eyes.

Also, each species within the hierarchy exists for the good of the species above it. Aquinas illustrates this when he emphasizes that the human intellect would be impossible without the senses and the heart could not function without the lungs. This can also be seen in nature where plants are nourished by the soil, animals are nourished by plants, and humans are nourished by both plants and animals.

Another major implication of Aquinas' arguments is that because material things are corruptible, there will be a numerical abundance of each created species to ensure the survival of the species. Aquinas concludes from his arguments at *SCG II*, 45, and others, that God must include angels in His creation. Aquinas (*ST I*, 50, 1-2) believes that angels are immaterial, incorruptible beings that are pure form conjoined with an act of existing. As seen above, Aquinas argues that there need only be one of each type of incorruptible being. This is because their incorruptibility ensures their continued existence.¹¹

However, there must be a numerical abundance of corruptible creatures, which are included in creation as a part of the necessary hierarchy of beings. This is obvious because if

¹¹ This is also because as immaterial beings without a material cause, it is impossible for there to be more than one number of each species of angel because there is nothing to numerically individuate one from another (*ST I*, 50, 2).

there are only one or two creatures of any given species, the chances of their continued survival will be much smaller in a world with natural laws than the chances of a larger number of creatures of the same species.

Finally, an implication of Aquinas' arguments is that God must include creatures with rational intellects and wills in His creation. This is seen in Aquinas' second and sixth arguments. God is Pure Actuality and all-knowing. Included in God's goodness is the ability to act for the good of others. So if God wants to communicate His goodness, He must create beings that can act for the good of others and also create beings with rational intellects and wills (i.e. beings that are capable of understanding the communiqué).

To summarize, according to Thomism a theistic universe should include a large number of differing types of creatures within it to fulfill God's purpose. This entails that there will be a hierarchy of beings with differing grades of perfection. The hierarchy should include beings that are both corruptible and incorruptible, and should range all the way from the inanimate, to the animate, to the rational, and to the purely spiritual. Because the world is ordered with a natural law, there must be a numerical abundance of creatures within each corruptible species to ensure its survival. God's purpose is to communicate His goodness, so this entails that He must preserve the hierarchy of species, not necessarily individuals within each species.

Objections to the Arguments

Probably the most obvious objection to these arguments is that it seems that an all-good God would not include death and suffering in His creation. Death and suffering are evils an all-good, all-powerful, and all-knowing God should not allow. If God allows evil, then He cannot be said to be all-good.

The main thing to remember in this regard is that Aquinas' definition of all-good is different from what most contemporary people will assume. As mentioned above, Aquinas' definition of 'all-good' refers to metaphysical goodness and not necessarily moral goodness. Infinite Goodness equates to Pure Existence and Pure Actuality, among other things. It does not necessarily equate to 'perfect morality'.

It is debatable whether Aquinas understood God's goodness to entail that He perfectly meets a certain set of moral obligations.¹² The main reason this is so involves Aquinas' concepts of God's simplicity and transcendence. Aquinas' arguments for God's existence famously entail that God is simple and is not composed of parts (*ST I*, 3; *SCG I*, 16-28). If God is simple, this entails that terms like 'all-good', 'all-powerful', and 'all-knowing', are all different ways of describing one Pure Act of existence. Since, these terms merely provide an analogical means of grasping God's infinite existence, Aquinas argues that we can never fully understand what they entail with our finite minds (*ST I*, 12, 7).

Aquinas did not deny that morality is in God. He mentions that we can attribute certain virtues to God such as truth, love, justice, prudence, and others. For example, 'to love' for Aquinas is to will the good of the beloved (*ST I*, 20, 2). Thus, God is loving because He wills the good of the universe and His creatures. Also, God is just (understood in terms of distributive justice) because He determines what each of His creatures should have and then ensures that they possess what He has determined. So in terms of Aquinas' virtue theory of ethics, all of God's acts are good because they flow from His infinite goodness.

¹² Brian Davies is a major proponent for the view that Aquinas' philosophy entails that God is not a moral agent. For example, see Davies 2006, pp. 84-105.

But this does not entail that all of the moral rules that apply to humans are necessarily applicable to God.¹³ We can know how God must act in some situations. For example, we can know that God is logically obligated to refrain from lying, murdering, and breaking covenants. He cannot do anything that would qualify as sin for humans because He cannot contradict His own eternal law, from which the moral law is derived (*ST I-II*, 79, 1). But we could never fully know how He ought to act in every situation because to do so our finite minds would need to understand God's infinite actuality, which is impossible in this life.

So God is not necessarily obligated to eliminate evil completely as J.L. Mackie (1955) famously suggests. The existence of evil in the world does nothing to bring God's goodness into question because His goodness is essentially metaphysical goodness, not necessarily moral goodness understood in terms of what it is for a human to be moral. But of course, the question of why God allows evil still remains.

To answer this, it is important to remember why God decides to create. As stated many times, God's reason for creating is to communicate His goodness. It is good to note that this does not necessarily include keeping His creatures from harm or death. As mentioned, to better communicate His goodness, God must create a hierarchy of beings including corruptible and incorruptible beings. Also as mentioned, this entails that there needs to be a numerical abundance of corruptible beings within each species to ensure the survival of each species.

Aquinas discusses this in more places than just *SCG II*, 45. Right before his arguments for a hierarchy of beings, Aquinas explains that

. . .since the good of the whole is better than the good of each part, the best maker is not he who diminishes the good of the whole in order to increase the goodness of some of the parts; a builder does not give the same relative value to the foundation that he gives

¹³ Laura Garcia (2009) provides a good discussion of the difficulties that even non-Thomistic philosophies face in the attempt to interpret God's moral perfection in terms of deontological, consequentialist, and virtue theories of ethics. She argues that virtue theories provide the least problematic interpretation of God's moral perfection.

to the roof, lest he ruin the house. Therefore, God, the maker of all things, would not make the whole universe the best of its kind, if He made all the parts equal, because many grades of goodness would then be lacking in the universe, and thus it would be imperfect (*SCG* II, 44).

Here we see again the concept that a diversity of forms necessarily requires diverse grades of goodness in the universe. Just like a human made of eyes would be less perfect, so would the universe be less perfect if there were only one grade of goodness in it.

Another important point to remember is that the Thomistic understanding of evil is that evil is a privation of the good. Evil is understood as the absence of a good that should be present. Thus, blindness in a human is an evil while blindness in a rock is not. As corruptible beings, animals and humans are naturally subject to death and suffering. Death and suffering may appear to be evil in that they are the privation of the ideal state of animals and humans. However, death and suffering are not evils because they are natural for corruptible beings. Thus, just as blindness is a privation but not an evil for a rock, so also death and suffering by natural causes are not evil for contingent beings.

This entails that the existence of natural death and suffering is not contrary to God's goodness. The existence of corruptible beings is necessary to accomplish God's purpose and the nature of corruptible beings necessarily entails death and suffering. Even when God allows sentient and rational beings to flounder, this is an action that flows from His perfect love and justice. It is loving because God is willing the good of floundering creatures in that He wills them to exist and is just in that they possess the goodness that He has determined that they should possess. But God cannot value the parts over the whole (including supernaturally endowing rational creatures with immortality), because this would contradict His purpose for creating. If sentient and rational creatures are immortal, there is no reason to create more than one of each. As already stated, such a world would not sufficiently manifest God's goodness. But

if God could not sufficiently communicate His goodness, He would never decide to create. God's goodness is compatible with death and suffering because they are not evils for contingent creatures, they are not contrary to His purpose, and instead they are necessary for His purpose.

Here it might be objected that Aquinas' arguments do not account for all types of natural death and suffering found in nature.¹⁴ It might be emphasized that some organisms are subjected to privations aside from the usual death and suffering associated with old age. As Draper says, there are a great number of organisms that "never flourish because they die before maturity" (2012a, pp. 312). Such cases involve abnormalities that are usually unexpected given Christian theism, such as birth defects, which cause organisms to die early deaths.

A problem with this objection is that it fails to realize what is involved with the natural decay of contingent organisms. When older organisms reproduce, this will many times produce progeny that possess birth defects, which result in offspring experiencing lives that are shorter and/or more difficult than their parents. If these offspring also reproduce, then defects are easily replicated within a population. Natural selection helps to cut down on the propagation of defects, but it usually does not fully eliminate them. Indeed, it would be strange for someone to allow for natural aging and decay, yet deny that this would entail birth defects and other complications. Thus, this objection adds nothing to what has already been discussed. For this objection to stand, it would be necessary to show that God is somehow obligated, logically or morally, to give organisms the ability to produce flawless offspring, regardless of the age of the parents.

¹⁴ I use the term 'natural' here to refer to death and suffering that is caused solely by natural processes. This is opposed to death and suffering that is caused by the freely willed choices of rational beings.

Implications for the Argument for Naturalism from Animal Suffering

It should now be apparent that Aquinas' arguments counter the argument for naturalism from animal suffering. For sure, Aquinas would reject premise (2) of the argument that "the God of theism would more than likely create a world in which sentient creatures always flourish." On the contrary, Aquinas would endorse the opposite view that the God of theism must create a world that includes the floundering of sentient creatures.¹⁵

Draper argues that evolutionary theory provides evidence for naturalism over theism because ". . . Darwinian explanations of good and evil are less complete when Darwin's theory is combined with theism than when it is combined with the no-design hypothesis" (2012b, p. 63). Explanations of good and evil are less complete when they are combined with theism because they lack the knowledge of God's moral justifications. However, although many contemporary theists believe that God's perfection entails that He is the most moral being in the universe (understood in terms of what it is for a human to be moral), we have seen that there is good reason to believe that this is not necessarily the case. But also Aquinas' arguments show that it is unnecessary to look for a moral explanation in God, because the explanation is found in His purpose for creating. Also, no moral explanation is needed because death and suffering are not evils, although they are privations, because death and suffering are natural to contingent creatures. God includes these privations in creation in willing the perfection of the universe for the purpose of communicating His goodness.

Aquinas' philosophical theology and 'evil as privation theory' not only explain why God allows evil, but they also expose the explanatory inadequacy of the no-design hypothesis.

Aquinas provides an objective definition of evil. It should be apparent that this basis is found in

¹⁵ Aquinas (*ST I*, 97, 1, ad 3) does not think that humans were naturally immortal before the Fall. This entails that all sentient creatures in a theistic universe are subject to death and suffering.

God. Evil is the privation of a good that ought to exist. This can only be an objective concept if the 'ought' is derived from the form of a thing as determined by God. If there is no objective basis for how creatures ought to be, then theories such as the no-design hypothesis have no objective basis for defining 'evil'. If sentient creatures exist for no reason, then there is no ought implied in their natures. Thus, the deaths of sentient creatures are not evils because their existence is not something that ought to obtain. Just like blindness in a rock is not an evil, blindness in a human would not be an evil if the existence of humans were accidental and they were never meant to possess sight. For sentient creatures, existence and the lack of suffering are not objectively ideal states, but can only be subjectively desirable states.

This especially applies to Draper's concept that early deaths and birth defects count as evidence for the no-design hypothesis. If there is no objectively ideal state for any particular organism, there can be no objective basis for emphasizing concepts such as *early* deaths, birth *defects*, and failing to reach *maturity*. Indeed, words such as 'early', 'defect', and 'maturity' can have no objective basis under the no-design hypothesis. If an evil is something that should not obtain, none of these things can be evils because there is nothing to objectively determine how long organisms ought to live or how their bodies should be configured. Thus, the argument for naturalism from animal evil ceases to be a formal argument and instead is shown to merely be a statement of preference.

Moreover, theism offers more explanatory power in that it predicts the necessity of rational creatures and the floundering of contingent creatures. First, evolutionary theory provides evidence in favor of theism because evolutionary theory entails that the existence of rational creatures is highly unlikely. Thus, evolutionary theory combined with the no-design hypothesis renders the existence of rational creatures in the universe a cosmic accident. However, theism

necessitates the existence of rational beings in the universe and explains why they exist although the odds are highly against their favor.

Second, Draper argues that “. . .the fact that huge numbers of human and other sentient beings never flourish at all before death and countless others flourish only briefly, is extremely surprising given CT. It is not what one would expect to find in a living world created by the Christian God” (2012a, p. 313). Aquinas’ arguments for a hierarchy of beings show this to be mistaken in that floundering and death are not only unsurprising given Christian theism, but they are to be expected. On this view of Christian theism, floundering is expected because God should create a hierarchy of beings that includes contingent beings. Contingent organisms, by definition, are beings that will eventually undergo decay. The purpose of the hierarchy is to communicate God’s goodness by pointing upwards to His metaphysical perfection. If the hierarchy contained only incorruptible creatures, this would not communicate His goodness as well as a hierarchy with contingent creatures. Also, there is nothing in God’s purpose necessitating that He ensure all creatures live to a ripe old-age.

With these arguments out of the way, and in light of Aquinas’ arguments for a hierarchy of beings, we should conclude that theism is more likely than naturalism if we assume, as Draper does in “Christian Theism and Life on Earth,” that the antecedent probability of theism is equal to the probability of naturalism (2012a, p. 307). As shown, the no-design hypothesis has no objective basis for defining ‘good’ and ‘evil’. So the truth of evolutionary theory does nothing to confirm it. Thus, the probability of the no-design hypothesis is not increased in the slightest by the truth of evolutionary theory. Yet the truth of evolutionary theory would increase the probability of Christian theism. This is because Christian theism, as viewed by Aquinas, predicts that God will create a world that includes sentient and rational creatures that are subject to

corruption and will inevitably flounder. Thus, the truth of evolution would confirm Aquinas' Christian theism by explaining how God causes differing species to arise in order to communicate His goodness.

Conclusion

The argument for naturalism from animal suffering states that naturalism is more likely to be true given the reality of evolutionary theory and the vast amount of floundering and death among animals. The no-design hypothesis is said to be preferred because it is a better explanation for the evil found in our world. Moreover, the evil in the world also seems to be contrary to the concept of God according to traditional theism.

However, it was shown that this problem for theism can be answered through the thought of Thomas Aquinas who argued that theism entails the necessity of a hierarchy of beings. Aquinas concluded that the only reason God could have chosen to create is to communicate His goodness. Also, Aquinas' philosophy entails that God's goodness is best understood as metaphysical goodness and not necessarily moral goodness. Given these concepts, Aquinas proposes seven arguments at *SCG* II, 45 that God must create a hierarchy of beings. These arguments conclude that God must create a formal abundance of beings in the world. This entails that there must be a hierarchy of creatures including both corruptible and incorruptible beings. The corruptibility of some beings, along with God's lawful ordering of the universe, entail that God will create a numerical abundance of creatures within their particular species. Also, God must include rational beings in His creation.

Aquinas' arguments and their implications expose the uselessness of the argument for naturalism from animal suffering. They not only explain why God allows death and floundering (and predict that He will allow death and floundering), but they show how naturalism has no

ability to explain what 'evil' is. Also, they provide theism with the prediction that rational beings should necessarily exist in the universe. They render the no-design hypothesis explanatorily vacuous and entail that evolutionary theory provides confirmation of Christian theism. Thus, the evidence favors theism more than the no-design hypothesis.

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