THOMAS AQUINAS

Contemporary Philosophical
Perspectives

Edited by
Brian Davies

56. *ST* I q.83 a.3.

57. *ST* I q.83 a.4.

58. Cf. *QDM* q.16 a.2, where Aquinas says, "evil cannot arise in an appetite in virtue of appetite's being discordant with the apprehension it follows."

59. *QDV* q.24 a.12.

60. *QDM* q.6 a.1.

61. God's grace does operate on the will with causal efficacy, but Aquinas's account of grace is complicated and it isn't at all clear that the operations of grace constitute an exception to his claim here.

62. *QDV* q.22 a.5; see also *QDV* q.24 a.10 obj.5 and ad 5.

63. *QDV* q.22 a.5 ad 3 in contrarium.

64. See, e.g., *QDM* q.16 a.5, where Aquinas says that there is no state in which human beings lack *liberum arbitrium*.

65. *QDV* q.22 a.6.

66. *ST* I q.82 a.1 corpus and ad 1.

67. For different versions of PAP and an assessment of their strengths and weaknesses, see, e.g., Thomas Flint, "Compatibilism and the Argument from Unavoidability," *Journal of Philosophy* 84 (1987), 423–40.

68. See, e.g., Harry Frankfurt, "Alternate Possibilities and Moral Responsibility," *Journal of Philosophy* 66 (1969), 829–39.

69. See my discussion in "Intellect, Will, and Alternate Possibilities," reprinted in *Perspectives on Moral Responsibility*, ed. John Martin Fischer and Mark Ravizza (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), pp. 237–62.

70. See, e.g., David Widerker, "Libertarian Freedom and the Avoidability of Decisions," *Faith and Philosophy* 12 (1995), 113–18, and "Libertarianism and Frankfurt's Attack on the Principle of Alternative Possibilities," *The Philosophical Review* 104 (1995), 247–61.

71. For the medieval positions in question, see Bonnie Kent, *Virtues of the Will: The Transformation of Ethics in the Late Thirteenth Century* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1995), esp. chs. 3 and 4.

72. For an example of a Franciscan position of the sort opposed to Aquinas's, see, e.g., *John Duns Scotus: Contingency and Freedom, Lectura I 39*, tr. A. Vos Jaczn, H. Veldhuis, A. H. Looman-Graaskamp, E. Dekker, and N. W. den Bok, The New Synthese Historical Library, vol. 42 (Dordrecht: Kluwer Publishing Co., 1994), pp. 116–17.

73. I am grateful to the faculty and students at the Thomas Institute in Cologne and to William Alston, David Burrell, Brian Leftow, and Timothy O'Connor for helpful comments on earlier drafts of this paper. I am especially indebted to Norman Kretzmann for many very useful comments and suggestions.

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Being and Goodness

Parts of Aquinas's moral philosophy, particularly his treatments of the virtues and of natural law, are sometimes taken into account in contemporary discussions, but the unusual ethical naturalism that underlies all of his moral philosophy has been neglected. Consequently, the unity of his ethical theory and its basis in his metaphysics are not so well known as they should be, and even the familiar parts of the theory are sometimes misunderstood.

We think Aquinas's naturalism is a kind of moral realism that deserves serious reconsideration. It supplies for his virtue-centered morality the sort of metaethical foundation that recent virtue-centered morality has been criticized for lacking.[1] Moreover, it complements Aquinas's Aristotelian emphasis on rationality as a moral standard by supplying a method of determining degrees of rationality. And when Aquinas's naturalism is combined with his account of God as absolutely simple, it effects a connection between morality and theology that offers an attractive alternative to divine-command morality, construing morality not merely as a dictate of God's will but as an expression of his nature.[2] Finally, Aquinas's brand of naturalism illuminates a side of the problem of evil that has been overlooked, raising the question whether recent defenses against the problem are compatible with the doctrine of God's goodness.

Aquinas's ethics is embedded in his metaphysics, only the absolutely indispensable features of which can be summarized here. Consequently, we can't undertake to argue fully for his ethical theory in this essay. For our purposes it will be enough to expound the theory, to consider some of the objections it gives rise to, and to point out some of the advantages it offers for dealing with recognized issues in ethics and philosophy of religion.

1. The Central Thesis of Aquinas's Metaethics

The central thesis of Aquinas's metaethics is that *the terms 'being' and goodness' are the same in reference, differing only in sense.*[3] What does Aquinas mean by this claim, and what are his grounds for it?

It will be helpful to begin with an observation about terminology. Contemporary metaphysics uses cognates of some Latin words crucial to Aquinas's presentation of his theory, but the terms 'essence', 'actual', and 'exists', for example, have acquired meanings different from the meanings Aquinas understood the corresponding Latin terms to have. For instance, he does not identify essential characteristics with necessary characteristics; as he uses those terms, all essential characteristics are necessary, but not all necessary characteristics are essential. Furthermore, in Aquinas's usage what is actual is opposed to what is potential rather than to what is merely possible, as in standard contemporary usage. As he understands it, what is actual is, fundamentally, what is in being; and what is in being is, ordinarily, what exists. But, as we'll see, his conception of being is broader than the ordinary conception of actual existence.

Goodness is what all desire, says Aquinas, quoting Aristotle,[4] and what is desired is (or is at least perceived as) desirable. Desirability is an essential aspect of goodness. Now if a thing is desirable as a thing of a certain kind (and anything at all *can* be desirable in that way, as a means, if not as an end), it is desirable to the extent to which it is perfect of that kind—i.e., a whole, complete specimen, free from relevant defect.[5] But, then, a thing is perfect of its kind to the extent to which it is fully realized or developed, to the extent to which the potentialities definitive of its kind—its specifying potentialities—have been actualized. And so, Aquinas says, a thing is perfect and hence desirable (good of its kind) to the extent to which it is in being.[6] That's one way of seeing how it is true to say that a thing's goodness is its being.

Offering the same line of explanation from the standpoint of the thing rather than a desirer of the thing, Aquinas says that everything resists its own corruption in accordance with its nature, a tendency he interprets as its aiming (naturally) at being fully actual, not merely partially or defectively in being. Thus, since goodness is what all things aim at or desire, each thing's goodness is its full actuality.[7]

In another gloss on Aristotle's dictum Aquinas takes the sense of 'goodness' to be brought out in the notion of that in which desire culminates.[8] Now what is desired is desired either for the sake of something else, for the sake of something else and for its own sake, or solely for its own sake. What is

desired solely for its own sake is what the desirer perceives as the desirer's final good, that for the sake of which it desires all the other things it desires, that in which the hierarchy of its desires culminates. But what each desirer desires in that way is the fulfillment of its own nature, or at least that which the desirer perceives as the very best for the desirer to have or be.[9] Each thing aims above all at being as complete, whole, and free from defect as it can be.[10] But the state of its being complete and whole just is that thing's being fully actual, whether or not the desirer recognizes it as such. Therefore, full actualization is equivalent to final goodness, aimed at or desired by every thing.[11]

Finally, Aquinas argues that every action is ordered toward being, toward preserving or enhancing being in some respect either in the individual or in its species: in acting all things aim at being. Therefore, again, being is what all desire; and so being is goodness.[12]

On Aquinas's view, these various arguments show that when the terms 'being' and 'goodness' are associated with any particular sort of thing, both terms refer to the actualization of the potentialities that specify that thing's nature. Generally, then, 'being' and 'goodness' have the same referent: the actualization of specifying potentialities. The actualization of a thing's specifying potentialities to at least some extent is, on the one hand, its existence as such a thing; it is in this sense that the thing is said to have *being*. But, on the other hand, the actualization of a thing's specifying potentialities is, to the extent of the actualization, that thing's being whole, complete, free from defect—the state all things naturally aim at; it is in this sense that the thing is said to have *goodness*. Like the designations 'morning star' and 'evening star', then, 'being' and 'goodness' refer to the same thing under two descriptions and so have different senses but the same referent.

This claim of Aquinas about being and goodness, his central metaethical thesis, is bound to give rise to several objections. But since effective replies to such objections depend on certain elements of Aquinas's metaphysics, we'll postpone considering them until we've presented those elements.

2. Full Actuality and Substantial Form

On Aquinas's view, every thing has a substantial form.[13] The substantial form of any thing is the set of characteristics that place that thing in its species and that are thus essential to it in Aquinas's sense of 'essential'.[14] Some of these essential characteristics determine the genus within which the thing's species belongs; the others differentiate the thing's species from other species of that genus. The thing's genus-determining characteristics (or simply its genus) and differentiating characteristics (or simply its differentia) together

comprise its substantial form or specific essence, what is essential to it as a member of its species. All the characteristics making up the thing's substantial form are essential to it as an individual, but if there are individual essences as well, they will include characteristics over and above those constituting the substantial form.[15]

The substantial form as a set of essential characteristics invariably includes at least one power, capacity, or potentiality, because every form (any set of real rather than merely conceptual characteristics) is a source of some activity or operation.[16] Among the essential characteristics, the thing's differentia is a characteristic peculiar to and constitutive of the thing's species, the characteristic that can be identified as the thing's specifying potentiality (or potentialities). The differentia is thus the source of an activity or operation (or set of them) peculiar to that species and essential to every member of the species. As Aquinas puts it, the thing's specific nature includes the power to engage in a specific operation determining of and essential to that thing as a member of that species.[17]

It follows that a thing's form is perfected when and to the extent to which the thing performs an instance of its specific operation, actualizing its specifying potentiality.[18] A thing's operation in accord with its specific power brings into actuality what was not actual but merely potential in that thing's form. So in Aquinas's basic, metaphysical sense of 'perfect', a thing is perfect of its kind to the extent to which it actualizes the specifying potentiality in its form.[19] The derivative, evaluative sense of 'perfect' is explained by the connection between actuality and goodness: for something to be actual is for it to be in being, and 'being' and 'goodness' are the same in reference. Therefore, a thing is good of its kind to the extent to which it is actual.[20] Or, putting it another way, a thing is good of its kind (or perfect) to the extent to which its specifying potentiality is actualized, and bad of its kind (or imperfect) to the extent to which its specifying potentiality remains unactualized.[21]

3. From Metaethics to Normative Ethics

The specifying potentialities of a human being are in the cognitive and appetitive rational powers, intellect and will, which comprise its differentia, reason.[22] Although endowed with freedom of choice, a human will in association with its intellect is inclined toward goodness not just naturally (like the appetitive aspect of every other being) but also "along with an awareness of the nature of the good—a condition that is a distinguishing characteristic of intellect."[23] Rational beings are "inclined toward goodness itself considered

universally" rather than naturally directed toward one particular sort of goodness.[24] The operation deriving directly from the human essence, then, is acting in accordance with rationality, and actions of that sort actualize the specifying potentiality of human beings. A human being acting in accordance with rationality makes actual what would otherwise have been merely potential in his or her substantial form. By converting humanly specific potentiality into actuality, an agent's actions in accordance with rationality increase the extent to which the agent has being as a human being; and so, given the connection between being and goodness, such actions increase the extent to which the agent has goodness as a human being. Human goodness, like any other goodness appropriate to one species, is acquired in performing instances of the operation specific to that species, which in the case of humanity is the rational employment of the rational powers. The actions that contribute to a human agent's moral goodness will be acts of will in accordance with rationality.[25]

A thing's substantial form, the set of essential characteristics determining the thing's species, constitutes the nature of the thing. And so whatever actualizes a thing's specifying potentiality thereby also perfects the nature of the thing. Given what else we have seen of Aquinas's theory, it follows that in his view what is good for a thing is what is natural to it, and what is unnatural to a thing is bad for it. So, he says, the good is what is according to nature, and evil is what is against nature;[26] in fact, what is evil cannot be natural to anything.[27] As for human nature, since it is characterized essentially by a capacity for rationality, what is irrational is contrary to nature where human beings are concerned.[28]

Habits that dispose a person to act in accordance with nature—i.e., rationally—are good habits, or virtues.[29] Vices, on the other hand, are habits disposing a person to irrationality and are therefore discordant with human nature.[30] Aquinas quotes with approval Augustine's appraisal of a vice as bad or evil to the extent to which it diminishes the integrity or wholeness of the agent's nature.[31]

It is an important consequence of this account of goodness and badness that no thing that exists or can exist is completely without goodness. This consequence can be inferred directly from the central thesis about being and goodness,[32] but some of its moral and theological implications are worth pointing out. Evil is always and only a defect in some respect to some extent; evil can have no essence of its own. Nor can there be a highest evil, an ultimate source of all other evils, because a *summum malum*, an evil devoid of all good, would be nothing at all.[33] A human being is defective, bad, or evil not because of certain positive attributes but because of privations of various forms of being appropriate to his or her nature.[34] And, in general, the extent to which a thing is not good of its kind is the extent to which it

has not actualized, or cultivated dispositions for actualizing, the potentialities associated with its nature.[35] Every form of privation is covered by that observation—from physical or mental subnormality, through ineptitude and inattention, to debauchery and depravity. In each case some form of being theoretically available to the thing because of its nature is lacking.

These considerations put us in a better position to assess Aquinas's understanding of the difference in sense between 'being' and 'goodness'. It should be clear by now that being is to be considered both absolutely and in a certain respect. Considered *absolutely*, being is the instantiation of a certain substantial form, the mere existence of a thing of some sort. But since each substantial form also includes a specifying potentiality, when that potentiality is actualized, the thing actualizing it is more fully a thing of that sort, a better specimen. When being is considered in this second way, it is correct to say that *in a certain respect* there is an increase of being for that thing. The ordinary sense of 'being' is being considered absolutely, that is, a thing's mere existence as the instantiation of some substantial form. But since to be is to be something or other, even being considered absolutely entails the actualization to *some* extent of *some* specifying potentiality, and in this way everything that is is good (in some respect and to some extent).

4. Supervenience

Aquinas, then, may be added to the lengthening list of those who think that goodness supervenes on some natural property.[36] As we've seen, Aquinas would say in general that an object *a* has goodness (to any extent) as an *A* if and only if *a* has the property of having actualized its specifying potentiality (to that extent). In particular, moral goodness supervenes on rationality in such a way that if any human being is morally good (to any extent), that person has the property of having actualized his or her capacity for rationality (to that extent); and if any human being has that property (to any extent), he or she is morally good (to that extent). Goodness supervenes on actualization of specifying potentialities; human moral goodness supervenes on actualization of rationality.

The relationship Aquinas sees between goodness and natural properties is complex and can be shown most easily by analogy. Fragility supervenes on certain natural properties without being reducible to any one of them, as Campbell and Pargetter have argued.[37] In line with their argument we might say that *x* is fragile in virtue of chemical bonding *A*, *y* in virtue of *B*, and *z* in virtue of *C*. Fragility cannot be reduced to or identified with bonding *A*, or *B*, or *C*, but it supervenes on each of them. It may be that what is common to *x*, *y*, and *z* is that each has weak chemical bonds in crucial spots, but those weak bonds are chemically quite distinct in connection with *A*, *B*, and *C*. In that case it can be said that the characteristic of being fragile and the characteristic of having weak chemical bonds in crucial spots are coextensive, and that fragility supervenes on natural characteristics, and yet it must also be denied that fragility can be identified with any one of those characteristics.

The relationship between fragility and other characteristics in that analysis is like the relationship between goodness and natural characteristics in Aquinas's ethical naturalism. A thing's goodness and the actualization of the thing's specifying potentiality are coextensive. Goodness in general is not to be identified with a particular natural characteristic, however, because the natural characteristic that is the actualization of a specifying potentiality will vary from one species of things to another. And the same observation holds regarding being: what is required to be a fully actualized member of species X is different from what is required to be a fully actualized member of species Y. The degree of actualization of the specifying potentialities for an X is the degree of being as an X, and this is also the degree of goodness as an X. But the specifying potentialities for an X differ from the specifying potentialities for a Y. So being and goodness are identical, but neither is to be identified with any one particular natural characteristic on which it supervenes.

But is moral goodness in particular identical with the natural characteristic of actualized rationality? Since human beings are essentially rational animals, human moral goodness is coextensive with actualized rationality. But moral goodness (or badness) is a characteristic of all beings whose nature involves freedom of choice, whether or not they are human. And so not even moral goodness is necessarily coextensive with the actualization of rationality, the specifying potentiality for human beings in the actual world. Goodness as an X will, for every X, be identical with the actualization of an X's specifying potentialities, but there is no natural characteristic such that goodness (or even moral goodness) is identical with it (where identity of properties is taken to require at least necessary coextension).

5. Objections to the Central Thesis

On the basis of this exposition of Aquinas's central thesis against its metaphysical background we can reply to objections the thesis is almost certain to generate. (The first two of those we consider are in fact considered and rebutted by Aquinas himself.)

Objection 1: A thing's being and its being good are clearly not the same—

many things that are, aren't good—and so being and goodness are clearly not coextensive. But if the terms are identical in reference, as Aquinas claims they are, being and goodness would have to be coextensive.[38]

This first objection trades on the counterintuitive character of a corollary of the central thesis—viz., everything is good insofar as it is in being. Aquinas accepts that corollary, associating it particularly with Augustine.[39] But the corollary cannot be reduced to an absurdity simply by observing that there are things that aren't good. In accordance with the central thesis, a thing has goodness in a certain respect and to a certain extent simply by virtue of possessing a substantial form and thus existing as a thing of a certain sort. As we've seen, however, the sense of 'goodness' is not simply the possession of some substantial form but, in particular, the actualization of the specifying potentiality inherent in that form. Only to the extent to which a thing has actualized that potentiality is it true to say unqualifiedly that the thing is good. For instance, to call Hitler good (without identifying some special respect, such as demagoguery) is to imply that he is good as a human being, or as a moral agent, which is false in ways that Aquinas's practical morality could detail by indicating how this or that action or decree of Hitler's fails to actualize rationality.

Objection 2: Goodness admits of degrees, but being is all or nothing. No rock, desk, or dog is in being just a little; no dog is in being more than another dog. On the other hand, things clearly can increase or decrease in goodness, and one thing can be better or worse than another thing of the same kind. Therefore, 'goodness' and 'being' can't have the same referent.[40]

It may be right to say of existence, at least abstractly, that it's all or nothing. But since every instance of existence is existence *as* something or other, and since existence as something or other typically admits of degrees—being a more or less fully developed actualized specimen—it is by no means clear that being is all or nothing. Making the same observation from Aquinas's point of view, we might say that there's more to being than just existence. Where contingent beings are concerned, potentiality for existing in a certain respect is a state of being that is intermediate between actually existing in that respect and not existing at all in that respect, as we've seen.[41] Furthermore, the actualization of potentialities is often gradual, so that the being of the thing whose specifying potentiality is being actualized admits of degrees. Stages in the actualization of a thing's specifying potentiality certainly can be and often are described in terms of goodness rather than being. All the same, the degrees of goodness picked out in such ordinary descriptions are supervenient on degrees of being.

Objection 3: According to Aquinas's central thesis, the more being, the more goodness. In that case unrestrained procreation, for example, would be a clear instance of promoting goodness, since the increase of the human pop-ulation is an increase of being and consequently of goodness. But that consequence is absurd.

Human beings who bring another human being into existence have not in virtue of that fact alone produced any goodness in any ordinary sense. If with Aquinas we take the basic sense of 'goodness' to be the actualization of a thing's specifying potentiality, then a human being produces goodness to the extent to which it actualizes its own or something else's specifying potentiality. Considered in itself, bringing children into the world does nothing to actualize any human being's specifying potentiality.[42] On the contrary, a man who fathered very many children would probably contribute to a *decrease* of goodness. He would be unable to have much parenting influence on the lives of his children or to give them the care they needed just because there were so many of them, and so it is at least a probable consequence of his unrestrained procreation that there would be more people whose chances of actualizing their specifying potentialities were unnaturally low.

But objection 3 is more complicated than the preceding objections just because goodness does supervene on being (in the way described in section 5 above). Consequently, whenever a thing has being in any respect, it also has goodness in some respect to some extent. If Ahasuerus, with his many wives and concubines, fathered, say, 150 children, he was partially responsible for the existence of 150 human beings and, consequently, for the goodness supervening on the being that constituted their existence. But neither we nor Aquinas would count Ahasuerus as a moral hero or even morally praiseworthy just because he fathered all those children.

Our rejoinder to objection 1 will help here. The small amount of goodness that must supervene on even the mere existence of a thing is not enough to call that thing good. In fact, if the thing falls too far short of the full actualization of its specifying potentiality, it is bad (or evil) considered as an instance of its kind, even though there is goodness in it. So insofar as Ahasuerus couldn't do what he ought to have done to help his children develop into good human beings, his unrestrained procreation couldn't count as the production of goodness; and to the extent to which his fathering so many children would be a factor in diminishing or preventing his care of them, it could count as producing badness.

Objection 4: According to Aquinas, loss of being is loss of goodness: badness (or evil) is the privation of goodness, which is a privation of being. In that case taking penicillin to cure strep throat would be a bad thing to do, since it would result in the destruction of countless bacteria. But that consequence is absurd.

Objection 4 gains a special strength from the fact that it forces a defender of Aquinas's position to take on the task of ranking natural kinds. The task may seem not just uncongenial but impossible for anyone who understands

goodness as supervenient on being itself. In Jack London's story "To Build a Fire" either a man will save his life by killing his dog or the dog will continue to live but the man will die. Since in either case one being is left, it may look as if Aquinas's theory must be neutral on the question of which of those beings should survive. But a moral intuition that is at least widely shared would consider the case in which the dog dies and the man survives to be preferable.

Far from offending that intuition, Aquinas's theory can explain and support it because his metaphysics provides a systematic basis on which to rank natural kinds: the Porphyrian Tree, a standard device of medieval metaphysics inherited from Hellenistic philosophy. A Porphyrian Tree begins with an Aristotelian category (*substance* is the standard medieval example) and moves via a series of dichotomies from that most general genus through at least some of its species. (In theory, all its possible species can be uncovered by this means.) The dichotomies produce progressively more specific species by the application of a pair of complementary properties (differentiae) to a less specific species (a genus) already in the tree. In this way, for example, *substance* yields *corporeal substance* and *incorporeal substance* to begin the tree. Corporeal substances can in turn be divided into those capable and those incapable of growth and reproduction and other life processes; and corporeal substances capable of life processes can be divided into those capable and those incapable of perception—animals and plants, roughly speaking. Finally, those capable of perception can be divided into those capable and those incapable of rationality—human beings and other animals. In this schema, then, human beings are corporeal substances capable of life processes, perception, and rationality.

Since each dichotomy in the tree is generated by the application of complementary characteristics, and since (setting aside the complicated case of the first dichotomy) all the characteristics applied involve capacities, one of the species (or genera) encountered in any pair after the first is characterized by a capacity its counterpart lacks. But, given Aquinas's views on being and actuality, an increment in capacity (or potentiality) constitutes an increment in being, and, because of the supervenience of goodness on being, a species (or genus) with more capacities of the sort that show up in the differentiae will have potentiality more goodness than one with fewer. So, other things being equal, the goodness of a human life is greater than that of a dog's just because of rationality, the incremental capacity.[43]

We don't have to accept the universal applicability of the Porphyrian Tree in order to see that in it Aquinas does have a method for ranking at least some natural kinds relative to one another, and that the method is entirely consistent with his central thesis. Moreover, the method yields results that elucidate and support the intuitive reaction to the Jack London story: other

things being equal, we value a human being more than a dog (or a colony of bacteria) because there's more to a human being than there is to a dog (or a colony of bacteria). Finally, although Aquinas subordinates all other species of animal to the human species, this feature of his theory cannot be interpreted as sanctioning wanton cruelty toward nonhuman animals or their gratuitous destruction. It is another corollary of his central thesis that any destruction of being is always prima facie bad in some respect and to some extent. Because some destruction may often be less bad than the only available alternative, it may often be rationally chosen. But unless there is some greater good (some enhancement of being) that can be achieved only by means of destruction, an agent who chooses to destroy will choose irrationally.

In expounding and defending Aquinas's metaethics we have been moving toward a consideration of his normative ethics, to which we now turn.

6. The Evaluation of Actions

Aquinas's normative ethics is constructed around a theory of virtues and vices, which are conceived of as habitual inclinations, or dispositions, toward certain sorts of actions. It will be helpful, therefore, to begin this consideration by looking briefly at his analysis and evaluation of human actions.[44]

A human action, strictly speaking, is one in which a human agent exercises the specifically human rational faculties of intellect and will.[45] (Absentminded gestures, consequently, are not human actions even though they are "actions associated with a human being."[46]) Every human action has an object, an end, and certain circumstances in which it is done.

An action's object, as Aquinas conceives of it, is fundamentally the state of affairs the agent intends to bring about as a direct effect of the action.[47] We might characterize the object as the immediate aim or purpose of the action. When Esther goes uninvited into the court of King Ahasuerus's palace, for instance, the object of her action is an audience with the king.

But in Aquinas's analysis of action, an action's object is distinguished from the action's end.[48] We might provisionally think of an action's end as the agent's motive for performing the action. So the end of Esther's action of coming to the palace is to persuade Ahasuerus to rescind his decree mandating the death of all the Jews in his kingdom.

Seen in this way, the *object* of an action is *what* the agent intends to accomplish as a direct result of her action, while its *end* is *why* she intends to accomplish it. Both the object and the end of an action are taken into account in determining the action's species, in determining what the action essentially is.[49] Given Aquinas's central thesis regarding being and goodness,

then, it is not surprising to find him maintaining that the goodness or badness of any action is to be decided on the basis of an assessment of the action's object and end. If the contemplated states of affairs that the action aims at and that motivate the agent are good, the action is good; if either the object or the end is not good, the action is not good.

So far, this account of the goodness of actions seems to ignore the fact that certain types of actions are morally neutral. The object of pitching horseshoes is to get them to fall around a stake, a state of affairs that certainly seems to be neither morally good nor morally bad. Suppose the end of such an action on a particular occasion is to entertain a sick child, which we may suppose is morally good. Then it might seem that the action itself, pitching horseshoes to entertain a sick child, would have to be evaluated by Aquinas as not good; for although its end is good, its object is not.

This counterintuitive evaluation can be dispelled by taking into account Aquinas's concept of the *circumstances* of an action: When was the action done? Where? By whom? How? etc.[50] An action's circumstances are obviously not essential features of a type of action, but they are what might be called *particularizing* accidents, because any broadly conceived type of action is particularized or recognized as the particular action it is by attending to its circumstances. So, for example, part of what makes Esther's action the particular action it is, is its circumstances. She comes uninvited to the court of the king's palace at a time when Ahasuerus has decreed death for anyone who comes into the court of the palace without having been called by the king, unless the intruder "finds favor with the king." Furthermore, because it has been a month since the king last sent for her, Esther has reason to believe she is out of favor with the king. Finally, she comes there at a time when Ahasuerus has decreed the death of all the Jews in his kingdom, and Esther's intention is to speak for her people. It is on the basis of a consideration of these circumstances that the action of coming uninvited to the king, which seems morally neutral, is particularized as Esther's act of courage and altruism.[51]

The importance of a consideration of circumstances in Aquinas's evaluation of actions can be seen in the fact that he takes any and every action particularized by its circumstances to be either good or bad, even though the type of the action broadly conceived of may be morally neutral (his paradigms are picking a straw off the ground or taking a walk).[52]

Not all of an action's accidents are included among its circumstances. So, for example, Esther's action has the accidents of contributing to the death of Haman and of being commemorated in a book of the Bible. But on Aquinas's theory neither of those accidents can or should make any difference to an evaluation of Esther's action. An action's circumstances, he says,

are those accidents of it that are related *per se* to the action being evaluated; all its other accidents are related to it only *per accidens*.[53]

By this distinction he seems to mean that the circumstances of Esther's particular action, the action being evaluated in our example, are features accidental to the *type* of action she performs, but not accidental to her particular action on that particular occasion. On the contrary, even our understanding of the object and end of her particular action is heavily influenced by what we know of its circumstances. In light of that knowledge we might want to revise our original broad assessment and say, more precisely, that the object of her action is a *dangerous and difficult* audience with the king, and that its end is a *resolute and self-sacrificial* attempt to get the king to rescind his edict.

The action's circumstances may be called its *intrinsic* accidents, the others its *extrinsic* accidents. The intrinsic accidents of Esther's action clarify and redefine our understanding of *what she does*, what she is responsible for; its extrinsic accidents—such as its being commemorated in a book of the Bible—obviously contribute nothing to such an understanding. Even the extrinsically accidental fact that her action has some causal relationship with Haman's death is not in any way a feature of what *she* does, because the connection between her action and his death is an unforeseeable and partly fortuitous chain of events, something she could not be held responsible for.

So Aquinas's evaluation of actions is based entirely on a consideration of *what* those actions *are* and not at all on a consideration of their extrinsic accidents. In that way it is a natural outgrowth of his central metaethical thesis. The object and end of an action determine the action's type and so, broadly speaking, they determine the being of the action; the action's circumstances determine the being of the particular action that is actually performed, and in doing so they clarify and refine our understanding of the particular action's object and end. A particular (actually performed) action, then, is good only in case both its object and its end as informed by its circumstances are good; otherwise the particular action is bad. The goodness of the action's object or end depends, in turn, on whether the contemplated state of affairs motivating or aimed at by the agent is good, as judged by the central thesis.

The end of Esther's action, for example, is to persuade the king to rescind his decree of death for all the kingdom's Jews. But the king's decree was irrational, on Aquinas's view, since it would have resulted in a great loss of being and hence of goodness without any greater good to justify that loss. Helping to bring about the rescinding of an irrational decree, however, is rational, other things being equal, and therefore morally good.[54] (Analogous things can be said about the object of Esther's action.)

7. Problems for a Simpleminded
Application of the Thesis

In the story of Esther, her attempt to save her people involves her knowingly risking her life: "and if I perish, I perish." How, if at all, is the evaluation of her action in terms of its object and end affected by that circumstance of the action? Aquinas would, not surprisingly, find that aspect of her action praiseworthy. In discussing courage, he praises risking one's life in the defense of the common good as a prime example of that virtue.[55] But suppose that Esther succeeds in saving her people and dies in the attempt. Would Aquinas's theory still evaluate her action as good in that case?

The simpleminded reply to that question is an emphatic affirmative: Of course Esther's action is good even if it costs her her life; it saves thousands of lives at the expense of one. On balance there is a great surplus of being and consequently of goodness.

Although the affirmative reply seems right, the reason given for it is repugnant. If this simpleminded bookkeeping approach were what Aquinas's thesis about being and goodness required, the thesis would lead to results that are egregiously inconsistent with the rest of Aquinas's moral theory as well as repugnant to moral intuitions shared by most people in his time and ours. We can show this by considering applications of the simpleminded approach to three cases more complicated than our revised version of Esther's story. The first of them is a version of one of Aquinas's own examples.

The heaven case: Johnson is a murderer, and Williams is his innocent victim. But when Johnson murders him, Williams (unbeknownst to Johnson) is in a state of grace, and so goes to heaven. The ultimate end of human existence is union with God in heaven, and so by bringing it about that Williams achieves the ultimate end, Johnson brings about an increase of being (and consequently of goodness). In reality, then, Johnson's murder of Williams is morally justified.

Aquinas considers his version of the heaven case as an objection to his own claim that the deliberate killing of an innocent person is never morally justified.[56] His rejoinder to this objection is that the fact that Williams goes to heaven, the good that is supposed to justify Johnson's murder of Williams, is an accident that is related to Johnson's action only *per accidens;* Williams's going to heaven is an extrinsic accident of Johnson's action. Aquinas is apparently thinking along this line: Williams's spiritual condition and not Johnson's action is what causes Williams to go to heaven, and it is an extrinsic accident of Johnson's action that Williams was in that condition at the time of the murder. Since it is a feature of Aquinas's theory that an action is to be evaluated solely on the basis of what it is and not on the basis of any of its extrinsic accidents, his evaluation of Johnson's action would not take any account of the fact that Williams goes to heaven. What Johnson's action is, as far as the story goes, is simply the murder of an innocent person, which is of course not morally justifiable in Aquinas's theory.

Aquinas's treatment of the heaven case strikes us as satisfactory, but his conclusion that sending Williams to heaven is only an extrinsic accident of Johnson's action seems to depend on the fact that Johnson does not (presumably cannot) know that Williams is in a state of grace. If Johnson knew that killing Williams would result in Williams's going to heaven, it would at least be harder to deny that achieving that result was part of the end of Johnson's action and thus part of what Johnson's action was. We want to consider some cases in which there is no relevant ignorance on the part of the agent.

The hostage case: A madman takes five people hostage and threatens to kill them all unless Brown kills Robinson, an innocent bystander. Brown decides that killing Robinson is morally justified by the surplus of being (and consequently of goodness) that will result from using Robinson's death to save the lives of the five hostages.

In the hostage case the object of Brown's action is Robinson's death, and its end appears to be the saving of five lives. Aquinas's way of dismissing the counterintuitive moral assessment in the heaven case is clearly unavailable as a way of dealing with the hostage case. The good that appears to justify Brown's action is the action's *end*, which *must* be taken into account in evaluating the action. In considering how Aquinas would deal with the hostage case, it will be helpful to look more closely at his conception of the end of an action.

Since it is Aquinas's view that actions should be evaluated only on the basis of what they are and not on the basis of their extrinsic accidents, and since it is also his view that actions are to be evaluated on the basis of their ends, the state of affairs sought after as the end of the action must be intrinsic to the action itself. For that reason it seems clear that the notion of motive, although it is in some respects close to Aquinas's notion of end, is not interchangeable with it. A state of affairs counts as the end of an action if and only if the agent performs the action for the sake of establishing that state of affairs, *and* the agent *can* in fact establish that state of affairs *solely by* performing that action.

In the hostage case the good that is supposed to justify Brown's killing the innocent Robinson is the saving of five lives. But that good cannot be the end of Brown's action because it is not a state of affairs he can establish by killing Robinson. The survival of the hostages depends not on Brown's action but on the action of the madman, who can of course kill them all even if Brown meets his demand. Therefore, the survival of the hostages is

not a state of affairs Brown can be said to establish solely by killing Robinson. And once this more precise notion of the end of an action has been introduced, the hostage case can be assimilated to the heaven case after all. In both cases, the good that is supposed to justify the killing of an innocent person turns out not to be an intrinsic part of the action being evaluated but rather only an extrinsic accident of it that is for that reason to be left out of account in the evaluation of the action. When Brown's action in the hostage case is evaluated in that way, it is evaluated simply as the deliberate killing of an innocent person; and since that state of affairs is unquestionably bad, the action itself is not morally justified.

But even if this attempt to defend Aquinas's evaluation of actions succeeds in the hostage case, it will apparently fail if we alter the form of the counterexample in one crucial respect.

The hospital case: Five patients in a hospital are waiting for donors to be found so that they can undergo transplant operations. One of them needs a heart; the second, a liver; the third, lungs; and the fourth and fifth each need a kidney. Every one of the five patients will be able to lead a normal life if, but only if, an organ donor can be found. Each of them will die very soon without a transplant operation. Jones, the skilled transplant specialist in charge of these patients, decides that killing Smith, a healthy, innocent person, is morally justified by the surplus of being (and consequently of goodness) that will result from using Smith's organs to save the five critically ill patients.[57]

The end of Jones's action, even on the more precise interpretation of 'end', is the saving of five lives. In the hospital case, unlike the hostage case, no other agent's action is needed to establish the state of affairs Jones aims at establishing, because he is a relevantly skilled specialist in charge of the five patients. And if the saving of their lives can in this case count as the end of Jones's action, then it must be taken into account in evaluating the action. For that reason, the tactic that was effective in defending Aquinas's evaluation of actions against the hostage case won't work against the hospital case.

But Aquinas's evaluation of actions requires taking into account the action's object as well as its end. Since the object and the end together make the action what it *is*, and since the goodness of anything is a function of its being, both object and end must be good if the action is to be good. But the object of Jones's action in the hospital case is the death of the innocent Smith and the removal of his organs, which is unquestionably morally bad. Aquinas would, more specifically, condemn the object of Jones's action in the hospital case as *unjust* (as we will explain in the next section).

But the sacrifice of one to save many in the hospital case is formally like our revised version of Esther's story. In order to understand Aquinas's eval-

uation of the hospital case and to see whether it applies also to Esther's courageous act of altruism, we need to understand something of Aquinas's theory of the virtues in general and of justice in particular.

8. Justice and Its Place in the Scheme of the Virtues

Assuming for now the metaphysical underpinnings of Aquinas's theory of the virtues—his accounts of intellect and will, passion and operation, disposition and habit—we can begin this brief synopsis by saying that (human) moral goodness is a kind of goodness attainable only by rational beings and, as we've seen, a rational being is good to the extent to which it actualizes its capacity for rationality. Summarizing drastically, we can say that moral virtue is the will's habit of choosing rationally in controlling passions and directing actions.[58] Of the cardinal virtues, prudence is the habit of skilfully choosing means appropriate for the attaining of ends and so is concerned with directing actions; in this way prudence links intellectual and moral virtues.[59] As for the cardinal virtues concerned with controlling passions, if the passions are of a sort that need to be controlled in order to keep them from thwarting rationality, the relevant habit is temperance. And if the passions are the sort that need to be controlled in order to keep them from deterring the agent from an action to which reason prompts him, the relevant habit is courage.[60] Finally, if what is at stake is the exercise of rationality not in the agent's governance of himself but in his actions affecting other people, the relevant habit is justice.[61]

In Aquinas's view, a society has a being of its own. Some things contribute to the being of a society, and others to its dissolution. In accordance with Aquinas's metaethics, the things that contribute to a society's being are part of the society's good, and the virtue of justice generally in the members of the society is directed toward establishing and preserving that common good. Aquinas, who follows Aristotle closely here, distinguishes distributive from commutative justice in respect of the rational moral principles to which the virtue conforms. Distributive justice is the rational regulation of the distribution of the society's worldly goods, aiming at a rational relationship in that respect between the society as a whole and any individual member of it.[62] Commutative justice, on the other hand, is the rational regulation of relationships among individuals or subgroups within the society. The basis of commutative justice in Aquinas's treatment of it seems to be that human beings considered just as persons are equals, and that it is therefore rational for them, considered just as persons, to treat one another as equals, and

irrational for them to treat one another unequally, considered just as persons.[63]

A used-car dealer and his customer, considered just as persons, are equals. If the dealer deceives the customer about the defects of a car and so cheats him out of much of the purchase price, then in that particular exchange of worldly goods the dealer gets a greater share than the customer gets—which is contrary to reason because the dealer and the customer are equals in all relevant respects. The inequality of the trade is part of what makes it an instance of cheating, and cheating is morally bad because it contravenes the principles of commutative justice.[64]

So, whenever one person takes another's worldly goods, the action will be just only if it is rational. A necessary (though not also sufficient) condition of its being rational is its involving an even trade. A slanderer, for instance, takes away the victim's reputation, one of the more important worldly goods, and gives nothing in return; slander is thus a gross injustice.[65] Murder is perhaps the grossest injustice of all, since in depriving the victim of life, the greatest of worldly goods, the murderer is not only providing no worldly compensation but also rendering the victim incapable of receiving any such compensation.[66]

In the hospital case the object of Dr. Jones's action is characterized by exactly that sort of injustice. His taking of Smith's life and vital organs involves considerable benefit for his five patients, but there can be no compensatory worldly good for Smith. The injustice in the object of Jones's action is a sufficient condition for evaluating the action as morally bad, regardless of the beneficial aspects of its end.

We began our investigation of the simpleminded application of Aquinas's central thesis by considering a revised version of the story of Esther, in which she loses her life in saving her people. It should now be clear that the intuitive positive evaluation of such an act of self-sacrifice is not affected by our negative evaluation of Jones's sacrifice of Smith in the hospital case. Esther would not be guilty of any injustice if she gave up her own life for her people, although of course Ahasuerus would be guilty of injustice if he took her life in those circumstances. In fact, according to Aquinas's account of commutative justice it is impossible for Esther to be unjust to herself, because a person cannot take *for* herself an unfair share of worldly goods *from* herself. The reasons for disapproving of Jones's action in the hospital case do not apply to Esther's hypothetical self-sacrifice, and approval of her self-sacrifice need not and should not be based on the simpleminded bookkeeping application of Aquinas's central thesis.

9. Agent-Centered Restrictions in Aquinas's Ethics

These considerations give us reason to think that Aquinas's ethics is a deontological theory of morality that can handle the problem of agent-centered restrictions. Samuel Scheffler has recently described these restrictions as rendering "typical deontological views . . . apparently paradoxical."

An agent-centred restriction is, roughly, a restriction which it is at least sometimes impermissible to violate in circumstances where a violation would serve to minimize total overall violations of the very same restriction, and would have no other morally relevant consequences. Thus, for example, a prohibition against killing one innocent person even in order to minimize the total number of innocent people killed would ordinarily count as an agent-centred restriction. The inclusion of agent-centred restrictions gives traditional deontological views considerable anti-consequentialist force, and also considerable intuitive appeal. Despite their congeniality to moral common sense, however, agent-centred restrictions are puzzling. For how can it be rational to forbid the performance of a morally objectionable action that would have the effect of minimizing the total number of comparably objectionable actions that were performed and would have no other morally relevant consequences? How can the minimization of morally objectionable conduct be morally unacceptable?[67]

While Aquinas's theory certainly endorses the truism that the good is to be maximized, it also interprets the nature of goodness in general and of good actions in particular in such a way that no action whose object is characterized by injustice can be rationally performed no matter how great a good is incorporated in the action's end. On this basis, a generalization of agent-centered restrictions can be endorsed and accommodated in Aquinas's teleological deontology.

The generalized version of Scheffler's example is a prohibition against perpetrating or permitting one injustice of uncompensatable suffering even in order to minimize the total number of injustices, and at this level of generality "the very same restriction" is the restriction against perpetrating or permitting injustice. Agent-centered restrictions that prohibit agents from perpetrating or permitting actions that constitute an injustice are rational for that very reason, regardless of the good to be achieved by performing those actions.

10. The Theological Interpretation of Aquinas's Central Thesis

Aquinas's central metaethical thesis has a theological interpretation more fundamental than any of its applications to morality. For since Aquinas takes God to be essentially and uniquely "being itself" (*ipsum esse*), it is God alone who is essentially goodness itself.[68] This theological interpretation of Aquinas's thesis regarding being and goodness entails a relationship between God and morality that avoids the embarrassments of both "theological subjectivism" and "theological objectivism"[69] and provides a basis for an account of religious morality preferable to any other we know of.[70]

The question "What has God to do with morality?" has typically been given either of two answers by those who think the answer isn't "Nothing."[71] God's will is sometimes taken to create morality in the sense that whatever God wills is good just because he wills it: consequently, right actions are right just because God approves of them and wrong actions are wrong just because God disapproves of them. This divine-command morality may be thought of as theological subjectivism (TS).[72] The second of these two typical answers takes morality to be grounded on principles transmitted by God but independent of him, so that a perfectly good God frames his will in accordance with those independent standards of goodness: consequently, God approves of right actions just because they are right and disapproves of wrong actions just because they are wrong (theological objectivism [TO]).

The trouble with TS is that by its lights apparently anything at all could be established as morally right or good by divine fiat. So, although TS makes a consideration of God's will essential to an evaluation of actions, it does so at the cost of depriving the evaluation of its moral character. Because it cannot rule out anything as absolutely immoral, TS seems to be a theory of religious morality that has dropped *morality* as commonly understood out of the theory. TO, on the other hand, obviously provides the basis for an objective morality, but it seems equally clearly not to be a theory of *religious* morality since it suggests no essential connection between God and the standards for evaluating actions. Furthermore, the status of the standards to which God looks for morality according to TO seems to impugn God's sovereignty.

So the familiar candidates for theories of religious morality seem either, like TS, to be repugnant to moral intuitions or, like TO, to presuppose moral standards apart from God, which God may promulgate but does not produce. For different reasons, then, both TS and TO seem inadequate as theories of religious morality; neither one provides both an objective moral standard and an essential connection between religion and morality.

On the conception of God as essentially goodness itself, however, there is an essential relationship between God and the standard by which he prescribes or judges. The goodness for the sake of which and in accordance with which he wills whatever he wills regarding human morality is identical with his nature. On the other hand, because it is God's very nature and not any arbitrary decision of his that thereby constitutes the standard for morality, only things consonant with God's nature could be morally good. The theological interpretation of the central thesis of Aquinas's ethical theory thus provides the basis for an objective religious morality.

11. Justice, Uncompensated Suffering, and the Problem of Evil

But a more pointed theological application of Aquinas's central thesis can be developed by combining the conception of God as perfect goodness itself with the impermissibility of certain actions as brought out in our generalized account of agent-centered restrictions. The rationality of agent-centered restrictions is a consequence of the irrationality of treating the victim of the initial action unjustly in such a way that even achieving that action's laudable end leaves the victim uncompensated, and it is the injustice of the uncompensated suffering that makes the action impermissible.[73] It follows that it is impossible that a perfectly good God would permit, much less perform, any action whose object involves a victim who is treated unjustly and left uncompensated, no matter how much other evil might be prevented thereby.

Nevertheless, many, perhaps most, attempts to solve the problem of evil portray God as permitting or even performing actions that appear to be impermissible in just that way. For instance, Richard Swinburne's "argument from the need for knowledge," which is certainly not idiosyncratic in its attempt to provide a morally sufficient reason for God's permitting natural evil, takes the initially attractive line that many natural evils "are necessary if agents are to have the *knowledge* of how to bring about evil or prevent its occurrence, knowledge which they must have if they are to have a genuine choice between bringing about evil and bringing about good."[74] But as this line is developed it turns out, not surprisingly, that in very many cases God must be portrayed as allowing some innocent person or persons to suffer without compensation so that others may learn to avoid or to prevent or mitigate such suffering on other occasions; "If God normally helps those who cannot help themselves when others do not help, others will not take the trouble to help the helpless next time."[75] Even if we suppose, as Swinburne does, that the knowledge gained in such a way cannot be gained otherwise, at least not efficaciously, God's role in this arrangement seems

morally on a par with that of Dr. Jones in the hospital case—or worse, since the end of Jones's action is the prevention of death while the end of God's nonintervention is the alleviation of ignorance.

Swinburne deals with difficulties of this sort by stressing God's right to treat us as we have no right to treat one another.[76] But to say in this context that God has such a right is to imply that there would be no injustice on God's part if he exercised the right. Swinburne's claim, then, comes to this: if God were to do something that would be unjust by human standards, it would not count as unjust simply because God was its perpetrator. If this claim is not to convey the morally repulsive suggestion that anything whatever that God might do would count as good solely because God did it (including, e.g., breaking his promise to save those who put their trust in him), then there must be morally relevant features of God's nature and action for which there are no counterparts in human nature and action.

Swinburne sometimes suggests that God's being the creator of the world is just such a feature. This seems to be the most promising line to take in support of Swinburne's claim about God's rights, but we do not think it succeeds. A mother is also in a sense the creator of her child. While that relationship gives her rights over the child that others do not have, it is not nearly enough to justify her if she inflicts uncompensated suffering on her unwilling child. If she were to deny her daughter any college education in order to have money enough to send her son to Harvard, when her daughter also wants an education and receives no compensating benefits for failing to get one, the mother would be outrageously unfair. That she was in some sense the creator of the children would in no way lessen the unfairness. Of course, God is the creator of human beings in a much more radical sense than a mother is the creator of her children. But would the assessment of the mother's unfairness be at all softened if it turned out that she had built these children from scratch in a laboratory? We see no respect in which the degree of radicalness in the claim that one person created another could be a morally relevant consideration in evaluating the justice of the creator's treatment of his creatures.

Similarly, Plantinga has suggested that natural evils might be perpetrated by fallen angels, and that the good there is in the exercise of free will on their part might provide a morally sufficient reason for God to allow instances of natural evil, if, and only if, the world characterized by such an arrangement is one in which there is more good than evil.[77] On this view, an omniscient, omnipotent, perfectly good God might permit the inhabitants of Mexico City to suffer in an earthquake so that the good of freedom might thereby be achieved in the earthquake-causing activity of fallen angels, as long as the general preponderance of good over evil was not thereby destroyed.[78] Plantinga's Free Will Defense (FWD) has sometimes been chal-

lenged because it has been thought to impugn God's omnipotence, but as far as we know, the literature on FWD has not so far addressed the challenge that arises from Aquinas's sort of ethical theory, which provides grounds for doubting whether FWD preserves God's perfect goodness. As our earthquake example suggests, FWD does not explicitly rule out attributing to God an action Aquinas would consider unjust and hence immoral. If it does not, then, on Aquinas's view, the reason FWD assigns to God for permitting some instances of evil (especially natural, but also some kinds of moral evil) is not a *morally* sufficient reason.

But the issue should not be construed as tied particularly to Aquinas's ethics. If moral goodness includes agent-centered restrictions, both general and particular, then God's justice and individual human rights must be taken into account in any attempt to explain God's permitting moral or natural evil. And it may be more effective to raise the issue in terms of agent-centered restrictions, which have a "considerable intuitive appeal" and "congeniality to moral common sense" quite independently of their involvement in Aquinas's or any other ethical theory. Putting the matter in those terms, if a proposed solution to the problem of evil depends on implicitly rejecting generalized agent-centered restrictions as having no application to God, it will be important to ask what sort of ethical theory is presupposed by the proposal and to consider whether such a theory is consistent with whatever else is held to be true about God by the defender of theism against the argument from evil.

In correspondence with us Plantinga has said of FWD that agent-centered restrictions and the requirements of justice

> clearly are not excluded; they just aren't explicitly mentioned. If you are right (and I'm not convinced you aren't) in thinking that God couldn't permit an innocent to suffer without some compensating good (accruing to that very person), then a world in which innocents suffer without such compensation won't be a very good world. In fact, if such a state of affairs is so evil that no amount of good can outweigh it, then *no* good possible world would be one in which there is such uncompensated suffering of innocents. . . . But can't we mend matters simply enough, just by adding . . . that *a* [the possible world God actualizes in FWD] meets the agent-centered restrictions: that *a* contains no instances of uncompensated suffering of innocents . . . [?]

Plantinga is plainly right to insist that FWD doesn't explicitly rule out agent-centered restrictions, but adding them successfully requires saying more about the nature of the world in which innocents suffer but are compensated. Worries raised by consideration of agent-centered restrictions are not al-

layed simply by stipulating compensation for the suffering of innocent victims, as can be seen by considering an adaptation of an episode from Dickens's *Tale of Two Cities*. An enormously rich French aristocrat habitually has his carriage driven at high speeds through the streets of Paris and is contemptuously indifferent to the suffering thereby inflicted on the lower classes. One day his carriage cripples a child. Seeing that the child has been seriously hurt, the aristocrat flings several gold coins to the grieving family. The family, to whom the coins represent a fortune, are entirely satisfied; but no one would suppose that the aristocrat has thereby exonerated himself. It's easy to find circumstances of this sort, in which victims may consider themselves compensated even though the perpetrator (or permitter) remains unjustified.

Insisting on an essential rather than a merely accidental connection between the suffering and the compensation will not guarantee justification. If a mother forces her son into months of semistarvation and sensory deprivation in order to impress on him the blessings of ordinary life, he will no doubt find intense pleasure in ordinary experiences thereafter. Here the compensation is essentially connected with the suffering. But even if the pleasure is so intense as to outweigh all the pains of the deprivation, the mother is not thereby justified.

What else is required can be seen in a slight variation on our hostage case. Even if a madman were threatening to cut off five other children's fingers unless you cut off your child's fingers, you would not have a morally sufficient reason to do so. Our claim is based, as before, on considerations of the injustice in the object of the action demanded of you. Rational agent-centered restrictions make that action impermissible. And yet it's not difficult to describe circumstances in which you would have a morally sufficient reason for acting in that way, in which you would be not only not blamed but even praised for it. If your daughter's fingers were caught in machinery in such a way that she would die horribly unless they were amputated at once, and no one but you could perform the action, goodness would require it of you. It seems clear that all that accounts for the difference in the moral status of the act of amputation in these latter circumstances is that it is now the indispensable (or best possible) means to *preventing a greater evil* for the child herself.

Given the constraints raised by considerations of agent-centered restrictions, then, if an agent is to be justified in allowing the suffering of an innocent victim, he must (among other conditions) believe (reasonably) that without such suffering greater harm would come to the victim. Analogously, the strictures we have derived from the central thesis of Aquinas's metaethics preclude only such solutions to the problem of evil as fail to show how

God's permitting innocent suffering can be the indispensable (or best possible) means of (at least) preventing greater harm to the victim.[79]

Notes

1. See, e.g., Robert B. Louden, "On Some Vices of Virtue Ethics," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 21 (1984), 227–236; Gregory E. Pence, "Recent Work on Virtues," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 21 (1984), 281–297.

2. See our article "Absolute Simplicity," *Faith and Philosophy* 2 (1985), 353–382; esp. 375–376.

3. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* (ST) Ia q. 5, esp. a. 1. We are interpreting Aquinas's *"sunt idem secundum rem"* as "are the same in reference" and *"differunt secundum rationem"* as "differ in sense." Aquinas's treatment of this thesis about being and goodness is a particularly important development in a long and complicated tradition, on which see Scott MacDonald, "The Metaphysics of Goodness in Medieval Philosophy before Aquinas" (Ph.D. diss., Cornell University, 1986). See also Michael Hönes, "Ens et Bonum Convertuntur: Eine Deutung des scholastischen Axioms unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Metaphysik und Ethik des hl. Thomas von Aquin" (inaugural diss., Albert-Ludwigs-Universität, Freiburg I. Br., 1968).

4. See, e.g., Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra Gentiles* (SCG), I 37.4 (n. 306); III 3.3 (n. 1880); Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* I 1, 1094a1–3.

5. Kinds must be broadly conceived of in this connection. For an exhibit at a plant pathology conference a stunted, diseased specimen of wheat may be perfect of its kind, just what's wanted. But the kind at issue in that case is not wheat but wheat-afflicted-by-wheat-mildew. Alternatively, it might be said that the goodness of an exhibit, like that of other artifacts, is related to the rational purposes of its users, in which case the kind at issue is not wheat but exhibit-specimen-of-mildewed-wheat.

6. *ST* Ia q. 5, a. 1

7. See, e.g., SCG I 37.4 (n. 306); *ST* IaIIae q. 94, a. 2. Rational agents have goals over and above their natural aims, and so the objects of their conscious desires are sometimes only perceived by them as good and not also actually good for them.

8. SCG III 3, passim.

9. See, e.g., *ST* IaIIae q. 1, a. 5.

10. When the thing described is a rational being, the object of its aim will include its *conception* of the fulfillment of its nature, which can be more or less mistaken. Objectively evil objects of desire are desired because they are perceived as good for the desirer to have.

11. What is meant by 'equivalent' here is spelled out in our discussion of supervenience in sec. 5.

12. *SCG III* 3.4 (n. 1881).

13. T. H. Irwin's "The Metaphysical and Psychological Basis of Aristotle's Ethics," in *Essays on Aristotle's Ethics*, ed. A. Rorty (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), pp. 35–53, is particularly useful for our purposes here because

of Aquinas's dependence on Aristotle. On the relevant role of substantial form in particular, see esp. pp. 37–39 of Irwin's article.

14. See above.

15. See, e.g., *ST* Ia q. 5, a. 5; IaIIae q. 85, a. 4; *Quaestiones disputatae de veritate* (*DV*), q. 21, a. 6.

16. See, e.g., SCG III 7.7 (n. 1916); *ST* IaIIae q. 55, a. 2. A contemporary counterpart of this view of forms might be seen in Sydney Shoemaker's "Causality and Properties," in *Time and Cause*, ed. Peter van Inwagen (Dordrecht: Reidel, 1980), pp. 109–135; reprinted in Shoemaker, *Identify, Cause, and Mind* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), pp. 206–233.

17. See, e.g., SCG I 42.10 (n. 343): "The differentia that specifies a genus does not complete the nature (*rationem*) of the genus; instead, it is through the differentia that the genus acquires its being in actuality."

18. See, e.g., *ST* IaIIae q. 49, a. 4, esp. ad 1.

19. *ST* IaIIae q. 3, a. 2: "Anything whatever is perfect to the extent to which it is in actuality, since potentiality without actuality is imperfect."

20. See, e.g., SCG III 16.3, 4 (nn. 1987 & 1988).

21. See, e.g., *ST* IaIIae q. 18, a. 1.

22. See, e.g., ibid., q. 55, aa. 1, 2; q. 63, a. 1.

23. *ST* Ia q. 59, a. 1. The awareness concomitant with a rational appetite can be distorted.

24. Ibid.; cf. SCG II 47 and DV q. 23, a. 1. See also our discussion in "Absolute Simplicity" sec. 5, 359–362.

25. See, e.g., SCG III 9.1 (n. 1928); *ST* IaIIae q. 18, a. 5.

26. *ST* IaIIae q. 18, a. 5, ad 1.

27. SCG III 7.6 (n. 1915): "Therefore, since badness or evil is a privation of that which is natural, it cannot be natural to anything."

28. See, e.g., *ST* IaIIae q. 71, a. 1.

29. See, e.g., *ST* IaIIae q. 55, aa. 1–4. For human beings, acting in accordance with rationality is their second actuality (as Aquinas says, following Aristotle). A newborn human being is only potentially a reasoning being. A mature human being acting in accordance with rationality, such as Aquinas when he is writing on ethics, is rationally exercising his rational powers; and that actual exercise of the specifying potentiality for human beings is their second, or more fully complete, actuality. But there is a state intermediate between the newborn's and that of the fully active mature human being—e.g., the state of Aquinas when he is asleep or in some other way not then actualizing his specifying potentiality. The sleeping Aquinas, unlike the philosophizing Aquinas, lacks the second actuality appropriate to human nature; but even the sleeping Aquinas has something the newborn infant lacks—an acquired disposition or habit to exercise his rational powers in certain ways. That is, the sleeping Aquinas has the being appropriate to human beings, but incompletely, in the condition picked out as first actuality (see, e.g., *ST* IaIIae q. 49, aa. 3, 4). Virtues are instances of first actuality relative to certain actions in accordance with rationality. Perfection as a human being (in this life) must include first actualities in part because the freedom associated with rational powers ranges over more alternatives than can be sorted out rationally and expeditiously on an occasion of action unless some disposition to respond in one way rather than another is part of the agent's character. That's one reason virtues are essential ingredients in human goodness. (See, e.g., *ST* IaIIae q. 49, a. 4; q. 55, a. 1.)

30. *ST* IaIIae q. 54, a. 3: "And in this way good and bad habits are specifically distinct. For a habit that disposes [the agent] toward an action that is suited to the agent's nature is called good, while a habit that disposes [him] toward an action that is not suited to his nature is called bad."

31. *ST* IaIIae q. 73, a. 8, s.c.

32. See, e.g., SCG III 7, passim.

33. SCG III 15, passim.

34. See, e.g., *ST* Ia q. 5, a. 3, ad 2: "No being can be called bad or evil insofar as it is a being, but insofar as it lacks some sort of being—as a human being is called evil insofar as it lacks the being of virtue and an eye is called bad insofar as it lacks clarity of sight."

35. See, e.g., SCG III 20, 22.

36. For a helpful survey, examples, and much else of relevance, see Jaegwon Kim, "Concepts of Supervenience," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 45 (1984), 153–177.

37. John Campbell and Robert Pargetter, "Goodness and Fragility," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 23 (1986), 155–165. "The relationship between fragility, fragility phenomena and the basis of the fragility is given by two identities. (1) being fragile = having some property which is responsible for being such that ⟨X is dropped, X breaks⟩, etc. and (2) the property which is responsible for object O's being such that ⟨O is dropped, O breaks⟩, etc. = having chemical bonding B. This explicates the 'because' relation for fragility, i.e., it tells us what is meant when we say that O is fragile because it has bonding B. And when we say that object N is fragile because it has bonding A, clause (1) remains unchanged and clause (2) is changed in the obvious way" (p. 161).

38. *ST* Ia q. 5, a. 1, obj. 1.

39. *ST* Ia q. 5, a. 1, s.c. (Augustine, *De doctrina christiana* I 32).

40. *ST* Ia q. 5, a. 1, obj. 3.

41. See n. 29 above.

42. The capacity for reproduction is a potentiality human beings share with all living things.

43. The *ceteris paribus* clause in this claim is important. Even though species A outranks species B in the way described, it is theoretically possible that a particular individual of species B might outrank an individual of species A. Suppose that there are angels, that angels constitute a species as human beings do, that the species *angel* outranks the species *human being*, and that Satan is a fallen angel. It is theoretically possible that Mother Theresa outranks Satan in the relevant sense even though the amount of being available to an angel is greater than that available to any human being. For if Mother Theresa has actualized virtually all of her specifying potentialities and Satan very few of his, it will be possible to ascribe more being and hence more goodness to Mother Theresa than to Satan.

44. For a clear, succinct presentation of some of this material in more detail, see Alan Donagan, "Aquinas on Human Action," in *The Cambridge History of*

Later Medieval Philosophy, ed. N. Kretzmann, A. Kenny, and J. Pinborg (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), pp. 642–654.

45. Aquinas's "Treatise on Action" is contained in *ST* IaIIae qq. 6–17; qq. 18–21 are concerned with the evaluation of actions.

46. For this distinction, see *ST* IaIIae q. 1, a. 1.

47. On the object of an action, see, e.g., *ST* IaIIae q. 10, a. 2; q. 18, a. 2.

48. On the end of an action, see, e.g., *ST* IaIIae q. 1, aa. 1–3; q. 18, aa. 4–6. For our purposes here we are omitting some of the details of Aquinas's complex distinction between the object and the end of an action; for some of the complications see, e.g., *ST* IaIIae q. 18, a. 7.

49. On specifying an action, see, e.g., *ST* IaIIae q. 1, a. 3; q. 18, aa. 2, 5, 7.

50. On the circumstances of an action, see esp. *ST* IaIIae q. 7, passim.

51. On the role of circumstances in the evaluation of actions, see, e.g., *ST* IaIIae q. 18, aa, 3, 10, 11.

52. *ST* IaIIae q. 18, a. 8.

53. See, e.g., *ST* IaIIae q. 7, a. 2, ad 2.

54. On Aquinas's treatment of issues of this sort regarding decrees or laws see Norman Kretzmann, "*Lex iniusta non est lex*: Laws on Trial in Aquinas's Court of Conscience," *American Journal of Jurisprudence* 33 (1988).

55. See, e.g., *ST* IIaIIae q. 123, passim.

56. *ST* IIaIIae q. 64, a. 6, obj. 2 and ad 2.

57. For a well-known form of the problem in the hospital case, see Philippa Foot, "The Problem of Abortion and the Doctrine of Double Effect," in her *Virtues and Vices* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), pp. 19–32.

58. See, e.g., *ST* IaIIae q. 60, passim. For a good discussion of the Aristotelian background, see L. A. Kosman, "Being Properly Affected: Virtues and Feelings in Aristotle's Ethics," in *Essays on Aristotle's Ethics*, ed. Rorty, pp. 103–116.

59. See, e.g., *ST* IaIIae q. 57, a. 5; q. 58, a. 4; IIaIIae qq. 47–56.

60. See, e.g., *ST* IaIIae q. 60, a. 4.

61. See, e.g., *ST* IaIIae q. 61, a. 2; IIaIIae qq. 57–71.

62. *ST* IIaIIae q. 61, a. 1.

63. *ST* IIaIIae q. 61, a. 2.

64. See, e.g., *ST* IIaIIae q. 77, passim.

65. See *ST* IIaIIae q. 73, passim; for comparisons of slander (or "backbiting") with theft or murder, see esp. a. 3.

66. On murder as a vice in opposition to commutative justice and the vice "by which a man does the greatest harm to his neighbor," see *ST* IIaIIae q. 64, passim.

67. Samuel Scheffler, "Agent-Centred Restrictions, Rationality, and the Virtues," *Mind* 94 (1985), 409–419; 409. In this article Scheffler is commenting on Philippa Foot's "Utilitarianism and the Virtues," *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association* 57 (1983), 273–283; also (a revised version) *Mind* 94 (1985), 196–209. For Scheffler's own resolution of the puzzle of agent-centered restrictions, see his book *The Rejection of Consequentialism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982).

68. See, e.g., *ST* Ia q. 2, a. 3 ("*Quarta via*"); q. 3, aa. 4, 7; q. 6, a. 3. Bonaventure, Aquinas's contemporary and colleague at the University of Paris, forthrightly identifies God as the single referent of 'being' and 'goodness' in his own version of the central thesis, interpreting the Old Testament as emphasizing being, the New Testament as emphasizing goodness (see, e.g., *Itinerarium mentis in deun*, V 2).

69. See Norman Kretzmann, "Abraham, Isaac, and Euthyphro: God and the Basis of Morality," in *Hamartia: The Concept of Error in the Western Tradition*, ed. D. V. Stump et al. (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1983), pp. 27–50.

70. See our "Absolute Simplicity," 375–376.

71. This brief discussion of religious morality is adapted from "Absolute Simplicity."

72. For an interesting, sophisticated treatment of divine-command theories of morality, see, e.g., Philip Quinn, *Divine Commands and Moral Requirements* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978).

73. Dostoevsky presents the classic case of this sort of acknowledgment near the conclusion of Ivan's harangue of Alyosha over the problem of evil: " 'Imagine that you are creating a fabric of human destiny with the object of making men happy in the end, giving them peace and rest at last, but that it was essential and inevitable to torture to death only one tiny creature—that baby beating its breast with its fist, for instance—and to found that edifice on its unavenged tears, would you consent to be the architect on those conditions? Tell me, and tell the truth.' 'No, I wouldn't consent,' said Alyosha softly" (*The Brothers Karamazov*, Bk. V, chap. 4).

74. Richard Swinburne, *The Existence of God* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), pp. 202–203.

75. Ibid., p. 210.

76. Ibid., pp. 216–218.

77. See, e.g., Alvin Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974), pp. 192–193.

78. Something similar can be said about cases in which the justification for God's allowing one human being to treat another in a flagrantly unjust way (as occurs in murder or rape, for instance) is basically the freedom of the perpetrator.

79. For an attempt at a solution that sets out to avoid that sort of failure, see Eleonore Stump, "The Problem of Evil," *Faith and Philosophy* 2 (1985), 392–423. Ralph McInerny's "Naturalism and Thomistic Ethics" (*The Thomist* 40 [1976], 222–242) provides corrections of some misinterpretations of Aquinas's ethical naturalism. We are grateful for comments on earlier drafts of this paper by Richard Creel, James Keller, James Klagge, Scott MacDonald, Alvin Plantinga, Bruce Russell, Nicholas Sturgeon, Richard Swinburne, and Edward Wierenga.