

COULD A GOOD GOD ALLOW DEATH BEFORE THE FALL? A THOMISTIC PERSPECTIVE

1. INTRODUCTION

The intramural debate among Christians over the correct interpretation of Genesis 1 and the age of the earth continues and has become heated at times over the last few years. For example in 2014, young-earth proponent, Ken Ham, attacked the credibility of the scientific apologetics ministry of Hugh Ross, an old-earth proponent. Soon after Ross released a book titled, *Navigating Genesis: A Scientist's Journey through Genesis 1-11*, Ham included in a blog post that

Dr. Ross misrepresents God to unbelievers by stuffing millions of years into the Bible and disconnecting death and suffering from its ultimate cause: man's sin. This does not encourage faith but suggests to them that God's Word is not trustworthy and damages the salvation message.¹

Ham is adamant throughout his post that Ross' interpretation of Genesis can lead Christians to doubt the inerrancy of Scripture, undermines the gospel, and makes God responsible for creating evil.

Ham's claims led Deborah Haarsma, the president of BioLogos, to write a post on her blog emphasizing that the heated debate between Christians over the age of the earth is more to blame for young people leaving the church than the beliefs of the differing viewpoints.² Accordingly, Haarsma pleaded for "gracious dialogue" and invited Ham to a dinner with her and Ross. In response, Ham wrote a blog post in which he rejected Haarsma's invitation and likened the situation to when Nehemiah refused to meet with Sanballat and Geshem, who were maliciously trying to stop Nehemiah from finishing rebuilding the wall of the temple in Jerusalem (Neh. 6).³

As indicated by Ham's comments towards Ross, young-earth proponents argue that a major problem with old-earth views is they seem to indicate that God created an imperfect world containing death, disease, pain, and suffering. Young-earth proponents say God would not only refrain from including natural evils in His creation, but also would never call such evils "very good". For example, in *Six Days: The Age of the Earth and the Decline of the Church*, Ham says,

If you are a Christian and you believe in millions of years, you have to take all the death, disease, and suffering, and all the horrible things happening in the world, and you have to attribute these to God. If you accept millions of years, then you have to say, "Isn't God good? He calls death, suffering, and disease very good."⁴

What Ham is saying is that it would be terrible for God to create a world with disease, suffering, and death and call it "very good". So any theist who believes that God did this, should realize it entails that God is not good.

This argument from young-earth proponents seems to form a type of logical problem of evil entailing that God's moral perfection is not compatible with the existence of natural evils before Adam and Eve's first sin. To hold the beliefs that God is all-good, all-powerful, all-knowing, and that God created a world initially containing natural evils is to hold to a contradiction; or worse, to do so is to believe (knowingly or not) that God is not morally perfect. Since this is what many young-earth proponents believe it is easy to see how the intramural debate can get heated.

With this debate in mind, I believe it will be beneficial to philosophically examine this logical problem. If the problem seems to be insurmountable, then perhaps it should be time for old-earth proponents to rethink their positions. If not, then perhaps young-earth proponents will realize that old-earth viewpoints do not necessarily entail that God is morally imperfect. In this essay, I will evaluate this logical problem involving death before the fall. First, I will propose what I believe to be the formal structure of this logical problem. After listing the problem, I will

discuss several theistic interpretations of God's moral perfection. This will help to clarify Thomas Aquinas' view of God's moral perfection and what this entails for the problem. Before I explain Aquinas' view of God's moral perfection, I will argue that he could not have viewed God's moral perfection in terms of deontological and consequentialist theories of ethics. I will conclude that Aquinas' view of God's moral perfection is logically compatible with death before the fall.

2. THE LOGICAL PROBLEM OF DEATH BEFORE THE FALL

As mentioned, young-earth proponents argue that it would contradict God's goodness for Him to create a world that initially contains death, disease, and suffering. It seems that God's power, knowledge, and goodness should preclude the possibility of Him creating a world that initially contains natural evils. Philip Ryken touches on this while discussing the importance for Christians to believe in a historical Adam:

Are these natural disasters — the sufferings that some philosophers place under the category of natural evil— part of God's creative intent for his people? If so, then God would be open to the charge that he is the author of evil. To express the problem most provocatively, if Adam did not fall, then God did, by putting human beings into a world inimical to their survival. . . The historical Adam thus helps to explain human pain and suffering without attributing any failure to God. When we see "nature red in tooth and claw," as Alfred Tennyson described it, we are not seeing the world as it was meant to be, but as it became in consequence of Adam's sin.⁵

Ryken is saying that the belief that God created a world that initially contained natural evils (before humanity's first sin) leads to the conclusion that God is morally imperfect (i.e. 'Adam did not fall...God did'). This is because if God included natural evils in His initial creation then it must have been His intent to subject humanity to disease, suffering, and death.

Although many theists have argued against the possibility of God creating a world that initially contains natural evils, none have provided a formal argument to this regard. I would like

to formally propose the problem that I think adequately represents this objection. I believe that the problem can be formulated as:

- (1) God is omniscient, omnipotent, and morally perfect.
- (2) A being who is omniscient, omnipotent, and morally perfect would not create a world that initially contains natural evil.
- (3) God created a world that contained millions of years of animal pain, suffering, and death.

As mentioned this is a logical problem for theists who hold that the earth is billions of years old and that animals existed for millions of years before humans arrived. Young-earth proponents would say that the conjunction of these three premises forms a logical contradiction. The contradiction entails either that there could not be death before the fall or that God is not morally perfect.

Of course, most old-earth proponents would not be willing to give up any of the attributes listed in premise (1). So this cannot be a premise that old-earth proponents can target in the attempt to avoid the problem. Also, premise (3) is not something old-earth proponents will want to give up either. Generally, old-earth proponents agree with contemporary science and hold that the earth is over 4.5 billion years old and that animals were subjected to death, disease, and pain for the millions of years that they have lived on the earth. To reject premise (3) it seems that an old-earth proponent would need to deny the paleontological evidence suggesting that animals have died for millions of years on the earth and instead hold that animals such as dinosaurs were created alongside Adam and Eve. To my knowledge, there are no old-earth proponents that have done so. So premise (2) seems to be the only one that old-earth proponents can consider when attempting to avoid this problem.

3. THEISTIC INTERPRETATIONS OF GOD'S MORAL PERFECTION

This logical problem intuitively seems to be sound. But upon further consideration, it is not as clear as it initially appears. For example, the term 'morally perfect' by itself is vague and can be understood in several different ways. As such, there are several different viewpoints regarding what it means to say that God is morally perfect. Because of this, the truth of premise (2) is not clear and it needs closer investigating.

Laura Garcia provides a good discussion of the various attempts that theists have made to explain God's goodness in the terms of differing ethical theories.⁶ The main three types of ethical theories that theists have used in this way are consequentialist, deontological, and virtue theories. Each type of theory faces specific problems when applied to people and to God.

Consequentialist theories often view good actions as those that produce the best value for the agent and also everyone else that is affected by the agent's actions. An action is morally good if it produces the most value in relation to all available options. When applied to people, Garcia notes that consequentialist theories entail several problematic issues:

1. There is something odd about treating moral value as simply a function of non-moral value;
2. It is difficult if not impossible for a human agent to calculate the total effects of her actions in the short and long terms; and
3. It conflicts with our moral intuitions that we should be motivated by concern for others and their true welfare rather than by an attempt to calculate the optimistic action.⁷

Garcia notes that some of the problems dissolve when consequentialism is applied to God.⁸ For example, as a perfect and omniscient being, God knows the consequences of any actions He may choose to perform.

However, a major problem remains for consequentialism when applied to God, which is the problem of maximizing value. Some philosophers, including Aquinas, have argued that for

any world God can create, He could have created a world with at least one more good thing in it.⁹ If God cannot maximize the amount of good things in any particular world, then any world that God chooses to create will be a world that falls short of what He could have created. This entails that if God creates any particular world, He is not morally perfect because He failed to perform a maximally great action. This problem is known as the problem of no best world.

Deontological theories view good actions as those that are based in certain foundational principles of obligation. An action is good if it is in accord with the foundational principles and bad if it is not. Philosophers have argued for various foundational principles such as the Categorical Imperative, intuition, and divine commands.

Garcia notes that consequentialist theories entail several problematic issues when applied to people:

1. There can be cases of conflicting duties, where it seems one has a strong duty to do two (or more) actions that are incompatible with each other;
2. They place insufficient emphasis on the agent's motives and intentions in acting; and
3. Since every good deed that exceeds what duty requires falls into this category, it is hard to say just how much extra good one must do in order to qualify as a really good person, much less a perfectly good person.¹⁰

When applied to God, these theories are less problematic in that if God is perfect, then He will be unable to fail in fulfilling all of His duties. However, a problem with applying deontological theories to God is that they only obligate creatures that have a choice in their actions. But in regard to any particular action, if God is only able to do the best action, then it seems that God is under no obligations regarding His actions and moral perfection does not apply to Him.

Instead of focusing on rules and consequences, virtue theories focus on the internal characteristics of agents, such as character traits, intentions, and motivations. Good actions should originate from an agent with valued internal characteristics. For example, an agent who

has cultivated virtues such as prudence, justice, fortitude, temperance, etc., should perform good actions.

Garcia believes that virtue theories seem to be able to fix the problems that consequentialist and deontological theories face, but mentions that virtue theory has its problems.¹¹ For example, virtue theory places value in virtues such as fortitude. However, there seems to be no way to attribute such values to God since it is impossible for God to be subject to pain or diversity.

Much more can be said regarding the implications and difficulties of applying these differing theories to God. However, a full explanation of this is not necessary because the problem regarding God and animal death before the fall is a logical problem. As such, all that is required to avoid the problem is to explain at least one way in which it does not entail a contradiction. However, it will be good to discuss several reasons for why it seems that Aquinas did not understand God's moral perfection in terms of deontological and consequentialist theories. Understanding these reasons will help elucidate why Aquinas interpreted God's moral perfection in terms of a virtue theory.

4. THOMISTIC CONCEPTS PRECLUDING THE APPLICATION OF DEONTOLOGICAL AND CONSEQUENTIALIST THEORIES TO GOD

Aquinas would not have understood God's moral perfection in terms of deontological theories. This is apparent in many places in his writings. First, Aquinas argues that God created a moral law to guide His creatures to their purpose for which God made them.¹² Everything in the universe is governed by God's providence.¹³ Humans, as rational animals, are distinct in that they are not governed by physical laws, but must be governed by moral laws so as to not override their free will.¹⁴

One striking thing about this understanding of the moral law is that it would not exist if God did not create it for the good of human beings. Aquinas believes that God's free will entails that He could have chosen not to create.¹⁵ If God did not create a world, then this would entail that He also would not have created a moral law. If there is no moral law, then it seems that there would be no foundational principles of obligation that God could follow.

Indeed, Aquinas' understanding of what a law is seems to preclude the interpretation of God's moral perfection in terms of a deontological theory. For example, in the *Summa contra Gentiles*, Aquinas mentions that

since law is nothing but a rational plan of operation, and since the rational plan of any kind of work is derived from the end, anyone capable of receiving the law receives it from him who shows the way to the end. Thus does the lower artisan depend on the architect, and the soldier on the leader of the army. But the rational creature attains his ultimate end in God, and from God, as we have seen in the foregoing. Therefore, it is appropriate for law to be given men by God.¹⁶

Here Aquinas is emphasizing that a law is a rational plan of operation that is aimed at completing a purpose. A higher authority (e.g. an "architect" or the "leader of the army") bestows a law to a subject so as to guide the subject to the completion of the plan of operation.

Aquinas mentions that only rational beings can be subject to moral laws because rational beings are uniquely able to determine their actions.¹⁷ This might cause some to think that Aquinas could understand God as a moral agent in deontological terms. However, with Aquinas' concept of the term 'law', this is impossible because God would need to be subject to a "rational plan of operation" from a higher authority that is directing Him to a certain purpose. However, there can be no higher authority in relation to God since only God is infinite, perfect, and eternal.

Also, there is no goal for which God aims outside of Himself in order to perfect Himself.¹⁸ Aquinas argues that God must will His own goodness, but there was no time at which God did not possess His own goodness.¹⁹ Although God's goodness is the object of His will, He

has possessed His goodness from all eternity. Thus, there is no end at which God needs to aim so as to obtain some perfection that He does not possess.

Aquinas believes that, as pure act, God can only aim at one ultimate end.²⁰ Since this end is necessarily God's goodness, God cannot aim at any other end. This entails that even when God decides to create the universe, the end of the universe can only have God's goodness as its end.²¹ And since God's goodness is the end of the world, even when God creates He is not aiming at something that is different from His infinite goodness, which He has possessed from all eternity.

Thus, God cannot be subject to any law because there is no authority above Him and there is nothing at which He could aim that He does not already possess. This rules out the possibility of extracting an interpretation of God's moral perfection in deontological terms from Aquinas' writings.

Aquinas certainly would reject applying consequentialist theories to God. The main reason for this comes from his thought on God and best possible worlds. As mentioned above, consequentialist theories entail that a good action is one that produces the most value, in relation to other possible actions, for the largest number of people involved in the action. Applying this to God would entail that when God creates, He must create a world with the maximum amount of metaphysical and/or moral goodness/value.

However, Aquinas does not believe that it is possible for God to create a world with a maximum amount of goodness. This is for at least two reasons. They include (1) Aquinas' argument that God cannot create something infinitely perfect because only God is infinitely perfect;²² and (2) Aquinas' arguments that God cannot create something that is actually infinite in magnitude or actually infinite in multitude.²³ If God cannot create an infinitely perfect world,

or a world that contains an infinite number of good things, then for any world that God creates, He could have created another world with at least one more good thing in it.²⁴

This understanding that God cannot create a best possible world in terms of the amount of goodness is catastrophic for the attempt to explain God's moral perfection in terms of consequentialist theories. This is because consequentialist theories judge the goodness of actions based on how they relate to other possible actions. If God is morally perfect, then applying consequentialist theories to Him entails that any world He creates will be the best possible world. But according to Aquinas, this is impossible and there are an infinite number of worlds that are better than any world that God chooses to create. Thus, every possible act of creation is a morally bad action for God. Even if God created a world with a potentially infinite number of happy people, this would still be an immoral action, which is absurd.

Garcia mentions that a possible solution to this is to say that perhaps good actions should be interpreted to be those that maximize the moral value of the world.²⁵ So God would only be obligated to create a world with maximal moral value, i.e. a world in which everyone acts morally. Garcia mentions that this is problematic because philosophers have argued that it is impossible for God to know which actions that free-willed creatures will choose.²⁶ If God has no control over what people will do, then the maximization problem remains.

Some Thomists have argued that God could create a world in which all humans choose only good actions.²⁷ So this is debatable within Thomism. Regardless, even if God could create a world with people that only choose the good, this still breaks down into a maximization problem. This is because any world that God creates will have less moral people than an infinite number of worlds that God could have created. Even if God can ensure that everyone acts morally, He still must maximize the number of moral people, and this was already shown to be impossible

according to Aquinas. Thus, for Aquinas, consequentialist theories are also insufficient to interpret God's moral perfection.

5. THE THOMISTIC CONCEPT OF GOD'S MORAL PERFECTION

Recently, Thomistic philosopher Brian Davies has argued that it is incorrect to interpret Aquinas as believing that God is a moral agent.²⁸ Among other things, Davies argues that God's simplicity, perfection, and transcendence entail that we could never know how God should or should not act. In the *ST*, Aquinas seems to indicate that God has no moral obligations when he emphasizes that

since the understood good is the object of the will, it is impossible for God to will any concepts except those which His wisdom considers. This is indeed like a law of justice, according to which His will is right and just. From this it follows that what He does according to His will, He does justly, just as the things we do according to laws, we do justly. But indeed, we do so according to laws from something higher. However, God Himself is His law.²⁹

Here Aquinas is discussing God's justice and says that everything God does, He does justly because He acts in accord with His perfect wisdom. Because God is perfect, so also His knowledge is perfect.³⁰ This entails that when He wills things, His knowledge, wisdom, and power are such that His effects will be exactly as He intends them to be. Thus, all of God's actions are perfect although there is no higher standard that determines what they should be. God is a law unto Himself.

However, this does not necessarily entail that God is not a moral agent. Thomistic philosopher Brian Shanley has argued in opposition to Davies and emphasized that Aquinas believes that certain virtues are attributable to God.³¹ For example, in the *SCG*, Aquinas says that

It is necessary therefore that the Divine goodness contain all the virtues in its own way. Hence, none of them is said to be a habit in God, as is the case in us. For it is not becoming of God to be good by something else which is added to Him, but by His essence: because He is absolutely simple. And neither still is He put in motion by

something in addition to His essence: because His act is His existence, as it was shown. Therefore, His virtue is not some habit, but His essence.³²

Aquinas is saying that because God is the source of all human virtues, the virtues must be in Him in some way (otherwise He would not be able to cause them). However, as Aquinas notes, 'habits', as good or bad inclinations to an end,³³ cannot be in God as they are in humans. In other words, God is not called good because He tends to act properly, but because He is infinite goodness and infinitely perfect.³⁴

Yet God could be understood as morally perfect in that He possesses certain virtues to an infinite degree. At *SCG* I, c. 93, Aquinas says that the virtues of truth, justice, liberality, magnificence, prudence, and art can all be attributed to God. In the *ST*, Aquinas says that God loves all things because to love is to will the good of the beloved.³⁵ This entails that God's act of creating and sustaining the universe is an act of love. Elsewhere in the *ST*, Aquinas argues that God's act of creating and sustaining the universe is an act of perfect justice (understood as distributive justice) because God determines the good that each of His creatures should possess and then ensures that they get what He has determined.³⁶ So the above quote in which Aquinas mentions that God is a law unto Himself is less of Aquinas saying that God does whatever He wants, like a theistic voluntarism, and more of a statement that all of God's acts are perfectly just because they flow from His perfect knowledge and wisdom. God's act of creating and sustaining the universe is also an act of perfect mercy and liberality.³⁷ It is liberal because God creates and sustains the world not for His own use, but on account of His goodness. It is merciful in that God's creation and sustenance of the world removes the defect of non-existence.

Thus, in a way, Aquinas believes that God is morally perfect because God possesses certain virtues to an infinite degree and is ultimately the source of all human virtues. God's simplicity entails that He is His perfection; is His love; is His justice; and is His mercy. So God's

actions will be performed perfectly, in love, justly, and mercifully. It is in this way that Aquinas possibly understands God to be a moral agent.

However, as Davies emphasizes, it is impossible for human beings to know how God should act. At *SCG* II, c. 92, Aquinas notes that there are many virtues that cannot be attributed to God. These are the virtues of sobriety, chastity, temperance, continence, fortitude, magnanimity, gentleness, "and other like virtues" because these are associated with beings that possess bodies and passions. It is hard to see how Aquinas could view God as a moral being, at the top of the class of all moral beings in the universe, if two of the four cardinal virtues cannot be attributed to Him. Indeed, it seems that Aquinas' doctrine of analogy is especially pertinent in regard to God's moral perfection in that there is something in God that is like (i.e. analogous and not entirely different from) human moral perfections, but that is infinitely greater and therefore not fully comprehensible by finite intellects.

As mentioned, Garcia notes this difficulty for applying a virtue theory to God.³⁸ In regard to this problem, she suggests that this might not be a problem if love is understood as the source of all the virtues:

On the positive side, virtue theories locate moral perfection in the will rather than in the intellect, treating right actions as those that are properly motivated and directed toward the right ends. . . This in turn suggests a more promising definition of divine moral perfection, understood not in terms of perfectly exemplifying the whole list of virtues but as exemplifying perfect love. If love is at the root of the human virtues, this definition has the further advantage of providing a clear analogy between human and divine moral goodness.³⁹

So although many virtues cannot be attributed to God, He can be understood as morally perfect because He is infinite love. So if it is noted that love is the root of the human virtues, then perhaps God's love places Him closer to a moral agent than Davies thinks.

However, some of Aquinas' writings shed doubt on this interpretation. For example, when discussing God's love, Aquinas notes that it is possible to say that God loves some of His creatures more than others. He mentions that

Since to love a thing is to will it good, in a twofold way anything may be loved more, or less. In one way on the part of the act of the will itself, which is more or less intense. In this way God does not love some things more than others, because He loves all things by an act of the will that is one, simple, and always the same. In another way on the part of the good itself that a person wills for the beloved. In this way we are said to love that one more than another, for whom we will a greater good, though our will is not more intense. In this way we must needs say that God loves some things more than others.⁴⁰

Garcia's solution seems to hold in that God's one simple act of will includes the creation and sustenance of creation. God love's all creatures equally considering this one act of will that is God's infinite goodness. However, Aquinas says that there is a way to understand that God loves some of His creatures more than others. This is when one creature possesses more good than another.

This concept has an interesting implication in regard to human beings. Aquinas notes in the *ST* that it is proper to understand that God loves those that will be in heaven more than He loves the reprobate who will spend eternity in hell. He says that

God loves all men and all creatures, inasmuch as He wishes them all some good; but He does not wish every good to them all. So far, therefore, as He does not wish this particular good—namely, eternal life—He is said to hate or reprobate them.⁴¹

Since God can be said to love some of His creatures more than others, when God reprobates some human beings, He loves them less than the blessed in heaven because He does not wish them to have eternal life.

At this point, a helpful question to ask is, "If God's infinite love is the basis of all His actions, then why does He will that some people go to hell?" Aquinas says that the answer to this

question lies in God's justice, which as mentioned above, is determined by His knowledge and wisdom:

. . . it may be said of a just judge, that antecedently he wills all men to live; but consequently wills the murderer to be hanged. In the same way God antecedently wills all men to be saved, but consequently wills some to be damned, as His justice exacts.⁴²

In other words, Aquinas is saying that God's justice is the reason for why He loves some people more than others. But God's simplicity entails that God's justice is His essence. Elsewhere Aquinas accordingly says that 'The reason for the predestination of some, and reprobation of others, must be sought for in the goodness of God. Thus He is said to have made all things through His goodness, so that the divine goodness might be represented in things.'⁴³ Aquinas suggests that it is fitting for God to reprobate some people as this demonstrates His goodness more than if all were saved because it better demonstrates His justice.⁴⁴ However, he says that we cannot presume to be certain as to why God chooses to predestine some and reprobate others. Thus to understand God's reason for election would be to understand the divine essence. This is something that Aquinas says is impossible in this life.⁴⁵

So difficulties remain for interpreting God's moral perfection in terms of a virtue theory that focuses on love as the source of all human virtues. Thus, it seems that even if Aquinas did think God's virtues entail that He is a moral agent, Aquinas held that we could never know how God should act because to do so would be to comprehend His essence, which is impossible. It seems that Aquinas was content with reasoning to God's goodness through the workings of his Five Ways and metaphysical thought. God is infinite goodness because He is infinitely desirable and pure existence. This entails that God has infinite love, knowledge, wisdom, and power and, as mentioned, cannot fail to act perfectly, in love, justly, and mercifully. Although we cannot know how God ought to act, we do have a glimpse of what His goodness entails.

6. IMPLICATIONS FOR THE LOGICAL PROBLEM OF DEATH BEFORE THE FALL

This view of God's goodness has important implications for the logical problem of death before the fall. As mentioned earlier, the old-earth theist must focus on premise (2) of the argument: 'A being who is omniscient, omnipotent, and morally perfect would not create a world that initially contains natural evil.' The answer to this problem lies mainly in that God cannot be a moral agent in deontological or consequentialist terms.

First, it was shown that God cannot be understood as a moral agent in deontological terms. There is no principle that God must follow which would determine what He should create. At this point, this entails that there is no moral principle that God must follow that would preclude the possibility of Him creating a world with death before Adam and Eve's sin.

However, it was also mentioned that God's perfection entails that He cannot fail to choose the best option in regard to any situation in which He makes a choice. This proves fatal to the possibility of applying a deontological theory to God's goodness because it entails that God is incapable of performing bad actions and thus it would be meaningless to say He is obligated to perform certain actions.

Some might take this concept to entail that God cannot include death in His initial creation because to do so would be to choose a bad action. But again, it must be remembered that there can be no moral principles of obligation that bind God's actions. To say that God including death in His initial creation is to choose a bad action is to say that there is some principle that obligates God to preclude death in His initial creation. But it was already shown that there can be no basis for God to be accountable to moral principles according to Aquinas' philosophy.

Second, it was shown that God cannot be understood as a moral agent in consequentialist terms. Indeed, the above-quoted objections to death before the fall from Ham and Ryken seem to

assume an interpretation of God's goodness in consequentialist terms. But it was discussed that there is good reason to believe that God cannot create a best possible world.

If God cannot create a best possible world, then this entails that there will be an infinite number of worlds that will be better than any possible world that God decides to create. If this is so, and God is held to a consequentialist standard, then God should never create because every available choice as to which world to create is a bad choice because all involve a lesser amount of good for all involved in the act of creation. Thus, if God cannot create a best possible world, then it is absurd to hold Him to a consequentialist standard since it is impossible for Him to perform the best action in creating.

Here someone might object that even if God cannot create a best possible world, then He should at least create a world with no death. However, it must be remembered that consequentialist theories entail that the goodness of actions are based on the outcome of the actions in relation to other available options. This means that worlds without death are just as bad as worlds containing death because all lack an infinite number of metaphysical and moral goodness that God could have included in creation. A world with death might contain less metaphysical and moral goodness than a world without death, but both worlds are ultimately just as bad if they are lacking an infinite amount of goodness.

Here it will be good to mention another concept that Aquinas emphasizes regarding whether God has obligations as to what He can create. Aquinas argues that God is not morally obligated to non-existent things. He says God is under no obligations or debts of justice to His creatures in this way because his creatures have nothing prior to existing.⁴⁶ Aquinas says that

if we consider God's goodness absolutely, we find nothing due in the creation of things. For in one way a thing is said to be a person's due by reason of the relation of another person to him, so that he is obliged to make a return to that person for what he has received from him; thanks are due a benefactor for his kindness because the recipient

owes this to him. This sort of dueness, however, has no place in the creation of things, because there is nothing pre-existent that could owe anything to God, nor does any benefaction of His pre-exist. In another way, something is said to be due a thing according to itself; for whatever is required for a thing's completeness is necessarily due that thing; it is a man's due to possess hands or strength, since without these he cannot be complete. But for the fulfillment of His goodness God needs nothing outside Him. Therefore, the production of things is not due Him by way of necessity.⁴⁷

Aquinas is saying that God is not obligated to His creatures prior to creation in at least two ways.

One way an obligation can arise is based on the relation between two parties. For example, if someone receives a good or service from someone else, then payment or thanks are due. In this way, there can be no relation that would establish an obligation between God and His creatures when they do not exist. Another way obligations can arise is from what something is owed by virtue of what it is. For example, if God intends for humans to walk, then He is logically obligated to create them with legs. However, in this way also there can be no relation that establishes an obligation between God and His creatures because God is not obligated to bestow goodness on that which does not exist. Thus, it is clear that there can be no deontological principle or consequentialist standard that precludes God from creating a world that initially includes death.

Of course, showing that it is absurd to hold God to a deontological or consequentialist standard does not fully solve the logical problem. It still needs explaining as to how God's omniscience, omnipotence, and moral perfection are logically compatible with death before the fall. So what is left is to show that Aquinas' interpretation of God's goodness provides a solution to the problem.

As mentioned, Aquinas understood God as perfect and infinite in love, justice, and mercy. To avoid premise (2) it must be shown that there is nothing unloving, unjust, or unmerciful in God's act of including death in His initial creation. First, as mentioned, there is

love in God's act of the creation and sustenance of the world. Aquinas' definition of 'love' as 'willing the good of the beloved' entails that when God wills things to exist and sustains them in being, then God is loving them at each moment they exist. Also as mentioned, this is an act of infinite love because it involves God's one simple act of will.

Second, there is mercy and liberality in God's act of creating and sustaining the world. There is mercy in that God bestows existence and goodness to that which did not exist. There is the highest metaphysical gap between existence and non-existence and this entails that God's act of creation and sustenance of His creatures is an act of supreme mercy. Whether or not a world contains death does not eliminate the mercy from God's act of creation.

Also, there is liberality in God's act of creation and sustenance of the world. As mentioned God is infinitely perfect and is in need of nothing to attain His perfection. Accordingly, God did not need to create anything and only did so in order to communicate His love and goodness to His creatures.⁴⁸ A world containing death also does not eliminate the liberality of God's act of creation.

However, it was mentioned that there are ways in which it can be understood that God loves His creatures in degrees. This concept also seems to entail that there are degrees to God's mercy and liberality as well. For example, if one person goes to heaven while another goes to eternal punishment, it seems that God loves the one that goes to heaven more, and is more merciful and generous to that person, than the one that goes to eternal punishment.

This might seem to be where Aquinas' notion of God's goodness fails to avoid premise (2). However, God's perfection, justice, and wisdom are the remaining concepts that solve this issue. As mentioned, Aquinas believes that God created to communicate His goodness and love to creatures. This was Aquinas' solution to why God would create although God needs nothing

to attain perfection. Following Pseudo-Dionysius, Aquinas believed that goodness is naturally diffusive.⁴⁹ So Aquinas argues that God decided to create because He was inclined, not obligated, to create rational beings that could understand His goodness and freely will to be with Him forever.⁵⁰

God's purpose for creating has major implications for what He can include in His initial creation. One implication involves noting that it is not God's purpose to create a paradise for His creatures in which they are free from all harm. If this were God's purpose, then the existence of death in His creation would logically contradict His purpose and goodness. However, if it is logically possible for God to include death in His creation so as to accomplish His purpose, then this does not logically contradict His purpose and His goodness.

Aquinas mentions a logical possibility in this way in the *ST* when he emphasizes that lions could not exist if death were not a reality because lions feed on other animals by nature.⁵¹ If God wants to communicate His goodness by creating a hierarchy of beings that demonstrate His power, knowledge, and wisdom, then it is possible that He would include lions in His creation. Indeed, Aquinas argues that God must create a hierarchy of beings in which the lower exist for the good of the higher if He wants to best communicate His goodness.⁵²

Another implication God's purpose has for His initial creation is that God must order His creation so as to ultimately fulfill its purpose.⁵³ As mentioned, God's perfection entails that there is no principle that obligates Him to create the world in a perfect state. Moreover, obligations arise between parties only in situations in which both parties exist. Thus, whatever initial state in which God decides to create the universe will be logically compatible with His goodness as long as it is ordered to ultimately fulfill His purpose.

God is only logically obligated to ensure that the world fulfills its purpose of communicating His love and goodness to His creatures. So death in His initial creation is not logically incompatible with this purpose and His goodness. Arguably, including death in His initial creation would better communicate His goodness because it would better demonstrate His love, mercy, and justice. Genesis 2 provides a logically possible reason for why God would want to include death in His initial creation. If death were a reality before Adam and Eve sinned, then this would demonstrate His love and power to Adam and Eve better if they were naturally immortal. When they saw animal death outside of the Garden of Eden, they would better understand God's care for them as He sustained them through their eating from the Tree of Life. The reality of animal death would demonstrate God's justice in that they would understand what their fate would entail if they disobeyed God. Finally, animal death would demonstrate God's wisdom in that Adam and Eve would need to trust in God and depend on His wisdom so as to avoid the fate of the creatures outside of the garden.

7. CONCLUSION

I have proposed that the claims of young-earth proponents regarding God's initial creation entail a logical problem that concludes that God's goodness is incompatible with death before the fall. This problem entails that it is logically contradictory to believe that God is all-good, all-knowing, and all-powerful, yet created a world that initially contains evil.

To clarify the problem and also Aquinas' viewpoint on the matter, I explained that there have been several theistic interpretations of God's goodness that involve deontological, consequentialist, and virtue theories of ethics. Each viewpoint has particular problems when applied to God in order to interpret what His moral perfection entails. In regard to Aquinas' philosophy, it was shown that Aquinas could not have viewed God's moral perfection in terms of

deontological and consequentialist theories. Deontological theories fail because there can be no authority above God to establish moral principles for Him. Also, God is perfect and there never was a time at which He did not possess infinite perfection. So it would be incoherent to apply guiding principles to His perfect actions. Consequentialist theories fail in light of Aquinas' concepts that God cannot create an infinitely perfect world, an infinite world, and a best possible world. If there is no best world that God can create, it is absurd to apply a consequentialist standard to His actions, and especially to His initial act of creating.

As mentioned, Aquinas' philosophy entails that God is all-good because God is infinitely perfect. All virtues are in God in a way because He is the source of human morality. However, many virtues that require a physical body cannot be attributed to Him. Regardless, God cannot sin or will evil. His perfection entails that all His actions are performed perfectly, mercifully, justly, and in love. These suggest that God is a moral agent. However, even if Aquinas thought of God as a moral agent, he most certainly believed that we could never know what this entails for what God should or should not do. To know what God should do, it would be necessary to fully understand His goodness, which is impossible.

Aquinas' understanding of God's moral perfection provides a possible solution to the logical problem of death before the fall. If God cannot create a best possible world, then any world that He creates will lack an infinite amount of goodness that He could have included. However, He can still create because His act of creation is an act of love, mercy, justice, and liberality. Moreover, God is guiding the world to its purpose of communicating His goodness. It is not necessary to exclude death, disease, and suffering from a world with this purpose. Instead, it furthers God's purposes to do so.

This interpretation of God's moral perfection provides a solution to the logical problem of death before the fall. Thus, it is wrong to believe that there is no possible way that God would allow millions of years of animal death, disease, and suffering before Adam and Eve sinned. God's goodness and the existence of death in God's initial creation are not logically contradictory. It is possible that God had a reason to include death in His initial creation that furthers His purpose for the world. Thus, old-earth viewpoints do not necessarily entail that God is morally imperfect.

Notes

¹ Ken Ham, 'Hugh Ross Twists the Bible to Fit Man's Fallible Opinions,' *Answers in Genesis*, September 27, 2014, accessed October 21, 2016, <https://answersingenesis.org/blogs/ken-ham/2014/09/27/hugh-ross-twists-the-bible-to-fit-mans-fallible-opinions/>.

² Deborah Haarsma, 'Ken Ham, We Need a Better Conversation (Perhaps Over Dinner?),' *BioLogos*, October 13, 2014, accessed October 21, 2016, <http://biologos.org/blogs/deborah-haarsma-the-presidents-notebook/ken-ham-we-need-a-better-conversation-perhaps-over-dinner>.

³ Ken Ham, 'Should I Have Dinner with BioLogos?' *Answers in Genesis*, October 14, 2014, accessed October 21, 2016, <https://answersingenesis.org/blogs/ken-ham/2014/10/14/should-i-have-dinner-with-biologos/>.

⁴ Ken Ham, *Six Days: The Age of the Earth and the Decline of the Church* (Green Forest: Master Books, 2013), p. 31.

⁵ Philip G. Ryken, 'We Cannot Understand the World of Our Faith Without a Real, Historical Adam,' in Matthew Barrett and Ardel B. Caneday (eds.), *Four Views on the Historical Adam* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013), p. 273.

⁶ Laura Garcia, 'Moral Perfection,' in Thomas P. Flint and Michael C. Rea (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophical Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 221-232.

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 221-222.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 222.

⁹ For example, see Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae (ST)* I, q. 25, a. 6, ad. 3.

¹⁰ Garcia, 'Moral Perfection,' p. 224.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 230.

¹² Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra Gentiles (SCG)* III, c. 114-115.

¹³ *ST* I, q. 103, a. 5; *SCG* III, c. 17-18; Thomas Aquinas, *Questiones disputatae de veritate (De. Ver.)* q. 5, a. 2.

¹⁴ *SCG* III, c. 114.

¹⁵ *ST* I, q. 19, a. 3; *SCG* I, c. 87-88.

¹⁶ *SCG* III, c. 114; All quotes from the *Summa contra Gentiles* are from Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, trans. Anton C. Pegis, James F. Anderson, Vernon J. Bourke, and Charles J. O'Neil (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975).

¹⁷ *SCG* III, c. 111.

¹⁸ *SCG* I, c. 92; see also *ST* I, q. 19, a. 1, ad. 1.

¹⁹ *SCG* I, c. 80; see also *ST* I, q. 19, a. 3.

²⁰ *SCG* I, c. 74.

²¹ *ST* I, q. 19, a. 2; *SCG* I, c. 86.

²² *SCG* II, c. 25; see also *ST* I, q. 47, a. 1.

²³ *ST* I, q. 7, a. 3-4.

²⁴ *ST* I, q. 25, a. 6, ad. 3.

²⁵ Garcia, p. 222.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ For examples, see Brian Davies, *Thomas Aquinas on God and Evil* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 4-5, 72-73; and John F.X. Knasas, *Aquinas and the Cry of Rachel: Thomistic Reflections on the Problem of Evil* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2013), pp. 214-225.

²⁸ See Brian Davies, *The Reality of God and the Problem of Evil* (New York: Continuum Books, 2006), pp. 84-111; and Davies, *Thomas Aquinas on God and Evil*, pp. 51-64.

²⁹ *ST I*, q. 21, a. 1, ad. 2; All quotes from the *Summa Theologiae* are from Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, first complete American ed., trans. Fathers of the English Dominica Province (New York: Benziger Brothers, 1947).

³⁰ *ST I*, q. 14, a. 1; *SCG I*, c. 47; *De Ver.*, q. 2, a. 2; see also *SCG II*, c. 24.

³¹ Brian J. Shanley, *The Thomist Tradition* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2002), pp. 110-117.

³² *SCG I*, c. 92.

³³ *ST I-II*, q. 49, a. 1.

³⁴ *ST I*, q. 6, a. 1; see also *SCG I*, c. 41.

³⁵ *ST I*, q. 20, a. 2; *SCG I*, c. 91.

³⁶ *ST I*, q. 21, a. 1; see also *SCG I*, c. 93.

³⁷ *ST I*, q. 21, a. 3; *SCG I*, c. 93.

³⁸ Garcia, p. 230.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ *ST I*, q. 20, a. 3; *SCG I*, c. 91.

⁴¹ *ST I*, q. 23, a. 3, ad. 1.

⁴² *ST I*, q. 19, a. 6, ad. 1; see also *De. Ver.*, q. 23, a. 2.

⁴³ *ST I*, q. 23, a. 5, ad. 3.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ *ST I*, q. 12, a. 11; *SCG III*, c. 47-48; *De. Ver.*, q. 10, a. 11.

⁴⁶ *ST I*, q. 21, a. 1; *SCG II*, c. 28-29.

⁴⁷ *SCG II*, c. 28-29.

⁴⁸ *SCG I*, c. 86.

⁴⁹ *ST III*, q. 1, a. 1; see also *ST I*, q. 19, a. 2.

⁵⁰ *SCG I*, c. 86-87; *SCG III*, c. 25 and 37.

⁵¹ *ST I*, q. 22, a. 2, ad. 3; q. 48, a. 2.

⁵² *ST I*, q. 47, a. 1-2; *SCG II*, c. 45.

⁵³ *ST I*, q. 103, a. 1; *SCG III*, c. 17.