



The Problem of Evil

An Introduction to
Probability & Warrant

Addendum on Probability Issues

- There are substantially 3 conceptions of probability lurking in the neighborhood these days, each with its variations
 - (1) Personalist conception: for each person S there is a *credence* function—a function P from an appropriate set of propositions—all propositions, or perhaps all propositions S has heard of, or whatever—into the unit interval
 - $P_S(A/B) = P_S(A \& B) / P_S(B)$; ranges between 1 and zero provided $P_S(B)$ does not equal zero
 - But whose credence function? How about a theist's credence function?

Probability Issues

- Note: additional claims that a rational or reasonable credence function is coherent doesn't help much
 - Coherence is not a **sufficient** condition for rationality
 - The Guide's Wall Illustration
 - Coherence is not a **necessary condition** for rationality either
 - Coherence requires that one believe the logical consequences of any proposition p one believes to at least the degree to which one believes p
- But maybe the thing to see is that theists may have perfectly coherent credence functions where the probability is high

Probability Issues

- (2) Probabilities as frequencies or propensities
 - Probabilities as frequencies
 - Probability of God's existence as a matter of the frequency of the attribute *truth* among propositions similar to the God's existence proposition, determining this frequency by determining the proportion of true propositions among those in the class in question whose truth values we know
 - The question is, which of the possible class of propositions are relevantly similar to God's existence?
 - The theist and the non-theist are going to see what counts as relevantly true propositions in different lights

Probability Issues

- Probabilities as propensity accounts
 - Plantinga, at least, thinks this is even hard to see how they could be applied to the question
- (3) The objectivist theory of probability—the logical theory
 - On this conception, there is a quasi-logical, wholly objective relation of probability between any two statements, or any two statements of a relevant domain
 - Probability so thought of may be metaphorically considered as partial attainment, with entailment *simpliciter* the special case in which $P(A/B) = 1$.
 - But here the problem is with *absolutely prior* or *a priori* probabilities: the probability of a proposition on a tautology or other necessary truth.

Probability Issues

- Is there any reason to think that propositions such as God exists as a omnipotent, omniscient, and good person and evil exists **have** a probability on a tautology or any other necessary truth?
- Summary: from an initial pre-analytic perspective there seems to be little reason to think that it is improbable that God exists and evil exists—at least once we realize that there may be good reasons for God allowing evil to exist.
- When we turn to various extant theories of probability, however, things are even worse for the atheologian
 - The problem is not that none of these theories seems a successful account of probability; this is indeed true, and is indeed a problem (but not just for the atheologian)
 - We do in fact have some idea of probability and some grasp of probabilities—there are many clear cases of improbable propositions, and many clear cases of pairs of propositions one of which is improbable on the other

Probability Issues

- The problem, rather is that if any of these theories is true, then there seems to be no way to develop an atheological probabilistic argument from evil
- Further, these three kinds of probabilities—personal probabilities, frequencies, and probability as construed on the logical theory—are all factual but non-normative conceptions of probability
 - They just tell you the probability of a proposition in quantitative terms
 - What counts is if you consider these numbers a guide to life—this is the normative (and not just a factual) conception of probability

Probability Issues

- In this latter view probability has to do with the degree of belief that would be accorded a given proposition (relative to circumstances) by someone whose noetic faculties were functioning properly.
 - Experience plays a key role—the degree to which I accept a proposition, when your faculties are functioning properly, will clearly depend upon the sort of experience I enjoy
 - Epistemic probability thought of in this way is close to a notion of warrant or positive epistemic status

Probability Issues

- But epistemic probability conceived like this would not look like the calculus of probabilities
 - There wouldn't be a specific real number registering the probability of A on B for me
 - Even if we could quantify degrees of belief, it may be that there is a certain range associated with the probability of A on B
 - Contrary to the probability calculus, it will not be the case that if A *entails* B, then the epistemic probability of B on some proposition C can't be less than that of A on C—a person could be much more confident in A than of B

Probability Issues

- Here what may count is the differences in one's initial degree(s) of belief in God
 - Some may have a stronger initial degree of belief in God in the face of evil—we have different reactions
 - Mother Teresa
 - Job—had mistrust of God and wanted to argue it out
- So what makes belief in God enjoy initial warrant or epistemic probability?
 - Its relation to other propositions (total evidence)?
 - Its relation to non-propositional evidence?

Accounts of Positive Epistemic Status

- **Internalist** accounts of positive epistemic status—
 - That is, does the theist fail in some intellectual duty or obligation?
 - Maybe the theist can't help her belief in God
 - **Are all of our beliefs within our direct control?**
 - Or does the theist displays a certain defect or flaw (that's not within her control) in believing God in the teeth of the evidence from evil
 - Does the theist has some cognitive deficiency just by virtue of being a theist?
 - The theist may turn the question around—is the non-believer a victim of sin in the world—his own or the sin of others?

Accounts of Positive Epistemic Status

- But the question of warrant can't be settled by propositional evidence for or against it; we must look at what sort of nonpropositional warrant, if any such belief enjoys
- In doing so we see the ontological and ultimately religious roots of the epistemological question (that is, **externalist** accounts)
 - It depends upon what sort of metaphysical and religious stance you adopt
 - It depends upon what kind of being you think human beings are and what sorts of beliefs their noetic faculties will produce when they are functioning properly
 - Hence we see the question as to the epistemic probability of theistic belief is not metaphysically or religiously neutral; its roots lie deep in metaphysics and theology