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The Providence of God according to Richard Swinburne: A Critical Study under the Guidance of St. Thomas Aquinas.

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INTRODUCTION

“Providence is concerned with the direction of things to an end. Therefore, as the Commentator says, whoever denies final causality should also deny providence.”¹ I shall propose in this work that this affirmation is valid – even in today’s philosophy – and should be a starting point for any attempt to understand and explain the providence of God. In order to reach an adequate understanding of the concepts of providence and of good, it is necessary to have recourse to the concept of the ultimate good.²

I shall study the theme of divine providence in Richard Swinburne’s work and show that the absence of the concept of the ultimate good makes it highly difficult, not to say impossible, to explain and defend adequately God’s providence. According to Swinburne, the traditional theist understands divine providence as follows:

God created and sustains [the Universe and all its wonders] for supremely good purposes. Some of these good purposes, he believes, have already been realized or are now being realized. But most traditional theists, and among them Christian theists, believe that other good purposes are yet to

¹ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Quaestiones Disputatae De Veritate*, q.5, a.2, co. The translation used in this work is that of Henry Regnery Company, Chicago, 1952.

² I shall use ‘ultimate good’ interchangeably with ‘ultimate end’ and ‘supreme good’.

be realized in this Universe or in another one... The world is thus, according to Christian theism, the object of God's providential care – he foresees and meets the needs of his creatures.³

However, the question that is frequently asked is: “if God has these supremely good purposes for the future, why the delay?”⁴ In other words, why is there so much evil in the world? “An omnipotent God could have prevented this evil, and surely a perfectly good and omnipotent God would have done so.”⁵ There is therefore need to explain why God would allow evil to occur. For Swinburne, the central theme of divine providence, not to say the only one, is the problem of evil. An inadequate theodicy would be a setback for the justification of theism. According to Swinburne, it would be sufficient ground for the denial of the existence of God.⁶ Given that the defence of theism has been his principal work, it follows that providence is a central topic of his work. Studying this topic will therefore give a good picture of his philosophical thought. It will also show – I believe – that a different conception of the providence of God would give his theistic defence stronger grounds.

Richard Swinburne has developed a theodicy which he considers to be a satisfactory response to the atheistic objection to the existence of God. He has presented this in many works, but above all – and systematically – in his book *Providence and the Problem of Evil*. This book will constitute a major source for the present study. He says that if a theist “can provide for [bad] states of each kind a reason

³ Swinburne, R., *Providence and the Problem of Evil*, Oxford: Clarendon Press; New York: Oxford University Press, 1998, ix.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Swinburne, R., *Is there a God?*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998, 95.

⁶ Cf. Ibid.

why God could justifiably allow a state of that kind to occur... he will have provided an adequate total theodicy.”⁷ I shall argue that the theodicy he presents is insufficient because of the wrong conceptions of good, evil and freedom.

A great part of this study will be dedicated to elucidating his concept of the good. Since “one opposite is known through the other,”⁸ it is evident that unless there is a correct conception of the good, it will not be possible to approach the problem of evil in an adequate manner. Moreover, since “providence pertains only to that knowledge which is concerned with means to ends and in so far as these means are ordained to ends,”⁹ studying the concept of good and how this can be applied in theodicy will not be a diversion from the topic of providence but rather a treatment of what is essential to it. Like I have noted above, Swinburne considers providence in similar terms (i.e. it consists in the benefactor availing goods to his dependants).

I shall carry out a critical study of Swinburne’s work under the guidance of St. Thomas Aquinas. By this, I mean that I shall try to complement and reinforce Swinburne’s and modern philosophy’s approaches with conceptions from St. Thomas’ doctrine, many of which go back to Aristotle’s conceptions. For this task, I shall rely on texts from Aquinas, Aristotle and contemporary authors in the classical-metaphysical tradition. For, while many of Swinburne’s interlocutors have criticised aspects of his philosophy, it is clear that most of them work with the same concept of the good that he uses. It follows that their criticism is not directed

⁷ Swinburne, R., *Providence and the Problem of Evil*, 15.

⁸ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, q.48, a.1, co. The translation used in this work is that of Benziger Bros, 1947.

⁹ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Quaestiones Disputatae De Veritate*, q.5, a.1, co.

towards the most fundamental issue in Swinburne's treatment of God's providence.

The present work will be an effort to bring the above mentioned conceptions from the classical-metaphysical tradition into contact with Swinburne's doctrine on divine providence. I shall attempt to present them using ordinary language and examples in order to introduce them to the contemporary-analytical context. This process may sometimes appear laborious or tedious but it will be necessary in order to make the encounter between the two traditions easier. In doing this, I believe, I shall bring to fruition Richard Swinburne's suggestion in his autobiography. He comments, while speaking about St. Thomas' five ways, that:

I do not think that those five ways work too well in detail; and it is interesting that often where the argument goes wrong it is not because Aquinas had relied unjustifiably on Christian theology but because he had relied too much on Aristotelian science. While I realised that the details were not always satisfactory... the approach of the *Summa* was 100 percent right.¹⁰

Swinburne's suggestion that follows this observation is that each generation must justify the Christian system by using the best secular knowledge of its day. I agree that St. Thomas' science may be obsolete and therefore in need of a substitute, but many of his metaphysical conceptions seem to me to have such great profundity and clarity that they could be of great help in a theistic defence even in today's philosophy.

¹⁰ Swinburne, R., «The Vocation of a Natural Theologian», in Clark, K. J. (ed.), *Philosophers Who Believe: The Spiritual Journeys of 11 Leading Thinkers*, Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 1993, 187.

Method

I shall use the method of natural theology, that is, the metaphysical method. In Swinburne's works that I shall be mainly concerned with, he studies the philosophical issues involved in Christian doctrines and so often discusses theological doctrines. I shall, on my part, distinguish between theological doctrines (i.e. doctrines which we know by divine revelation) and philosophical doctrines (doctrines that can be known through human reason). For example, I consider the doctrines of grace and original sin to be theological. It will however be necessary sometimes to comment on theological doctrines in order to highlight Swinburne's philosophical presuppositions.

Again, while this is a study of natural theology, I shall at some points have to analyse some notions of moral science during my study of the concepts of good and evil. I use the terms 'moral' and 'ethical' synonymously and consider moral science to be the study of the order which reason through consideration introduces in voluntary actions.¹¹ That there is an order means that some actions are for the sake of others and some are to be preferred to others. In addition, Swinburne prefers to use the terms 'badness' or 'wrongness' rather than the traditional terminology of 'evil'. Whereas I prefer to use the traditional terminology, I shall sometimes use his terminology in order not to appear to change his views.

I shall not use the terms 'modern philosophy' and 'contemporary philosophy' in a strict sense but will often use

¹¹ Cf. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Sententia Libri Ethicorum Aristotelis, Prooemium*. I use the term "science" in order to include both Philosophy and Theology.

them interchangeably. I shall also sometimes use these terms to refer to the analytical philosophical tradition. Similarly, when I use the term 'classical philosophy,' I shall mean to include 'mediaeval philosophy' up to and including St. Thomas Aquinas. In addition, whenever I use the terms 'man,' 'he' or 'she', I do not exclude the other gender but refer to any human being. Neither have I used the terms 'person' and 'human being' with any meaning other than the ordinary day to day use.

Often, my challenges to Swinburne's conception or procedure will not be specifically directed to him. Rather, they will be moments in which I shall try to enter into dialogue with the tradition that has come to be widespread in Anglo-American contemporary philosophy. An observation by Eleonore Stump, who considers herself to form part of the analytical tradition, seems to point to the need of a change of perspective in this tradition. She suggests that it may probably have lost sight of the important philosophical issues and instead got entangled in unnecessary technicalities:

The contemporary philosophical debate in Anglo-American philosophy over the problem of evil has become complicated and technical... In its focus on such philosophical technicalities as the appropriate patterns of probabilistic reasoning, it seems simply to sidestep much that has been at the heart of the problem of evil for many reflective thinkers. And so, to many people, there has also been something heartily unsatisfying about the direction of this contemporary debate.¹²

On my part, I believe that many of these technicalities are an invasion of the philosophical field. It is an attempt to apply the scientific method to objects to which it has no

¹² Stump, E., *Wandering in Darkness: Narrative and the Problem of Suffering*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2010, 23.

access. Evidently, the modern scientific methods can only accede to the material and yet reality is not restricted to this.

In Chapter I, I shall present and discuss Swinburne's conceptions of the divine attributes. My intention will not be to carry out an exhaustive study of Swinburne's doctrine on the divine attributes but to put into context his doctrine on God's providence. What he says about the other attributes will be an indication of what kind of providence we can expect. I shall also present his views about the different arguments for or against the existence of God. This is necessary because (as can be noted from the introduction above) the theme of divine providence arises, for Swinburne, in the context of the justification of God's existence. Moreover, the role and solution that he gives to the problem of evil depends greatly on his views about what arguments are successful in proving the existence of God. Before dealing with these however, it will be necessary to consider his epistemological presuppositions for it to be clear why he proceeds the way he does.

In Chapter II, I shall deal with what we may say to be the only theme of providence for Swinburne: the problem of evil. I shall present his theodicy, that is, his response to the 'atheist's argument' against the existence of God on the account of there being evil in the world. I shall consider the logical and philosophical difficulties that arise from his proposal. I shall argue that his theodicy compromises the divine attributes. Indeed, "beyond pointing out the shortcomings of the opponent's arguments, [the theist] can and should try to offer a positive theodicy."¹³ However, like Hugh J. McCann suggests, he should "do so without

¹³ McCann, H. J., «Divine Providence», *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2014 Edition), Zalta, E. N. (ed.), URL = <<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/providence-divine/#LogConIndEvi>>.

compromising divine perfection.”¹⁴ I shall suggest that the principal difficulty of Swinburne’s theodicy, which is the source of the other difficulties, is the concept of good (and evil) that he uses. It is a concept that does not recognise finality (i.e. that all things are good or evil in reference to an end). That is, the difficulties inherent in his theodicy have their root at his point of departure. This however is not proper to him but an inheritance of modern philosophy. I shall present a summary of some other contemporary views on the problem of evil in order to show that his main interlocutors use the same concept of good as he does.

For the same reason, while presenting an alternative concept of good in Chapter III, I shall discuss not only his views but those of some other contemporary philosophers. The alternative concept that I shall propose in this chapter will seek to solve two main problems at the foundation of Swinburne’s theodicy, which will have become manifest in Chapter II: the consideration of evil as having positive existence rather than as *privatio boni*; and the consideration of God’s goodness as moral goodness. The proposal that I shall make will be just one more among many possible ones from a Thomistic perspective. Thus, the authors that I shall cite will be those that will help to make this particular proposal. The different topics that I shall raise and the order that I shall follow will be that which will help me to tackle effectively the above problems. Similarly, the texts of contemporary authors that I shall select will be those that will help to treat these problems. The third chapter will also include a proposal, based on a teleological concept of nature, of a theodicy that judges all goods and evils in reference to the ultimate good.

¹⁴ Ibid.

In Chapter IV, I shall consider the concept of freedom. I shall emphasise the intimate relation there is between the will (and therefore free will) and the good. This will thus be a particular application of the concept of good proposed in Chapter III to a topic of central interest to Swinburne's theodicy. By following the contemporary debate – especially between compatibilism and incompatibilism – I shall argue that freedom does not require the choice between good and evil as two existing realities. This view is a point of departure for Swinburne's theodicy. Finally, I shall consider the role that some themes which are traditionally considered under providence have in Swinburne's doctrine. I shall however begin with a biographical note, in the present Introduction, whose main source is Swinburne's autobiography.

Biographical Note

Richard Granville Swinburne is a British author that has energetically and consistently defended the existence of God and dedicated almost the whole of his life to justifying theism. He pioneered the use of Bayesian probability calculus in the philosophy of religion.¹⁵ He was elected Nolloth Professor of the Christian Religion at Oxford University in 1985, a position he held till his retirement in 2002. He is acknowledged by many as one of the leading defenders of Christianity of our time.

Swinburne was born in 1934. He says that as far as he recalls, he prayed from early years and has always thought in

¹⁵ Cf. Chartier, G., «Richard Swinburne», in Markham, I. (ed.), *Blackwell Companion to the Theologians*, II, Oxford: Blackwell, 2009, 467.

Christian terms. He believes that any human contribution to this must be attributed to his early schooling since neither of his parents was Christian. He went to Oxford University as an undergraduate in 1954 and claimed then that being a Christian was the most important thing in his life. However, at Oxford and in the Western world in general, a materialist worldview very different from the traditional Christian worldview was considered to be what was favoured by science.¹⁶

Logical positivism, to which the scepticism of David Hume had led, reigned in the Anglo-American world. It seemed to him that the careful and rational argument about big metaphysical issues that had characterised European philosophy since the Greeks had reached a standstill. Talk about anything profound was considered to be meaningless. This view was codified in the ‘verification principle’, which says that the only propositions that are meaningful are ones that can be verified by observation.¹⁷ This led many philosophers to hold that the only job left for philosophy was to teach people what words mean in ordinary use, and so to help them avoid using words to state meaningless philosophical theses. The main proponent of the Oxford ‘ordinary language’ philosophy was J. L. Austin. Swinburne says that he considers himself fortunate to have attended many of his lectures. He was able to learn the subtleties of ordinary language and the need to start from words used in their ordinary senses before introducing new technical terms. He adds that he disliked Oxford philosophy for its dogmas of ordinary language but liked it for its tools of clarity and

¹⁶ Cf. Swinburne, R., «The Vocation of a Natural Theologian», 179.

¹⁷ Cf. *Ibid.*, 182.

vigour. It seemed to him that someone could use its tools to make Christian theology again intellectually respectable.¹⁸

Still at university, Swinburne thought that he had to do something to make Christianity respectable once again. It seemed to him that the preachers made no effort to connect with modern science, ethics and philosophy in their sermons. They did not try to answer the major questions like: “Why should one believe the Bible? Does it not presuppose an out-of-date science? Are not moral truths mere matters of opinion? Why should one suppose that there is a God at all?”¹⁹ He notes that he later discovered that behind this ‘lazy indifference’ lay a theological attitude that considered reason not to have any part to play in the Christian faith. The theologians relied on a philosophy derived from the Continental tradition (Hegel, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Sartre, etc.). Swinburne notes that just like it has seemed to most Anglo-American philosophers, it seemed to him that these philosophers were characterised by “a certain sloppiness of argument, a tendency to draw big, vague, general pictures of the universe, without spelling them out very precisely or justifying them very thoroughly.”²⁰

However, since the centrepiece of the modern worldview was not philosophy but modern theoretical science, Swinburne devoted the three years of his research fellowship (1960-63) to investigating about modern science, history of science and philosophy of science.²¹ Similarly, he devoted most of the ten years of his first teaching post (University of Hull) to writing about philosophy of science.²²

¹⁸ Cf. *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 180.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 181.

²¹ Cf. *Ibid.*, 183.

²² Cf. *Ibid.*, 187.

In 1972, he became a professor of philosophy at the University of Keele and began to write a trilogy on the philosophy of theism.²³ The trilogy includes: *The Coherence of Theism* (1977), *The Existence of God* (1979), *Faith and Reason* (1981). Later, he wrote a tetralogy on the philosophy of Christian doctrine. It includes: *Responsibility and Atonement* (1989), *Revelation* (1991), *The Christian God* (1994), and *Providence and the Problem of Evil* (1998). Swinburne says in his autobiography that after completing *Providence and Problem of Evil*, he would not have anything further to say at book length on the philosophy of religion.²⁴ Below is a brief classification and sequence of his major works by the *Blackwell Companion to the Theologians*:

Early in his career, he established his credibility in metaphysics with *Space and Time* (2nd Ed. 1981). The *Evolution of the Soul* (rev. ed. 1997) and *Personal Identity* (1984, co-authored with Sydney Shoemaker) focus on philosophy of the mind related metaphysical questions. In epistemology and the philosophy of science, he has published *An Introduction to Confirmation Theory* (1973) and more recently, *Epistemic Justification* (2001). In the philosophy of religion, he has authored *The Concept of Miracle* (1971), *The Coherence of Theism* (rev. ed. 1993), *The Existence of God* (2nd ed. 2004), *Faith and Reason* (2nd ed. 2005) and *Providence and the Problem of Evil* (1998). *Is There a God?* (1996) discusses some of the issues considered in these books at a popular level (translated in several languages). On the border of theology and the philosophy of religion are *Responsibility and Atonement* (1989), *Revelation: From Metaphor to Analogy* (2nd Ed. 2007), *The Christian God* (1994), and *The Resurrection of God Incarnate* (2003). *Was Jesus God?* (2008) summarises Swinburne's views on these matters for a popular audience.²⁵

²³ Cf. *Ibid.*, 188.

²⁴ Cf. *Ibid.*, 198.

²⁵ Cf. Chartier, G., «Richard Swinburne», 469.

In his work, Richard Swinburne has maintained a lively dialogue with different schools of thought. He has received criticism from different circles. Among the atheists, John Mackie has argued that Swinburne has simply failed to make out a persuasive probabilistic case for theism, while Richard Dawkins and others have attacked his account of the problem of evil as morally insensitive. Among the Christian writers, he has above all maintained a continuous and respectful debate with Alvin Plantinga and those aligned with his program of 'Reformed epistemology'.²⁶ Swinburne has also been criticised by some contemporary scholars in the Thomist tradition. Some of them have questioned whether he takes seriously enough the ontic and epistemic gap between God and creation.²⁷

In conclusion, Swinburne has dedicated himself to the defence of theism and especially of Christianity with an attitude that the title of his autobiography reflects well: 'The Vocation of a Natural Theologian'. He never had any ecclesiastical position but felt he had a role to play in serving the Church. He was inspired by St. Paul's words that "there are diversities of ministrations"²⁸ and considered his as writing, lecturing and teaching in a secular context. He was baptised at the age of fifteen in the Church of England and remained an Anglican for greater part of his life even though he "never felt altogether comfortable as an Anglican."²⁹ He adds however that he valued the Church of England for its sacramental worship, its respect for scholarship, its tolerance and its humility. He joined the Orthodox Church in the mid 1990's.³⁰ He feels quite grateful that his work has contributed

²⁶ Cf. *Ibid.*, 472.

²⁷ Cf. *Ibid.*

²⁸ Cf. Rom. 12:4-8

²⁹ Cf. Swinburne, R., «The Vocation of a Natural Theologian», 201.

³⁰ Cf. Chartier, G., «Richard Swinburne», 468.

to relocating Christianity in its proper place at the middle of a rational, scientifically sensitive worldview. Thus, he concludes his autobiography with the following words:

How much influence all this writing will ultimately have, I have, of course, no idea. But I believe I have already had a small influence in edging Christianity a bit further into the forum of intellectual respectability; and in my more collected moments, I am immensely grateful for the privilege of having been allowed to do so – grateful to God...³¹

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³¹ Swinburne, R., «The Vocation of a Natural Theologian», 199.

I. RICHARD SWINBURNE'S THEISM

For Swinburne, theism is “the claim that there is a God, understood in the way that Western religion, (Christianity, Judaism and Islam) has generally understood that claim.”¹ He says that this claim is logically equivalent to “there exists necessarily a person without a body (i.e. a spirit) who necessarily is eternal, perfectly free, omnipotent, omniscient, perfectly good, and the creator of all things.”² He notes that by referring to God as ‘*a person*’, he oversimplifies the Christian view – the doctrine of the Trinity – in order to be fair to the Judaic and Islamic views.³ He asserts that in the search for a highest level theory, that is, a theory that explains everything that we observe, the view that there is a God is the best candidate.⁴

I shall discuss, in this chapter, the terms included in Swinburne’s definition of theism and his views about our access to God (i.e. how and what we can know about his existence and attributes). This will help to put into context his conception of divine providence. I shall discuss his views about the attributes of God in Section 2. Indeed from the definition, it can be noted that he recognises as proper to God

¹ Swinburne, R., *Is there a God?*, 3.

² Swinburne, R., *The Existence of God*, 2 ed. Oxford: Clarendon Press; New York: Oxford University Press, 2004, 7.

³ Cf. *Ibid.*, footnote 1.

⁴ Cf. Swinburne, R., *Is there a God?*, 2.

all the attributes that are traditionally referred to him. It will however become manifest immediately that he understands the attributes in peculiar and limited ways. Given however that the scope of this study is not Swinburne's concept of God but of only one attribute (i.e. the divine providence), I shall limit myself to highlighting those peculiar aspects of his understanding of God that have some implication for the providence of God. The question that should arise is: What will be the extent of the providence by a God understood in Swinburne's way?

In Section 3, I shall present his discussion of the arguments for the existence of God that have been formulated and the way he considers that we should go about this project. He considers 'God exists' as one more hypothesis, which we can test following the same criteria that are followed in testing hypotheses in the positive sciences.⁵ One aim of this chapter is to make manifest the kind of results (the characteristics of God) to which this approach leads him. I shall suggest that a more metaphysical approach would give much better results, since metaphysics is the only scientific field that can provide grounding or a proof that is apt for the infinite.⁶

However, before I present and discuss Swinburne's considerations about the above 'content' of theism, I shall briefly present his epistemological system in Section 1. It will include what he considers to be knowledge, the process of justification of our beliefs and the nature of explanation. This will help understand why he proceeds the way he does in his defence of theism. This refers also to his considerations about divine providence, since like I have mentioned, the theme of

⁵ Cf. Swinburne, R., *Is there a God?*, 2.

⁶ Cf. Moros, E. R., «Presupuestos de la demostración de la existencia de Dios», *Scripta Theologica* 34 (2003) 431.

providence arises for him in the context of the defence of theism. It is apparent – from the ample space that he dedicates to exposing his epistemology in *Providence and the Problem of Evil*, not to mention other books – that Swinburne himself considers it important.

1. Justification and Knowledge

According to Swinburne, knowledge is a fairly vague notion.⁷ He affirms this during his discussion of the goodness of true belief. He asks himself whether true belief is any better if it amounts to knowledge: Is true belief any better if it has that extra something, that is, a ‘warrant’ which turns it into knowledge? His answer is that it will depend on what ‘warrant’ it is. He notes that the warrant in an externalist theory of knowledge arises solely from something external to the subject. For example, reliabilism, which is the most common version of externalism, holds that a belief has a warrant when it is produced by a process such as perception which normally produces true beliefs.⁸ Swinburne holds that, while it is a good thing that our beliefs satisfy the reliabilist requirement, a true belief will not be any more worth because of this.⁹

On the other hand, “the core component of ‘warrant’ for an internalist is ‘justification’. To amount to knowledge, a (strong) true belief must be ‘justified’.”¹⁰ Justification may be subjective (i.e. a matter of satisfying the subject’s own

⁷ Swinburne, R., *Providence and the Problem of Evil*, 57.

⁸ Cf. *Ibid.*

⁹ Cf. *Ibid.*, 58; 64.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

criteria) or objective (i.e. a matter of satisfying the true criteria). I present here below his discussion of the internalist sense – on which his epistemology is based – of both subjective and objective justification.

1.1 Subjective Justification

Each person normally has a system of beliefs that determine her way of thinking and working. It can however be asked whether someone holds onto a certain belief or group of beliefs ‘justifiably’ or ‘rationally’. The case being considered here is whether one is epistemically – rather than morally – justified to hold a certain belief. A belief is said to be justified “if and only if either (by the subject’s own standards of probability) it is rendered probable by the subject’s other justified beliefs or it is properly basic.”¹¹

He notes that the notion of ‘properly basic’ belief came to the philosophical discussion through the work of Alvin Plantinga, according to whom it is a belief “which a subject is justified in holding quite apart from any support which it might gain from other beliefs.”¹² In the internalist sense, “a properly basic belief is one which is probably true because of its content alone, e.g. because it is a belief about what the subject is now perceiving.”¹³ It may however still be required by an internalist theory that a subject have certain other internal states such as sensations for it to be a properly basic belief.¹⁴

¹¹ Ibid., 16.

¹² Ibid., footnote 10.

¹³ Ibid., 16.

¹⁴ Cf. Ibid., footnote 10.

So, one is epistemically at fault if one's beliefs do not fit together; that is, one is justified to hold a belief only if it is compatible with one's other beliefs or it is forced upon one by what one is experiencing. If, for example, someone believes that there are some bad states in the world that are incompatible with the existence of God, then he is not justified to continue believing that God exists. On the other hand, if the beliefs that one has concerning certain bad states are such that they are not incompatible with the belief of the existence of God, he is justified to believe that God exists.

At this point, Swinburne introduces his 'Principle of Credulity', which he refers to as a supreme principle that covers the justification of belief in the internalist sense. It states that "other things remaining equal, it is probable and so rational to believe that things are as they seem to be (and the stronger the inclination, the more rational the belief)."¹⁵ He adds a precision that when he says 'seem', he means 'seem epistemically', that is, the way we are initially inclined to believe that things are. He asserts that this must be the starting point for all justified belief because if all beliefs needed to be justified by other beliefs, no belief would ever be justified. "Without this principle, there can be no knowledge at all."¹⁶

According to the Principle of Credulity therefore, if it seems to me that I am seeing a table, I ought to believe this until evidence appears that I have been deceived. The principle not only applies to deliverances of sense but also to "the way things seem morally, mathematically, or logically."¹⁷ It must apply, for example, to apparent

¹⁵ Ibid., 20.

¹⁶ Swinburne, R., *The Evolution of the Soul*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986, 12.

¹⁷ Swinburne, R., *Providence and the Problem of Evil*, 22.

experiences of God: if it seems to you that you are aware of the presence of God, you ought to believe so until someone produces reasons to suggest otherwise. On the other hand, “if it seems to someone that there is some bad state incompatible with the existence of God, he ought so to believe, and so believe that there is no God – in the absence of counter-reasons.”¹⁸

And since, according to Swinburne, a good agent ought to prevent any pain or suffering which he can prevent, it follows from the Principle of Credulity that any evil for which no greater-good defence can apparently be provided must count against the existence of God.¹⁹ In order to believe justifiably or rationally that God exists, one needs to have “either strong positive evidence for the existence of God, or a record of discovering with respect to many apparent bad states that a theodicy works with respect to them, or a theodicy for each kind of bad state which seems to count against the existence of God.”²⁰

1.2 Objective Justification

A belief is said to be justified in the objective sense “either if it is rendered probable by the subject’s other justified beliefs or if it is properly basic.”²¹ It can easily be noted that this is the same characterisation that applies to the subjective sense, the only difference being that the subject must now operate by true criteria rather than her own criteria.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid., 29.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid., 59.

In Swinburne's terminology, when a subject acts according to true criteria, she is *justified*₂ while when she acts according to her own criteria, she is *justified*₁. "[While] a subject may not be at fault in operating in accordance with her own criteria, clearly it is better if she operates by true criteria."²²

"True criteria are the necessary a priori inductive criteria of what are the proper starting-points for belief, and of what makes what probable."²³ Swinburne adds that we all believe that there are true criteria for what is evidence for what. When we make an observation *y* and then conclude that *z* is probably the case, we do this following certain a priori criteria. He claims that we all think that these criteria are true and that almost everyone has a very similar view about what are the true criteria.²⁴ In *Providence and the Problem of Evil*, he gives three criteria that we normally follow in deciding which claims or hypotheses are more probable. I shall present them here below in the form in which he presents them in *Is there a God?* In this latter case, he gives four criteria used by scientists for deciding which proposed law of nature is justified to be considered as one or not. Nevertheless, he explains that the third criterion reduces to the second. He says that a hypothesis or claim is justified if:

- (1) it leads us to expect (with accuracy) many and varied events which we observe (and we do not observe any events whose non-occurrence it leads us to expect),
- (2) what is proposed is simple,
- (3) it fits well with our background knowledge,
- (4) we would not otherwise expect to find these events (e.g. there is no rival law which leads us to expect these events

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Cf. Ibid.

which satisfies criteria (1–3) as well as well as our proposed law).²⁵

Apart from the above criteria, Swinburne says that there are other important evidential criteria which are also a priori. These include criteria for inferring people's thoughts and feelings from the way they behave and also the criterion that we should believe (in the absence of counter-evidence) what people tell us about what they themselves believe. Otherwise, we would not have grounds for our beliefs about people who are close to us or about history or geography.²⁶ In addition, we also have a priori criteria of proper basicity, that is, what sort of content a belief should have in order to be a proper starting point for belief building. All these criteria are a priori. We come face to face with experience with these already 'in the bag'. He says that if we did not have a priori criteria, we could not take a step beyond experience. The a priori criteria make it possible to extrapolate from experience to the past, the future, the unobserved and to very general theories. They also make it possible for scientists to agree – most of the time – and to come up with theories which we do not consider to be arbitrary.

It is a good thing that our beliefs be *justified*₂ because then they are probably true. However, the only thing one can do towards this is to have *justified*₁ beliefs at every given moment. That is, we can only act according to criteria which seem correct to us at a given moment and which over time we can try to improve.²⁷ But Swinburne notes that in order to have an account of knowledge in anything like the ordinary sense, internalism needs to add two further conditions: It needs to exclude the 'Gettier effect', that is, the justification

²⁵ Swinburne, R., *Is there a God?*, 25.

²⁶ Cf. Swinburne, R., *Providence and the Problem of Evil*, 61.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

of a true belief via some false belief; and secondly it must be based on its evidence and not only be coincidental. Justified true belief that fulfils all these conditions is better than mere true belief. Hence knowledge in the internalist sense is better than mere strong true belief.²⁸

1.3 *The Quest for an Ultimate Explanation*

Men form beliefs from the phenomena that they observe. It is these beliefs that they strive to justify according to the process that I have presented in the previous subsections. Like I have noted, Swinburne considers that it is a good thing that our true beliefs should be justified. This way, they will amount to knowledge. Normally however, we do not stop at forming justified beliefs but ask ourselves what may be the cause of these phenomena (i.e. their explanation). Swinburne says that “human beings have always sought the true explanations of all the events (all the phenomena) of which they know, have sought to discover the causes of events and the reasons why those causes had the effects they did.”²⁹

He classifies the explanations of the events that occur in the world into two kinds: scientific and personal explanations. “Scientific explanation involves laws of nature and previous states of affairs. Personal explanation involves persons and purposes.”³⁰ Scientific explanation is about inanimate causation, while personal explanation is about

²⁸ Cf. *Ibid.*, 62-64.

²⁹ Swinburne, R., *Is there a God?*, 21.

³⁰ Swinburne, R., «The Vocation of a Natural Theologian», 189.

intentional causation.³¹ He adds that humans have had sometimes practical aims and other times non-practical ones in their search for explanation. Moreover, this desire for explanation persists till they can get to the ultimate explanation (i.e. a ‘theory for everything’).

Swinburne defends theism as the best candidate for the ultimate explanation. Before I present his justification (i.e. a rational explanation) of the hypothesis of theism in the next sub-section, I shall consider here below what he considers to be the nature of explanation. That is: what kind of explanation do we normally look for and how do we know that we have found it? When should we be satisfied and stop our search? This I hope should bring to light what kind of explanation he believes is sufficient to account for everything that exists and what kind he thinks is possible. This is a pertinent issue when we come to evaluate the kind of God and the kind of divine providence that he defends.

Let me take note of some important terminology before I proceed. Swinburne says that “the world consists of objects – or more technically, as philosophers sometimes call them, substances.”³² He says that the word ‘substance’ refers to an individual thing (i.e. this desk or that tree). Furthermore, substances have properties and have relations to other substances. A substance having a property or relation, changing its properties or relations, coming into existence or ceasing to exist is an *event*.³³ An event may also be called a phenomenon or a state of affairs.³⁴

³¹ Swinburne, R., *Is there a God?*, 21.

³² *Ibid.*, 20.

³³ Cf. *Ibid.*

³⁴ Cf. *Ibid.*; Swinburne, R., *The Existence of God*, 23.

a) How Explanation Works

Swinburne believes that to say that someone has provided an explanation of the occurrence of some phenomenon (i.e. an event or state of affairs) is quite ambiguous. It may mean that he has provided a true explanation of the phenomenon or it may merely mean that he has suggested a possible explanation. However, when we seek explanations, we are not interested in any kind of explanation but in a true explanation. He says that to provide a true explanation of the occurrence of phenomenon *E* is to “state truly what (object or event) brought *E* about (or caused *E*), and why it was efficacious.”³⁵ That is, we have an explanation of an event when we have the cause (i.e. the what) and the reason (i.e. the why).

The cause of *E* may sometimes be a set of factors *A* ... *D* and this means “at least that each, in the conditions of its occurrence, made it more physically probable that *E* would occur.”³⁶ He says that we may call all the factors together ‘the cause’ or, more usually, we distinguish one of them as the cause and the others as the conditions. “[Which] we call the cause is sometimes a somewhat arbitrary matter.”³⁷ Swinburne calls “a set of factors that together were sufficient for the occurrence of an event *E* a *full cause* of *E*.” He goes further to say that if there is a full cause *C* of *E* and a reason *R* that guarantees *C*'s efficacy, then there is a *full explanation* of *E*.³⁸ “In this case, the ‘what’ and ‘why’ together will deductively entail the occurrence of *E*.”³⁹ In

³⁵ Swinburne, R., *The Existence of God*, 23.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 24.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 25.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

contrast with a full explanation, “an explanation of *E* is only a partial one if the explanation includes factors that contributed to bringing about the occurrence of *E* (made it physically probable), but these factors did not necessitate the occurrence of *E*.”⁴⁰

Swinburne asserts that a full explanation *F* does really by itself explain why something happened. He thinks that we do not need to ask or to know whether there is an explanation of how the states it cites came to be or why any reasons it cites operate. He says that:

To suppose otherwise is to commit a fallacy that we may call ‘the completist fallacy’. For if it were really the case that *F* could not explain *E* unless there is an explanation of *F*, nothing in the universe could be explained, unless there were explanations of such things as the origin of our galaxy – which is absurd.⁴¹

Swinburne says however that, although a full explanation of *E* leaves no facet of *E* unexplained, there is a special kind of full explanation “in which all the factors cited are such that there is no explanation (either full or partial) of their existence or operation in terms of factors operative at the time of their existence or operation.”⁴² This he calls a *complete explanation*. He gives the following example of a complete explanation:⁴³ Let us suppose the full explanation of a high tide to be the positions of the sun, moon, earth, water, etc. (i.e. the what) and the operation of Newton’s laws (i.e. the why). Now, if Newton’s laws are made to operate by the contemporaneous operation of Einstein’s laws of General Relativity and by the fact that this region of the universe is relatively empty of matter; and if there is nothing else

⁴⁰ Ibid., 76.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid., 78.

⁴³ Cf. Ibid.

operating at this very time that makes the sun, moon, etc. be in these positions and make Einstein's laws operate; then we have a complete explanation of the high tide in terms of the operation of Einstein's laws, the universe in this region being relatively empty of matter, and the sun, moon, etc. being where they are.

Again he goes further to admit a special kind of a complete explanation. If we know, not only the factors that contemporaneously bring about *E* and which have no further explanation of their existence and operation, but also those that originally brought about *E* and which have no further explanation of their existence and operation, then we have what Swinburne terms as an *ultimate explanation*. He says that these factors are ultimate brute facts. In brief, a complete explanation refers only to those factors *C* and *R* that have no explanation operating contemporaneously with the occurrence of *E*, while an ultimate explanation refers to those factors that have no explanation that may not be operating at the time that *E* occurs but originally brought about *C* and *R*.⁴⁴

Finally, he mentions what he calls an *absolute explanation* of *E*. This is "an ultimate explanation of *E* in which the existence and operation of each of the factors cited are either self-explanatory or logically necessary."⁴⁵ He says however that he does not believe that there can be any absolute explanations for logically contingent phenomena. He believes that the arguments to the existence of God, which are the subject of the present discussion, are arguments to a complete explanation of phenomena.⁴⁶ They all claim that God's intention at some time brings about certain phenomena at that time; and that nothing else at that time explains either

⁴⁴ Cf. *Ibid.*, 78-79.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 79.

⁴⁶ Cf. *Ibid.*, 80.

his existence or his forming that intention. Given that God is perfectly free, his intention involved has no causal explanation and given that he is eternal, his existence at any time has no further explanation. Therefore, any complete explanation in terms of God's intention at a time will also be an ultimate explanation.

So how do we know that we have reached a complete explanation? I shall present Swinburne's answer to this question after presenting what he thinks are the grounds for judging an explanation to be true. But first I must reiterate his earlier position that a full explanation is sufficient in whichever inquiry that we carry on and that we need not go further. Thus, while he considers all the special kinds of explanation presented above, and while he believes that a 'theory for everything' has to be a complete explanation, he nevertheless believes that a full explanation is what we normally look for when we seek an explanation of the occurrence of a phenomenon. Swinburne gives an example of a long railway train in which each truck makes the next truck move. He suggests that the "motion of the last truck is certainly fully explained by the motion of the last truck but one, even if there are other things to be explained."⁴⁷

He contrasts his position with some positions that have been taken in classical philosophy. He says that Duns Scotus and Thomas Aquinas "are among the few philosophers of the past that devoted much thought to this matter of explaining one explanation by another, and the latter in turn by another one."⁴⁸ He disagrees with them however on their claim that there cannot be an infinite regress of essentially ordered causes, that is, that there must needs be a first cause fully responsible for the whole series of causes.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 92.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 90.

He says that this thesis is equivalent to claiming that any phenomenon that has a full explanation has a complete explanation. He says that Aquinas claimed that he could prove this thesis on a priori grounds but adds that Aquinas' argument is not altogether clear. It seems to Swinburne that Aquinas' argument attempts to find an 'Aristotelian explanation' and that this is tantamount to committing the completist fallacy. He says that Aquinas' thesis may be true but he knows of no good a priori argument for it and that until it is provided, we should assume that it is not.⁴⁹

b) The Truth of an Explanation

I wish to present here the grounds on which an explanation is judged to be true. This, for Swinburne, is the same as saying how probable it is. I have already presented the criteria that according to Swinburne we follow in the objective justification of explanations (especially in the scientific context)⁵⁰. Swinburne defends his position using examples of laws and theories that have had some importance in the history of physical science. I wish to highlight these criteria here in a form that Swinburne applies them in weighing the different arguments that have been presented throughout history and which he believes have some considerable weight in favour or against the hypothesis 'God exists'.

“[Our] grounds for judging a proposed scientific explanation h of a phenomenon E to be probably true, where e is our observational knowledge, which includes E , are the

⁴⁹ Cf. *Ibid.*, 90-92.

⁵⁰ Cf. p. 33.

prior probability of h and its explanatory power with respect to e .⁵¹ The explanatory power of h depends on its predictive power and the prior probability of the evidence e (i.e. the probability of e if h were not true). A theory has high explanatory power when its predictive power is high and the prior probability of the evidence is low. The predictive power of a theory will be high if it renders very probable the observed behaviour. This will be the case if the phenomena that it predicts would not be expected but for it. Any other theories with significant prior probability should not predict the said phenomena nearly as well as the theory in question.⁵² It may be seen that the two factors that determine the explanatory power are what are contained in Criteria 1 and 4.⁵³

The prior probability of h is its probability before the evidence e that is cited in its support is taken into consideration. It depends on the degree of the theory's fit with background knowledge and on its simplicity. It can be seen that these correspond to Criteria 2 and 3. However, as earlier highlighted, Swinburne believes that as we deal with theories of larger and larger scope, there will be less and less background knowledge with which these theories have to fit. More and more of the observational evidence will become part of the data that the theory has to explain. Hence, a 'Theory of Everything' will have no contingent background evidence by which to determine its prior probability. It must be determined by purely a priori considerations. Thus, the criterion of 'fit with background knowledge' does not affect our evaluation of theism and the other rival 'theories of everything'. This leaves only the criterion of simplicity as the

⁵¹ Swinburne, R., *The Existence of God*, 58.

⁵² Cf. *Ibid.*, 56-57.

⁵³ Cf. p. 33.

determinant of the prior probability of fundamental theories.⁵⁴

The criterion of simplicity requires that a theory (e.g. a scientific theory) have few component laws, each of which relates few variables by mathematically simple formulae. In addition, if it postulates objects or properties that are not observable (e.g. atoms, electrons, quarks), it should postulate as few new ones and new kinds as possible. Swinburne notes that this rule of postulating no more new objects than those needed to explain our observations is often called 'Ockham's razor'. So, for example, it may seem that Einstein's General Theory of Relativity does not look very simple, "but his claim for it was that it was the simplest among theories which yielded the data of observation."⁵⁵

He further notes that the enormous importance of the criterion of simplicity is not always appreciated: "Sometimes people ignore it and say that what makes a theory probable is just its explanatory power, or, worse still, just the fact that we can deduce from it statements reporting the phenomena that have been observed..."⁵⁶ He, on the other hand believes that "[without] the criterion of simplicity, we never have any way of choosing between an infinite number of theories compatible with data."⁵⁷ He rejects the view of some writers who claim that our preference for simplicity is a matter of convenience and has nothing to do with the truth. He argues that when we make predictions (e.g. that a bridge will not break if a lorry passes over it) by using the simplest theory, we really think that predictions based on this theory are more probably true than those of any other theory. Moreover, we

⁵⁴ Cf. Swinburne, R., *The Existence of God*, 59-60.

⁵⁵ Swinburne, R., *Is there a God?*, 31.

⁵⁶ Swinburne, R., *The Existence of God*, 58.

⁵⁷ Swinburne, R., *Is there a God?*, 30.

often know that they are crucial for our survival or plans. He concludes that we do this only “because we regard the simplicity of a theory as crucial evidence of its truth.”⁵⁸

Having noted the grounds on which we judge an explanation to be true (i.e. the explanatory power and prior probability) and in what these consist, I shall now return to the question of how we know that we have reached a complete explanation. It may be recalled that according to Swinburne’s definition of a complete explanation, it refers only to the factors acting contemporaneously with the occurrence of the phenomenon that is being explained. This question is relevant because Swinburne suggests that we should not inquire beyond this point even though the factors cited in a complete explanation may have other causes. He considers that there is no way of avoiding an infinite regress when seeking an explanation and that therefore we should have some grounds to determine the stopping point of explanation.

Swinburne suggests that we know that objects or reasons are a complete explanation, if we believe that they could only be explained further by postulating causes and reasons (acting at the time) which do not have more explanatory power or prior probability than themselves. Thus these objects or reasons would be the terminus of explanation. We would be justified in believing that a theory was the terminus of explanation, if we had grounds for believing that any gain of explanatory power would be outweighed by a corresponding loss of prior probability or vice versa. He says that we would have these grounds if we already had a simple theory which fitted well with background knowledge and we had grounds for believing that any attempt to amend our theory or derive it from a more

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 31.

fundamental theory would make it very complicated or not fit with our background knowledge and yet lead to only a marginal gain of explanatory power.⁵⁹

With regard to the hypothesis of theism however, he affirms that the question of whether we ought to go beyond theism in order to provide a complete explanation is irrelevant. He says that the only thing we have to establish is whether theism has sufficient prior probability and explanatory power. "For, if theism is true, then, of logical necessity, God's action provides a complete and ultimate explanation of what it explains."⁶⁰ What he means by this is that the properties that God is postulated to have are such that he must be an ultimate explanation. So, once we establish that the hypothesis is true (i.e. that it has sufficient prior probability and explanatory power), we need not ask further questions.

In *The Existence of God* and in other works he strives to show that theism has sufficient prior probability, which as I have highlighted he claims is basically a question of its simplicity. He also argues at length to show that theism has sufficient explanatory power, that is, that it makes the phenomena that we observe more likely than they would otherwise be. He does this by considering the different arguments for the existence of God and by claiming that the premises (i.e. the observed phenomena) from which they start are more to be expected if theism were true than if were not.

⁵⁹ Cf. Swinburne, R., *The Existence of God*, 81-82.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 108.

c) Candidates for an Ultimate Explanation

Indeed the human quest for explanation inevitably and rightly seeks for the ultimate explanation of everything observable. The human being wants to find “that object or objects on which everything else depends for its existence and properties.”⁶¹ However, not everything will have an explanation:

A may be explained by B, and B by C, but in the end there will be some one object or many objects with such and such properties on which all other objects depend. We will have to acknowledge *something* as ultimate – the great metaphysical issue is *what* that is.⁶²

According to Swinburne, there seem to be three possible ultimate explanations:

One is *materialism*... the view that the existence and operation of all the factors involved in personal explanation have a full inanimate explanation...

[The second] is a mixed theory – that the existence and operation of the factors involved in personal explanation cannot be explained fully in inanimate terms; and conversely, the existence and operation of the factors involved in inanimate explanation cannot be explained fully in personal terms. Let us call this theory *humanism*.

The third possibility is that the existence and operation of the factors involved in inanimate explanation are themselves to be explained in personal terms, where persons include, not just human persons, but a personal being of a quite different

⁶¹ Swinburne, R., *Is there a God?*, 39.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 39. The italics in this quotation, just like in the next one, are in the text.

kind, God. That is the claim of *theism*, the view that there is a God.⁶³

Swinburne proposes that the “three rivals for providing the ultimate explanation of all observable phenomena must be assessed by the four criteria for assessing proposed explanations.”⁶⁴ However, I have noted that he considers simplicity to be the ultimate determining criterion. Swinburne argues that theism provides by far the simplest explanation of all observed phenomena, while the other two are not simple hypotheses. He presents arguments in *Is There a God?* and in other places to show that both ‘materialism’ and ‘humanism’ are not simple hypotheses. I shall here below limit myself to presenting Swinburne’s argument of how theism is the simplest hypothesis and therefore the most justified one.

1.4 *The Justification of Theism*

a) The Simplicity of Theism

According to Swinburne, theism claims that every other object which exists is caused to exist, kept in existence and given all its properties by just one substance, God. Since the hallmark of a simple explanation is to postulate few causes, there could not be a simpler explanation than one which postulates only one cause. Theism is therefore to be preferred to polytheism since it is simpler. Moreover, theism postulates for this one cause, a person that has infinite

⁶³ Ibid., 39-40.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 41.

degrees of those properties that are essential to persons: infinite power, knowledge and freedom. He adds that this is the hypothesis that there is a person with zero limits, apart from those of logic.⁶⁵ And this person is called God.

Swinburne goes on to argue that to postulate that God has infinite power is a simpler hypothesis than the hypothesis that he has such-and-such limited power. It is simpler in the same way that scientists find the hypothesis that some particle has infinite velocity than the hypothesis that it has 301,000 km/sec. “Scientists have always preferred hypotheses of infinite velocities to hypotheses of very large finite velocity, when both were equally compatible with the data. There is a neatness about zero and infinity that particular finite numbers lack.”⁶⁶ That is why, for example, Newton’s theory of gravity postulated that the gravitational force travelled with infinite velocity rather than some very large finite figure. Scientists only accepted that it travelled with finite velocity after Einstein’s General Theory of Relativity was adopted as the simplest and therefore preferable theory.⁶⁷ Swinburne explains however that a person with zero powers would not be a person at all and that is why we postulate infinite rather than zero power for God.⁶⁸

Now, persons are substances with intentional powers, purposes and beliefs. So, Swinburne says, if the action of a person is to explain the existence of the entire universe, he must be very powerful. However, like it has been said above, it is a simpler hypothesis to postulate that his power is infinite than that it is very large. It naturally follows from this hypothesis of infinite power that this person should have no

⁶⁵ Cf. *Ibid.*, 43-44.

⁶⁶ Swinburne, R., *The Existence of God*, 97.

⁶⁷ Cf. Swinburne, R., *Is there a God?*, 44.

⁶⁸ Cf. Swinburne, R., *The Existence of God*, 97.

causal influences from outside him. The simplest hypothesis to hold therefore is that he has infinite freedom. In addition, in order to exercise power effectively, one needs to know the consequences of one's actions. If the purposeful action of a person is to explain all the phenomena in the universe, it is simplest to suppose that his understanding of things is unlimited. He must therefore be infinitely knowledgeable. God, according to theism, is a person that has these properties and has them essentially. If we said that God was all this accidentally, it would mean that God could abdicate if he chose to. We would then need to explain why he had not yet done so or what would happen if did. It is much simpler to postulate that he has these properties essentially.⁶⁹

Swinburne asserts that to suppose that God essentially has infinite power, freedom and knowledge, and these bound to eternity, is to postulate the simplest kind of person there could be. Hence, theism provides the simplest kind of personal explanation of the universe that there could be (i.e. theism fulfils Criterion 2).⁷⁰ As I mentioned earlier, he also presents arguments – which I do not think necessary to present here – to show that ‘materialism’ and ‘humanism’ are not simple hypotheses and this way shows that theism fulfils Criterion 4. Now, since God is omnipotent, he could bring about anything. So, showing that what we observe is to be expected (i.e. that Criterion 1 is fulfilled) if there is a God will consist in showing that what we observe in the world is consistent with his perfect goodness.⁷¹ Presenting and discussing Swinburne's argument that there is no state in the world that is incompatible with God's perfect goodness is the

⁶⁹ Cf. Swinburne, R., *Is there a God?*, 45-46.

⁷⁰ Cf. *Ibid.*, 47.

⁷¹ Cf. *Ibid.*

main concern of the present study. This will be dealt with in subsequent chapters.

b) The Limit of Scientific Explanation

Having considered the simplicity of theism, which is a personal explanation with the specific characteristics that I have highlighted above (and which I shall present in more detail later on), I wish now to present how Swinburne contrasts theism with scientific explanation. Often, he does this while defending the different arguments for the existence of God. He proceeds by claiming that the different observed phenomena from which these arguments start are better (or only) explained by theism than any scientific explanation.

Swinburne notes that our earth is one of several planets which travel around the sun, a small star, one of the many millions of stars in our galaxy. And our galaxy is one of thousands of millions of galaxies that are part of the physical universe. “It is extraordinary that there should exist anything at all. Surely the most natural state of affairs is simply nothing: no universe, no God, nothing.”⁷² He however notes that “by its very nature, science cannot explain why there are any states of affairs at all... But a God can provide an explanation.”⁷³ This argument from the universe to God is the cosmological argument. It is an “argument from a complex phenomenon to a simple entity, which leads us to expect the existence of the former far more than it would be

⁷² Ibid., 48.

⁷³ Swinburne, R., «The Vocation of a Natural Theologian», 191.

expected otherwise. Therefore, I suggest, it provides some evidence for its conclusion.”⁷⁴

In addition, that there are laws of nature is evident to everyone. The lower laws of nature are explained by higher more general laws, and these by the highest and most general laws. Swinburne notes that science cannot explain why there are most general laws of nature. It simply takes them as its premises. Furthermore, that there is an orderly universe is something that is beyond the capacity of science ever to explain. Swinburne notes that:

Science's inability is not a temporal phenomenon caused by the backwardness of twentieth century science. Rather because of what scientific explanation is, these things will ever be beyond its capacity to explain. For scientific explanations by their very nature terminate with some ultimate natural law, and the question with which I'm concerned is why there are natural laws and physical things at all.⁷⁵

Again in theism, we find a simple explanation. This argument from the orderliness of the universe to God is called the teleological argument. However, the question to which the cosmological and teleological arguments respond does not stop only at asking why there are laws or matter-energy at all, but also asks why the laws and the matter-energy have the peculiar character of being already wound up to produce plants, animals and humans.⁷⁶ Science cannot provide an answer while theism can.

Hence, “it is not a rational conclusion to suppose that explanation stops where science does, and so we should look for a personal explanation of the existence, conformity to

⁷⁴ Ibid., 192.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 193.

⁷⁶ Cf. Ibid., 195.

law, and evolutionary potential of the universe. Theism provides just such explanation.”⁷⁷ Swinburne adds that the arguments above, together with arguments from various other phenomena such as the existence of conscious beings, the providential ordering of the world, apparent miraculous events and the religious experiences of many millions (when all the arguments are taken together), show theism to be significantly more probable than not.⁷⁸

In conclusion, in this section, I have taken note of Swinburne’s view that our true beliefs amount to knowledge when justified and that this is a greater good than mere true belief. By connecting the knowledge that we have about different phenomena, we are able to give explanations for these and other phenomena. The insatiable desire for explanation leads human beings to seek an ultimate explanation for all the phenomena that we observe (i.e. a ‘theory for everything’). However, this search for explanation that could potentially go on infinitely must stop once we reach a complete explanation. This is an explanation for all phenomena that has the highest prior probability and explanatory power.

I have presented Swinburne’s justification of theism as the best candidate. His view is that it has the highest prior probability because it is the simplest theory possible; and it has the highest explanatory power because, if a being with attributes as those postulated by theism exists, the probability that all the phenomena that we observe occur, is high. I shall be presenting in more detail these attributes in Section 2 and the specific steps of this justification in in Section 3.

⁷⁷ Swinburne, R., *Is there a God?*, 68.

⁷⁸ Swinburne, R., «The Vocation of a Natural Theologian», 196.

2. The Attributes of God

Providence is indeed one of the divine attributes. It is however – and rightly so – usually understood as depending on other divine attributes especially on God's omnipotence and omniscience.⁷⁹ The extent of the providence of any person depends on his power and knowledge. Hence, God's providence will depend on how these attributes are understood. In addition, when talking about the providence of any person, we assume that the said person is good and has good purposes for his dependants. In other words, we assume that he is willing to employ his knowledge and power in favour of them. However, since God's providence and goodness are the main subject of the present work, I shall not deal with them in this chapter but in the subsequent ones. I shall first of all present (in Sub-section 2.1) Swinburne's views about the divine attributes that he includes in the definition of theism. Secondly, I shall discuss the interesting issues that arise (in Sub-section 2.2) in his consideration of the attributes, especially those aspects that may affect the divine providence. His peculiar views may lead theists to asking themselves, as Swinburne himself suggests, whether such a God is worth of worship.⁸⁰

⁷⁹ Cf. Echavarría, A., «Providencia», in *Diccionario de Filosofía*, EUNSA (2010), 946.

⁸⁰ Cf. Swinburne, R., *The Existence of God*, 95.

2.1 *What Swinburne Says about the Attributes*

a) God's Omnipresence

Swinburne's definition of theism includes that God is a spirit. By this, he understands that God is "a non-embodied person who is omnipresent."⁸¹ To say that God has no body is to "deny that there is any volume of matter such that by his basic actions he can control only it and such that he knows the goings-on elsewhere only by their effects on it."⁸² By his omnipresence God "can control by basic actions all states of affairs everywhere (in this or any other universe) without being dependent for that power on anything."⁸³ It may be noted here that Swinburne recognises God's spatial omnipresence. He does not however attribute a temporal omnipresence to God as will become apparent later on when I present his views about God's eternity.

b) God's Omnipotence

To say that God is omnipotent means that he is infinitely powerful. It means that "he is able to do whatever it is logically possible (i.e. coherent to suppose) that he can do."⁸⁴ Thus, "whatever (logically possible) action he formed

⁸¹ Ibid., 93.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid., 94.

⁸⁴ Cf. Ibid., 7.

the intention to do, he would succeed in doing.”⁸⁵ This means that he cannot bring about any state of affairs, the description of which involves a logical contradiction (e.g. my existing and not existing at the same time). Swinburne explains that ‘me existing and not existing at the same time’ does not really describe a state of affairs at all, in the sense of something that it is coherent to suppose could occur. He says that there are also states of affairs that it is coherent to suppose that they could occur, but that it is not coherent to suppose God could bring about. He says, for example, that it is logically possible that ‘an uncaused state of affairs’ occur, but it is not coherent to suppose that God could bring about, that is, cause an uncaused state.⁸⁶

c) God’s Omniscience

God’s omniscience means that “he knows at any time whatever it is logically possible that he know at that time.”⁸⁷ There may be some true propositions that it is not logically possible that a person know at some time *t*, for example, propositions about some other person’s future free actions. Then to claim that God is omniscient is not to claim that he knows these propositions at *t*. Hence, Swinburne believes that God cannot know with certainty future free human actions. This position forms part of his free-will defence.⁸⁸ He admits that his view is opposed to the common position in the

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 98.

⁸⁶ Cf. *Ibid.*, 94-95

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 95.

⁸⁸ I shall present Swinburne’s views on the free-will defence in Chapter IV.

Christian tradition.⁸⁹ In the Christian tradition, it has been possible to claim that God knows everything including future contingent events because it was held that God was eternal in the sense that he was timeless or outside time. Swinburne however rejects this latter view as making no sense.⁹⁰ I shall present shortly his views about God's eternity.

Furthermore, according to Swinburne, to say that God is omniscient is to say that he has infinite beliefs and that his beliefs amount to knowledge (i.e. they are true and justified).⁹¹ He believes that it is more consonant with his omnipotence that his beliefs should amount to knowledge. Otherwise, if he did not have true beliefs about the consequences of his actions, he could fail to realise some of his intentions. This would mean that he would not be omnipotent. Now, true beliefs fail to amount to knowledge only if they are true by accident. Here, Swinburne rules out the 'Gettier effect' with respect to God's beliefs. He argues that, given the other divine properties, especially his omnipotence, God's beliefs could not be false, and so could not be true by accident.⁹²

d) God's Freedom

God is a perfectly free person. By this, Swinburne understands that "no object or event or state (including past states of himself) in any way causally influences him to do

⁸⁹ Cf. Swinburne, R., *Coherence of Theism*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986, 219.

⁹⁰ Cf. Swinburne, R., *The Existence of God*, 7.

⁹¹ Cf. pp. 28-35 for Swinburne's views on what knowledge is.

⁹² Cf. Swinburne, R., *The Existence of God*, 98.

actions that he does.”⁹³ The choices that God makes and the intentions that he forms depend entirely on him at the moment of the choice alone.⁹⁴ He is not influenced causally by desires (i.e. by any external object).⁹⁵ Neither is he in any way predetermined to act in certain specific ways (i.e. he has no inbuilt probabilistic tendency). Swinburne asserts that it follows from God's being omniscient and perfectly free that he is perfectly good. While human persons do not always do what they believe to be the best action because of the influence of desires, God being “[a] perfectly free person will inevitably do what he believes to be (overall) the best action and never do what he believes to be an (overall) bad action.”⁹⁶ I shall discuss God's goodness when I come to considering Swinburne's concept of the good in Chapter III.

However, in spite of the above, whereby God is neither determined nor inclined by anything to any action, Swinburne argues on several occasions that some occurrences should be expected from God. In fact his arguments for the existence of God begin from God's essence and try to show that we should expect God to bring about the events we observe. That is, from what we know (i.e. postulate) about God, it follows directly, with more or less degrees of probability, that the different phenomena should occur. This implies some kind of determinism or in the very least what Swinburne terms as probabilistic tendency. An example is a response that he gives to D. H. Mellor when he objects to the claim that we can assign probabilities to God's actions.⁹⁷ He agrees with Mellor in that we can assess the probability of a

⁹³ Ibid., 7

⁹⁴ Cf. Ibid., 98.

⁹⁵ Swinburne, R., *Is there a God?*, 7.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 12.

⁹⁷ Cf. Mellor, D. H., «God and Probability», *Religious Studies* 5 (1969) 223-234.

cheat having put the cards in the order in which they are in a bridge hand only if we could write in advance of looking at the cards in what order (s) a cheat would be likely to arrange them.⁹⁸ Swinburne responds that while we do not know which orders a cheat is more likely to put the cards and while all orders are equally likely a priori, when it comes to God, “we do have some idea of what kinds of world God is likely to create.”⁹⁹

e) God the Creator

By God being the creator of all things, Swinburne understands that “for all logically contingent things that exist (apart from himself) he himself brings about, or makes or permits other beings to bring about, their existence.”¹⁰⁰ This indicates that God, although he is the cause of all that exists, is himself a contingent being. Swinburne says that God is responsible for the past, present and future existence of material objects and of the natural laws that they follow. He is the source of the being and power of all other substances. And supposing that devils, angels and other universes exist, God also makes them exist and behave as they do or sustains the power they have in them.¹⁰¹

Nevertheless, according to Swinburne, there is no contradiction in that ‘an uncaused state of affairs’ occur.¹⁰² Thus, the undifferentiated non-complex universe needs no

⁹⁸ Cf. Swinburne, R., *The Existence of God*, 131.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 132.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 94.

¹⁰¹ Cf. *Ibid.*

¹⁰² Cf. *Ibid.*, 95.

explanation and therefore needs no creator. In claiming that the cosmological argument cannot be a deductive proof, he argues that if this were the case, it would be incoherent to affirm that a complex physical universe exists and God does not exist. He says however it is not incoherent since, even if God never existed, a complex physical universe could have formed from matter that always existed and was continually rearranging itself in various combinations.¹⁰³ Therefore, for Swinburne, it is possible for something to exist even without there being a creator.

Furthermore, Swinburne claims that God had the necessity to create. He argues that it is better for God to bring about the existence of something other than himself than not to bring about anything. From his perfect goodness, God always does the 'best action', where there is one.¹⁰⁴ Therefore, "God must bring about the existence of other things."¹⁰⁵ He argues that this follows from a principle which Aquinas often invokes and sometimes attributes to Dionysius. The principle states that 'goodness is by its nature diffusive of itself.' He says that when the consequence that God must inevitably bring about the existence of things apart from himself becomes explicit, Aquinas backs away. He says that it is the wish to defend the normal Christian view – that God did not have to create anything – that prevents Aquinas from making the conclusion.¹⁰⁶

He claims that a "solitary God would be a bad state of affairs. God needs to share, to interact, to love..."¹⁰⁷ Since God must bring about something, Swinburne goes further to

¹⁰³ Cf. *Ibid.*, 136-137.

¹⁰⁴ Cf. Swinburne, R., *Is there a God?*, 12.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 117.

¹⁰⁶ Cf. *Ibid.*, 117.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 119.

ask himself whether God can bring about other divine beings. If he can, then the inevitability of God bringing about something could be satisfied by the Christian doctrine of the Trinity. He suggests that in that case there would be no need for Aquinas to reject the Dionysian principle. Furthermore, he asserts that “if God can make other divine beings, he must surely do so.”¹⁰⁸ But if he cannot, then he must create more limited conscious beings with whom to interact in love. Swinburne’s view is that God can bring about other divine beings. He notes that in Christian doctrine, God the Father bringing about the Son and the Spirit is not normally called ‘creating’. It is apparent however that for Swinburne it is only a choice of terminology and not that there is any difference.¹⁰⁹

Swinburne’s doctrine about God’s creation brings to the forefront many issues. Among them is the issue of God’s unity. He says that theism postulates one God because this is the simplest theory.¹¹⁰ He does not seem to find any problem with there being many divine beings apart from it being a complicated theory. In addition, what he understands by the infinity of God is brought to question. As has been noted, he suggests that divine beings (i.e. beings that have infinite power, knowledge, goodness, etc.) may be brought into existence by God. This claim raises a number of questions: Is it possible that an infinite being be brought into existence? Is it possible that there exist more than one infinite being? Swinburne believes that to say that God has infinite power, knowledge, etc. is simply to postulate the maximum degree of all the properties of God. We do this only because it is simpler to postulate an infinite amount than a large finite

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Cf. Ibid., foot note 7.

¹¹⁰ Cf. Ibid., 97; *Is there a God?*, 43-44.

number. He explains that a very large finite number may account for all that we observe (i.e. may satisfy the requirements for what God ought to have) but an infinite amount is much simpler.¹¹¹

f) God's Eternity

As earlier mentioned, the attribute of eternity has implications for understanding the omniscience of God. By 'eternal', Swinburne understands that God "always has existed and always will exist."¹¹² God's essence is eternal and this means that he is "a being of a kind such that if he exists at any time he exists at all times."¹¹³ He says he prefers "the understanding of God being eternal as his being everlasting rather than as his being timeless."¹¹⁴ He notes that the latter is an alternative understanding common in the Christian tradition. However, as I have noted above, he rejects it. He considers it unnecessary for the theist to burden himself with this understanding and says that it is very difficult to make any sense of it.¹¹⁵

He has three reasons for rejecting it. Firstly, he argues that understanding God's eternity as timelessness did not arrive in the Christian tradition until the fourth century. He seems to attribute the doctrine to St. Augustine when he says: "This doctrine of divine timelessness is very little in evidence before Augustine."¹¹⁶ He says that there are no signs of it in

¹¹¹ Cf. Swinburne, R., *The Existence of God*, 97.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 7.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 96.

¹¹⁴ Swinburne, R., *Is there a God?*, 9.

¹¹⁵ Cf. Swinburne, R., *The Existence of God*, 7.

¹¹⁶ Swinburne, R., *Coherence of Theism*, 217.

the Old Testament. He adds that the same applies in general to the New Testament, even though there are occasional sentences that could be interpreted in terms of this doctrine. Secondly, it seems to him that the claim that God is timeless contains an inner incoherence and is incompatible with most things which theists wish to say about God. Thirdly, he believes that the reasons for which theists have wanted to assert the timelessness of God are not very good ones.¹¹⁷

Swinburne presents Boethius exposition, which he says is the best-known, of the doctrine that God's eternity means that he is timeless.¹¹⁸ However, he does not respond to any of its arguments. Nevertheless, he goes ahead to give three reasons why theists may want to consider God as timeless. He notes that first and foremost, a consideration that scholastics had in holding this doctrine seems to have been that it would provide the explanation of the doctrine of God's total immutability.¹¹⁹ Secondly, "[in] view of the general Christian tradition that God's omniscience includes knowledge of future free human actions, the doctrine of timelessness does seem to have the advantage of saving the former doctrine against obvious difficulties."¹²⁰ Swinburne says that a third reason may be one which he is not aware to have been put forward by the scholastics but which a modern man may have: A man might feel that a temporal being is less perfect because his mere existence in time would mean that he was continually losing parts of his existence all the while. That is, "[as] today ends and tomorrow begins, the being has lost today..."¹²¹

¹¹⁷ Cf. *Ibid.*, 220.

¹¹⁸ Cf. *Ibid.*, 216.

¹¹⁹ Cf. *Ibid.*, 218.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 219.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*

g) God's Necessity

In Swinburne's definition of God, the term 'necessarily' appears twice. I present below what each of these refers to. Firstly, the theist claims that God possesses all the above properties in some sense necessarily. "To say that some being necessarily or essentially has certain properties is to say that without these properties he could not exist."¹²² Having these properties is essential to being the kind of being that God is. God "belongs to the essential kind of divine being."¹²³ A divine being is "a person who is omnipotent, omniscient, perfectly free, perfectly good, and creator of all things."¹²⁴ Swinburne explains that God could not, for example, suddenly cease to be omnipotent and continue being God.

Secondly, Swinburne's definition affirms that God exists necessarily. While other things are dependent for their existence on other beings or exist by chance, "God could not not exist."¹²⁵ He goes further to ask himself what sort of 'could not', that is, what sort of necessity is this. "[It] seems to me that a theist, if he is to worship a God worthy of worship, must hold that God's necessity is necessity of the strongest kind that the being, described so far could possess."¹²⁶ He believes that to "say that 'God exists' is necessary is [...] to say that the existence of God is a brute fact that is inexplicable – not in the sense that we do not

¹²² Swinburne, R., *The Existence of God*, 95.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 96.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 95.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

know its explanation, but in the sense that it does not have one.”¹²⁷ What this means is that God is the terminus of the explanation of all phenomena observed. That is, if we postulate a being with the properties that God is said to have, we need no further explanation.

The necessity of God’s existence does not imply, for Swinburne, that ‘God is a necessary being’. When he says that “God could not not exist,” he does not mean that there is a being called God who must of necessity exist. He on the contrary affirms that “any terminus to explanation of things logically contingent must be itself something logically contingent.”¹²⁸ So, “God could not not exist,” simply means that there must be a final explanation. This explanation does not however have to be a necessary one but only one with the greatest explanatory power and simplicity. Neither does God’s necessity mean that the proposition ‘God exists’ is necessary. He says that if it were necessary, there would be a contradiction in affirming that ‘God does not exist’. He believes however that it is obvious that there is no incoherence in such a statement.¹²⁹

Thus, God’s necessity only amounts to the claim that his existence is a brute fact. According to Swinburne, this is the strongest kind of necessity that can be granted to God. That is, it is “the strongest kind of necessity compatible with his being a logically contingent being.”¹³⁰ He says that such necessary existence is termed as factually necessary existence (in contrast to logically necessary existence). He insists that God’s existence is not logically necessary. Thus, while he believes that two of Leibniz’s arguments are the best

¹²⁷ Ibid., 96.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 96.

¹²⁹ Cf. Ibid., 136.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 96.

cosmological arguments that there are, he nevertheless finds a problem with Leibniz's claim that God is a metaphysically necessary being. Swinburne asserts that if this means that God is a logically necessary being, then Leibniz is mistaken. Furthermore, although he disagrees with Kant's claim that the cosmological argument is an ontological argument in disguise, he nevertheless thinks that: if "the necessary being to which the cosmological argument purports to argue is a logically necessary being"¹³¹, then Kant's criticisms have force. Swinburne insists that "[there] can be no 'absolute explanation' of the existence of the universe."¹³² On the other hand, he says:

If however Leibniz's metaphysically necessary being is not a logically necessary being, but the supreme brute fact, then his principle boils down to the simple claim that there is a terminus to explanation, that everything that has a full explanation has an ultimate, or at least a complete, explanation.¹³³

Swinburne rejects this alternative as well. I noted earlier, when I presented his theory of explanation, that he considers that a satisfactory explanation needs not be a complete explanation. He goes further to note that Leibniz claims that the universe needs an explanation because it is not metaphysically necessary. He adds that Leibniz may be right but that he does not see how one can defend this claim except in terms of "greater simplicity and explanatory power of a potential explanatory hypothesis."¹³⁴ I have also presented Swinburne's view that the truth of any hypothesis or theory depends on these two factors and also that these determine our stopping point in the search of an explanation for any

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 148, footnote 19.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 148.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 149.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*

phenomena.¹³⁵ Swinburne says that Leibniz provides no arguments in terms of the above factors and so takes it upon himself to provide one in his *The Existence of God*.

2.2 *The Limits to the Attributes of God*

According to Swinburne, theism is the hypothesis that “there is a person with zero limits (apart from those of logic) to his power, knowledge, and freedom”.¹³⁶ This means that logic is the first measure of everything including God. Now given that logic consists in the rules of thought, it means that the God who is subject to the limits of logic can only be as great as our thought can reach. I have referred above to an affirmation, which Swinburne makes while discussing the necessity of God. He says: “[It] seems to me that a theist, if he is to worship a God worthy of worship, must hold that God’s necessity is necessity of the strongest kind that the being, described so far could possess.”¹³⁷ Thus, Swinburne recognises that the kind of attributes that God is said to have will affect his worthiness of worship. In other words, if his attributes are limited excessively, such a being may end up somewhat less than God.

¹³⁵ Cf. pp. 41-45.

¹³⁶ Swinburne, R., *Is there a God?*, 44.

¹³⁷ Swinburne, R., *The Existence of God*, 95.

a) Limits of Theistic Personalism

Before I begin the discussion of Swinburne's views on the divine attributes, I would like to take note of a division that Brian Davies makes among theists. This may help to understand Swinburne's approach better. Davies says that "theism can be divided into at least two approaches to God... 'classical theism' and 'theistic personalism.'" ¹³⁸ He suggests that from the time of St. Augustine to that of G. W. Leibniz, "philosophers almost always worked on the assumption that belief in God is belief in classical theism." ¹³⁹ On the other hand, the main figures among the 'theistic personalists,' he says, are Alvin Plantinga and Richard Swinburne. He notes that "[their] writings and the writings of those who share their view of God, proceed from the assumption that, if we want to understand what persons are, we must begin with human beings." ¹⁴⁰ It is true, he admits, that they do not suggest that God is just like a human being. Rather, they think that while God is like human beings, he is also different from them.

Among other theistic personalists, according to Davies, are Charles Hartshorne, John Lucas, Richard Creel and Steven T. Davis. ¹⁴¹ He claims that "theistic personalists frequently reject almost all the tenets of classical theism." ¹⁴² He considers that the major difference between the two groups is in their approaches to the doctrine of creation. For classical theism, God "is the one (and the only one) who creates 'from nothing' (*ex nihilo* in the traditional Latin

¹³⁸ Davies, B., *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion*, 3 ed. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004, 2.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 10.

¹⁴¹ Cf. *Ibid.*, 10-14.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 11.

phrase).”¹⁴³ It is evident, from what I have reported, that Swinburne’s ideas on God as Creator are quite different from this. I shall try to highlight this in the discussion that I shall hold shortly.

In addition, according to Davies, many theistic personalists take classical theism’s emphasis on the difficulty of understanding God to be an exaggeration. Although they concede that God is a mystery, “they frequently imply that we can have some sense of what it is to be God since we know from our case what it is to be a person.”¹⁴⁴ This may be seen from Swinburne’s debate with D. H. Mellor that I reported earlier.¹⁴⁵ Swinburne claims that while, in the case of a cheat, we do not know which orders he is more likely to put the cards, and while all orders are equally likely a priori, when it comes to God, “we do have some idea of what kinds of world God is likely to create.”¹⁴⁶ Accordingly, we know what God will do much better than what a man will do. Davies notes that the attitude of classical theists is quite different.

Classical theists happily agree that God may be compared to things that we know. They also agree that he can be truly described using words which we employ when speaking of what is not divine... Yet classical theists also typically insist that none of this means that we therefore have a grasp of God or a concept which allows us to say that we understand what God is.¹⁴⁷

Davies suggests that theistic personalists more or less follow the approach that René Descartes uses to prove that ‘I

¹⁴³ Ibid., 2.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 14.

¹⁴⁵ Cf. p. 57.

¹⁴⁶ Swinburne, R., *The Existence of God*, 132.

¹⁴⁷ Davies, B., *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion*, 2004, 7.

exist.’¹⁴⁸ Descartes says that it is absurd to doubt one’s existence as long as one is thinking. “I am a thing that thinks... a thing that doubts, understands, affirms, denies, wills, refuses, and that also imagines and senses.”¹⁴⁹ Descartes adds that this thing is not anything bodily. Theistic personalists think that by following what Descartes did and supposing God to be less limited than what we know ourselves to be as persons, we might arrive at a fair comprehension of God.¹⁵⁰ These general ideas about the theistic-personalistic approach may be useful in the interpretation of Swinburne’s conception of the divine attributes.

b) Limits to God’s Power and Necessity

It may be recalled that in his definition of the omnipotence of God, Swinburne stated that God can do whatever it is coherent to suppose that he can do.¹⁵¹ This of course is true. Whatever is a contradiction, God cannot do. Contradictions are not *things*. Like Swinburne also notes, they have no entity. I have noted the example that he gives: ‘me existing and not existing at the same time’ does not really describe a state of affairs at all, in the sense of something that it is coherent to suppose could occur. Therefore, if we said ‘God can do *everything*’, it would be an

¹⁴⁸ Cf. *Ibid.*, 14.

¹⁴⁹ Descartes, R., «Meditations», II, in Cress, D. A. (ed.), *Discourse on Method and Meditations on First Philosophy*, 3 ed. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1993, 66.

¹⁵⁰ Cf. Davies, B., *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion*, 2004, 14.

¹⁵¹ Cf. discussion on [p. 54](#).

adequate description of God's omnipotence. We shall have excluded the contradictions even without need to add an exception clause of 'whatever it is incoherent to suppose'.

On the other hand, the addition of this exception clause alters our understanding of God's power. It does not leave space for God's power to go beyond what we can think or know. It turns our knowledge (our thought) into the measure of God's power. Logic takes prior position to God and therefore turns into his measure. I may here note that Jeremy Gwiazda suggests that Swinburne's 'infinite' properties are in fact limited. I shall present Gwiazda's criticism and Swinburne's reply later on. For now, I shall only note that the attribute of omnipotence is important in the understanding of providence and the problem of evil. This is made clear above all by the fact that the problem of evil is stated by most authors in these terms. They say that the occurrence of evil throws a shadow over the existence of a good and omnipotent being. Hence, limiting the omnipotence of God limits the universality of his providence.

Likewise, it is important to consider God's necessity. The views about it may determine the position that one takes about the problem of evil. It may be noted that, in his argument against evil, Swinburne works under the assumption that God's existence is not necessary and cannot be shown to be necessary (i.e. it cannot be demonstrated). Hence, he considers that there is no "positive evidence of sufficient strength for the existence of God"¹⁵² and so we need a rational argument (e.g. the theodicy that he proposes) to undermine the inference of the non-existence of God from the occurrence of evil. If God's existence could be shown to be necessary, the occurrence of evil would not put any doubt on the existence of God. Thus, Davies suggests that one reply

¹⁵² Swinburne, R., *Providence and the Problem of Evil*, 24.

to the problem of evil can be that we already know that God exists – if we are already certain about it – and so the occurrence of evil in no way entails his non-existence.¹⁵³

I have reported that Swinburne limits the necessity of God's existence to a kind of necessity that he calls factual. This means to him that the existence of God is a brute fact that is inexplicable. By a brute fact, he means that 'God' is a complete explanation. 'God' however is just one complete explanation. There may be other complete explanations. And when he says that it is inexplicable, he means that we cannot explain his existence in terms of factors (causes and reasons) simpler and with greater explanatory power than the hypothesis of theism.¹⁵⁴ Like I noted, he claims that this is the strongest kind of necessity compatible with his being a logically contingent being. He asserts that God's necessity cannot be logical necessity, which is "the only sense of necessity recognised since Hume"¹⁵⁵ among the Anglo-American philosophers.

So, what are the implications of the claim that God is a contingent being? It means, for Swinburne, first of all, that our inference of his existence is not necessary but simply that it is probable (i.e. it has great explanatory power and is simple). Secondly, it means that it is coherent to think and to say that God does not exist.¹⁵⁶ He claims that there is no contradiction between saying this and that 'the physical universe exists.' He appeals to the criterion of coherence, which is one of the determinant criteria in modern philosophy. So, despite all that we observe (man and the physical

¹⁵³ Cf. Davies, B., *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion*, 2004, 211.

¹⁵⁴ Cf. pp. 44-45.

¹⁵⁵ Moros, E. R., *Modalidad y esencia: La metafísica de Alvin Plantinga*, Pamplona: EUNSA, 1996, 40.

¹⁵⁶ Cf. p. 63-64.

universe), according to Swinburne, it is possible for God not to be (not to exist).

However, if it is possible for God not to exist, that he exists depends on something or someone else. Who or what is it? Only what is necessary needs no explanation. That is, we do not ask for the cause of what cannot be otherwise. On the other hand, if something can be otherwise, we ask for the cause (explanation) of its being the way it is. In response, we may say that *Y* is the cause of *X*; and then we may in turn ask for the cause of *Y*, and so on. In order to avoid an infinite regress, we must posit an uncaused cause, *Z*. This would be a necessary being because he could not *not* be. Otherwise, there would not be anything at all. St. Thomas Aquinas, like I shall present in greater detail during the discussion of deductive proofs, considers that an argument along these lines can be a demonstration of the existence of God.¹⁵⁷ Swinburne does not think so since he does not think that it is possible to avoid the infinite regress in explanation, nor does he think that it is important to avoid it.¹⁵⁸ Many authors, including in the analytical context consider that the infinite regress is a problem that cries out for explanation. One of these is Robert M. Adams. Although he does not concede that we must necessarily posit an uncaused cause (a being without explanation), he agrees that to postulate a necessary being is an answer that settles the question of the infinite regress.

Belief in a Necessary God has the advantage that the regress-threatening question, 'But who made God?', does not arise, or receives the speedy answer that God's existence has an explanation in its necessity. This answer is not as satisfying as it would be if we understood what makes God's existence necessary. But it is at least a way in which we can say that

¹⁵⁷ Cf. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, q.2, a.3; *Summa contra Gentiles*, I, 13, par 33.

¹⁵⁸ Cf. pp. 40-41; 44-45.

there is an explanation, and one that does not generate an infinite regress.¹⁵⁹

I suggest that, by claiming that everything that exists is contingent, Swinburne leaves our desire for explanation unsatisfied. What would be special about God that would make other beings depend on him if he is as contingent as they are? How can *all* contingent beings depend for their existence and operation on another contingent being?¹⁶⁰ By removing the necessary being (i.e. God), we remove everything!

[The] existence of God defines the minimum of metaphysical possibility required, such that if God never existed in a possible world, such a world would not be metaphysically possible... The inexistence of God is thus a black hole which makes any other metaphysical possibility disappear.¹⁶¹

Besides, by claiming that the physical universe, which is all that we observe, could exist even if God did not exist, Swinburne expressly defeats his purpose. It seems to me that this basic premise nullifies whichever other explanations that he may give for defending the existence of God. Why would we need to affirm the existence of God as the cause of the universe if the universe did not need God in order to exist? If a complex physical universe could have formed from matter that always existed and was continually rearranging itself in various combinations, why then do we need to posit God as the explanation of its existence?¹⁶² This seems, moreover, to defeat his theory of simplicity which states that one should not postulate more objects than are necessary. If the universe

¹⁵⁹ Adams, R. M., «Presumption and the Necessary Existence of God», *Noûs* 22 (1988) 30.

¹⁶⁰ Cf. p. 58.

¹⁶¹ Moros, E. R., *El argumento ontológico modal de Alvin Plantinga*, Pamplona: EUNSA, 1997, 116. The translation is mine.

¹⁶² Cf. p. 98-99.

is sufficient in itself, there is no need then to postulate a cause, one moreover that is less evident to us than the universe.

How is it possible for Swinburne to affirm that God is a logically contingent being despite all else that he says about God (especially about his infinite attributes)? It is because, for him, God is simply a hypothesis postulated in order to explain the contingent phenomena that we observe. ‘God exists’ is a terminus of other hypotheses that explain what we observe. And according to him, an explanation of contingent phenomena cannot itself be other than contingent. Enrique Moros, who compares Swinburne’s position with that of Alvin Plantinga, observes that:

while Swinburne conforms himself with the modern notions of coherence, demonstrability, rationality, etc., Plantinga tries to modify and widen them in an attempt to get rid of the metaphysical scepticism in the Anglo-American philosophy since Hume.¹⁶³

Hence, Plantinga is able to admit the notion of metaphysical necessity or broadly logical necessity. On the other hand, Swinburne seems to consider the notion of metaphysical necessity to be meaningless. Moros suggests that there “seems to be at the bottom of this a metaphysical and theological scepticism, an inheritance of Humean tradition.”¹⁶⁴

It is not surprising, then, that those who have a scientificist view of reality have applauded Swinburne’s rejection of God’s necessity. Keith Parson notes that “[to] his credit, Swinburne does not attempt to revive the traditional version of the cosmological argument. He does not think that

¹⁶³ Moros, E. R., *El argumento ontológico modal de Alvin Plantinga*, 119.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 118.

the universe must have a sufficient reason for its existence.”¹⁶⁵ Similarly, Quentin Smith notes that:

Swinburne rightly rejects the unjustified assumption that God ‘necessarily exists’ (and in this sense is ‘self-explanatory’) and Swinburne would probably agree that the ‘modal intuition’ that God necessarily exists is no less epistemically suspect than a ‘modal intuition’ that time or space-time necessarily exists, which the materialist may offer as his countering ‘modal intuition’ to ‘prove’ that his world-view is explanatorily on a par with theism.¹⁶⁶

I have up to this point endeavoured to show that any rational inquiry about the explanation of the real existence of what we observe points to the metaphysical necessity of God’s existence. That is, from the necessity of *being* (*esse*) present in all things that we observe, we are able to arrive at the necessity of a being that has not received *being* but to whom it is proper to *be*.¹⁶⁷ I wish now to return to Swinburne’s assertion that God’s existence cannot be logically necessary. At this point, I wish to defend the view that God’s existence is also logically necessary. That is, the proposition ‘God exists’ is necessary. I shall rely on the consideration that St. Thomas Aquinas makes concerning the necessity of propositions. Ian Logan says that St. Thomas considers a proposition to be evident (*per se nota*) and necessary if it is impossible to be thought to be otherwise.¹⁶⁸ This, he says, is because the predicate is included in the

¹⁶⁵ Parson, K., *God and the Burden of Proof: Plantinga, Swinburne, and the Analytic Defense of Theism*, Buffalo (New York): Prometheus Books, 1989, 67.

¹⁶⁶ Smith, Q., «Swinburne’s Explanation of the Universe», *Religious Studies* 34 (1998) 97.

¹⁶⁷ Cf. St. Thomas Aquinas, *De Ente et Essentia*, Ch. 4, par. 7.

¹⁶⁸ Cf. Logan, I., *Reading Anselm’s Proslogion: The History of Anselm’s Argument and its Significance Today*, Farnham (UK): Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2009, 138.

essence of the subject. Swinburne agrees with this. Swinburne however, in considering logical necessity, neglects an aspect which St. Thomas highlights by a distinction he makes. Aquinas says that a proposition may be *per se nota* in itself though not to us or on the other hand, *per se nota* in itself and to us.

If, therefore the essence of the predicate and subject be known to all, the proposition will be self-evident to all; as is clear with regard to the first principles of demonstration, the terms of which are common things that no one is ignorant of, such as being and non-being, whole and part, and such like. If, however, there are some to whom the essence of the predicate and subject is unknown, the proposition will be self-evident in itself, but not to those who do not know the meaning of the predicate and subject of the proposition.¹⁶⁹

Now, we do not know the essence of God and therefore the proposition ‘God exists’ will not be *per se nota* to us. However, according to Aquinas, it may be demonstrated that the predicate in this proposition is the same as the subject.¹⁷⁰ This is the position that I defend in this work. Once the demonstration is carried out, this proposition becomes evident and necessary. There may however be some who may consider that such a demonstration is not possible but accept that existence belongs to the essence of God. To these also, the proposition ‘God exists’ is necessary.

“The proposition ‘God exists’, differs from a principle such as ‘the whole is greater than the part’, which is *per se notum* through an immediate perception and does not have to be demonstrated.”¹⁷¹ The difference lies in that the terms ‘whole’ and ‘part’ are well known to everyone (i.e. to the wise and to the unwise). If however there were anyone so

¹⁶⁹ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, q.2, a.1, co.

¹⁷⁰ Cf. Ibid.

¹⁷¹ Logan, I., *Reading Anselm's Proslogion*, 138.

unwise that he did not know the meaning of the terms 'part' and 'whole,' then the principle 'the whole is greater than the part' would be *per se notum* in itself but not to him. Such a person could deny this principle without there being any contradiction. Similarly, someone to whom it has not been demonstrated that existence pertains to the essence of God can deny coherently that God exists. Therefore, a proposition may at first hand appear not to be logically necessary but when in fact it is. This is the case with the proposition 'God exists.'

In short, for Swinburne and many other contemporary philosophers, logical necessity is the supreme, if not only, kind of necessity. "For this reason, there can never be a necessity of the existence."¹⁷² On the other hand, the writers in the classical metaphysical tradition considered that the things that exist have some necessity in them. They, just like the ordinary people, considered that the things that *are*, cannot *not be*. That is, the being (*esse*) of things is evident and necessary. At the same time, they claimed that we almost immediately grasp that the *esse* is not proper to the material things that we observe but must have been received from *Another*. The created world points to the necessity of a Creator. This way, the classical philosophers reached the conclusion of the necessity of God's existence. Thus, Ángel L. González, while commenting on St. Thomas' five ways, notes that "the metaphysical ascent up to God always has its start in the consideration of creatures inasmuch as they are caused beings which reclaim an uncaused cause."¹⁷³ I shall return to this when I deal with the deductive proofs. However, at this point, we can make a preliminary conclusion

¹⁷² Moros, E. R., *Modalidad y esencia: La metafísica de Alvin Plantinga*, Pamplona: EUNSA, 1996, 40.

¹⁷³ González, A. L., *Teología Natural*, 93.

that if the existence of God is necessary and can be shown to be necessary, that there is evil will not bring into doubt God's existence.

c) Limits to God's Creation

So, from the creature, we are led to the Creator. From dependent and contingent being, we are led to pure and necessary being. For the philosophers and theologians in the Christian tradition, there is nothing that *is* that could have come about without the will of God (i.e. not created by God). "God, for classical theism, is the one (and the only one) who creates 'from nothing' (*ex nihilo* in the traditional Latin phrase)." ¹⁷⁴ The distance between non-being (nothingness) and being is infinite. Only an infinite being can overcome it. This is omnipotence. ¹⁷⁵ On the other hand, according to Brian Davies, although all theistic personalists agree that God is the Creator, they tend to causally distance God from the world. They regard him as an onlooker with reference to the created order, who is able to step in and modify how things are. They also think that God does not have to create everything himself but may permit another being to do it. ¹⁷⁶ He says that this may be noted, for example, from what Swinburne says he understands by God being the creator of all things. ¹⁷⁷

Moreover, when classical theism claims that everything that *is* has received being from God and is

¹⁷⁴ Cf. Davies, B., *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion*, 2004, 2.

¹⁷⁵ Cf. Polo, L., *Presente y Futuro del Hombre*, Madrid: Rialp, 1993, 138-139.

¹⁷⁶ Cf. Davies, B., *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion*, 2004, 12.

¹⁷⁷ Cf. p. 58.

dependent on him, it does not refer only to the physical universe but also to morality and logic. Morality and logic are rooted in the nature of the things created by God. In Chapter III, I shall argue that morality has to do with the proper ends of agents (i.e. it depends on these). Swinburne, on the other hand, believes that logic and morality are necessary and independent of whether God exists or not. For St. Thomas, there is a total dependence of everything that *is* on God and the understanding of the relation Creator-creature is the key to all else that we might understand about God. Jean P. Torrell summarises St. Thomas' view of God's creation as follows:

He is certainly not the only Christian thinker to have developed a creationist view of the universe following the book of Genesis but he has probably done it with greatest vigour. To say that the world is created signifies that it is entirely, in each and every element, in a relationship of total dependence on God. The originality of his thought is that this total dependence is accompanied by an equally total autonomy, since God respects the proper constitution of each creature and allows it to act according to its own laws.¹⁷⁸

In addition, St. Thomas considers that the universality of the divine providence necessarily follows from God being the Creator of everything. He thus comments:

Since, therefore, as the providence of God is nothing less than the type of the order of things towards an end, as we have said; it necessarily follows that all things, inasmuch as they participate in existence, must likewise be subject to divine providence.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁸ Torrell, J. P., *St. Thomas Aquinas: The Person and His Work*, I, 2 ed. Translation by Robert Royal. Washington, D. C.: The Catholic University Press, 2005, 163.

¹⁷⁹ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, q.22, a.2, co.

So, inasmuch as all things have received existence from God, so are they subject to divine providence. According to J. M. Arroyo, for St. Thomas, to say that God is Creator implies that God is the universal provider because *esse*, which is received in creation, is what is most intimate to any being.¹⁸⁰ Hence, limiting God's creation would also limit his providence. In the same vein, Agustín Echavarría links the metaphysical notion of providence that was developed within the Christian tradition to the understanding of God as the Creator of all things: "Only a God-Creator, inasmuch as he is the cause of the being of all things, is capable of not only producing and conserving them in existence and sustaining their actions, but also of ordering and directing them towards the good."¹⁸¹

While presenting what it means to Swinburne that God is the Creator of the universe, I not only highlighted his view that the universe could have existed even if God never existed, but also his view that God had necessity to create conscious beings. I suggest that this latter view shows that the limits of logic imposed by Swinburne not only limit God's power and his other attributes but also make him dependent on us. Since 'God' is the terminus of a logical process (a final hypothesis that explains other hypotheses), he depends on this process. Since God is dependent on thought, thinking subjects are necessary if God is to exist. This leads to a great paradox: the creation is necessary while the Creator is not necessary. This however is not surprising if in the method of inquiry, God is simply a hypothesis that we postulate as a final explanation. Even if we show that the hypothesis is simple, has great explanatory power and has no

¹⁸⁰ Cf. Arroyo, J. M., *El tratado de la providencia divina en la obra de Santo Tomás de Aquino*, Roma: Pontificia Universitas Sanctae Crucis, Facultas Theologiae, 2007, 512-515.

¹⁸¹ Echavarría, A., «Providencia», 945. The translation is mine.

incoherence, but we make no reference to reality, such hypothesis does not show that God exists. He is simply a result (a creation) of the logical process.

Further questions that arise from Swinburne's considerations about God's creation are God's infinity and unity. On one hand, he claimed that God could, and probably must bring to existence, other divine beings. His objective is to give a rational justification of the Christian doctrine of the Trinity. Hence, Swinburne in his earlier writings referred to the 'second God' and 'third God.' He decided however to drop the terms due to the controversy that they raised.¹⁸² Although Swinburne notes that in Christian doctrine, God the Father bringing about the Son and the Spirit is not normally called 'creating,' it is apparent that for him it is only a choice of terminology.¹⁸³ William Hasker makes the same observation. "Swinburne's view of the Trinity does imply that the Son and the Holy Spirit are created, even though they are beings of a very different sort than all other individuals that God has created."¹⁸⁴ Hasker concludes that this "opens a significant breach between Swinburne and the main trinitarian tradition."¹⁸⁵ It is clear that the one divine being that brings into being the other divine beings would be the source of being of the others and therefore greater than them. If the one that confers being is infinite, then the ones that receive their being (existence) cannot be also infinite. The ones that receive being will be composed of essence and being and so their being will be limited by its essence. Only one who is pure being is infinite.

¹⁸² Cf. Hasker, W., *Metaphysics and the Tri-Personal God*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2013, 153.

¹⁸³ Cf. p. 60.

¹⁸⁴ Hasker, W., *Metaphysics and the Tri-Personal God*, 153.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

In any case, although Swinburne admits the possibility of there being more than one God, he postulates that there is only one God because this is a simpler hypothesis. The only explanation that he has for monotheism is that it is a simpler hypothesis than polytheism. However, according to his theory of simplicity, sometimes we need to postulate other beings in order to explain sufficiently well what we observe.¹⁸⁶ Now, when we come to the issue of evil, which is the main subject of the present study, it seems that it would be quite reasonable to postulate another infinite being responsible for the evil. It is much simpler that we attribute the evil that occurs in the world to another being rather than to the perfectly good being. Moreover, it should be noted that Swinburne concedes that the argument from evil against God is a good C-inductive argument (i.e. it counts against the existence of God).¹⁸⁷ It is apparent therefore that there are more compelling criteria than simplicity which lead theists to affirm that there is only one God and that the evil that occurs is permitted by him and not by any other being.

d) Limits to God's Knowledge

The logical limits that Swinburne places on God's knowledge not only limit our understanding of God but they also have significant consequences for his providence. He says that God's omniscience means that "he knows at any time whatever it is logically possible that he know at that time."¹⁸⁸ That is, he will know only what we think that a person can know. Only what is coherent to us that a person

¹⁸⁶ Cf. Swinburne, R., *Is there a God?*, 43-45.

¹⁸⁷ Cf. Swinburne, R., *The Existence of God*, 266.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 95.

can know is what God will know. Here, Swinburne makes no distinction in the possibilities that different kinds of persons may have. But, isn't it possible that a divine person may know more than what human persons can know, including what may not seem coherent to us that he may know? In fact, if this were not the case, such knowledge would not be different from human knowledge and so would not be infinite.

By this limitation of God's knowledge, Swinburne normally wants to defend the view that God cannot know with certainty future free actions of another person. This view is an essential part of his free-will defence, whereby human beings are fully responsible for the evil they cause. Hence, Swinburne explains that "it may be that there are true propositions that it is not logically possible that a person know at some time t ."¹⁸⁹ He affirms that we should not expect God to know such propositions at time t . He believes that God's omniscience only allows him to know with the highest degree of probability possible, at any given time t , what action a person is likely to perform freely at a future time $t+1$.¹⁹⁰ Thus, as part of his defence of God, Swinburne claims that God will not know incorrigibly the consequences of all actions (his and those of other free beings). Therefore, God can be held responsible only for the objectively likely consequences of his actions and not the actual consequences.¹⁹¹

On the other hand, he thinks that Alvin Plantinga complicates his 'free-will defence' and makes it less plausible by trying to defend God's knowledge of everything including future free human actions. "Plantinga holds this because he holds to a strong traditional view of God's

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

¹⁹⁰ Cf. Swinburne, R., *Providence and the Problem of Evil*, 6.

¹⁹¹ Cf. p. 166.

essential omniscience, as God knowing all true propositions; and combines this with the view that God is not timeless but everlasting.”¹⁹² The solution that Plantinga chooses is the claim that God’s omniscience includes ‘middle knowledge,’ a position that has its origins in the seventeenth century Jesuit, Luis de Molina. I do not think that this position is adequate. However, it is not within the scope of the present work to discuss its merits. I shall on my part highlight the merits of St. Thomas’ view inherited from Boethius. I think that it is the one that responds most adequately to God’s infinite perfection.

Like I have noted, Swinburne admits that his view differs from the unanimous view in Christian tradition that God’s knowledge has no limit either in time or in space. Accordingly, God knows everything including the secret inner thoughts of all persons and all their future actions. This view has been justified in the Christian tradition by the way God’s eternity was understood (i.e. as atemporal). Hence Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann, following the classical conception of eternity, explain that God does not foreknow ‘future contingent events’ because it is impossible that any event be future to an eternal entity.¹⁹³ Similarly, to the question, ‘Can God change the past?’ they respond with a firm ‘no.’ They clarify however that:

it is misleading to say, with Agathon, that not even God can change the past... The impossibility of God’s changing the past is a consequence not of the fact that what is past is over

¹⁹² Swinburne, R., *Providence and the Problem of Evil*, 128.

¹⁹³ Cf. Stump, E. and Kretzmann, N., «Eternity», in Stump, E. and Murray, M. J. (eds.), *Philosophy of Religion: The Big Questions*, Malden (Massachusetts); Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1999, 52.

and done with but rather of the fact that the past is solely a feature of the experience of temporal entities.¹⁹⁴

Accordingly, God knows our future actions, not because he *foreknows* them but simply because they are present to him. Swinburne, on the other hand, believes that he can easily get rid of this way of understanding God's eternity. Because of this, he claims that "the view that God's omniscience includes knowledge of future free human actions is easily detachable from the theistic tradition."¹⁹⁵ However, from the discussion that will follow shortly, it will be seen that he does not succeed in doing so.

For now however, it should be noted that a lack of knowledge about the future events will limit God's providence for such events. This is so because, like St. Thomas explains, providence depends on knowledge of the means and the end.¹⁹⁶ This limit on God's providence means that it will only be as much as the providence of a man. Swinburne thinks that God's knowledge of future events is greater than our knowledge because God knows with greater probability than us what is likely to happen. It follows from this that God's providence will be greater than ours only in the way that one country provides for its citizens better than another country because it has a more sophisticated statistical-probabilistic apparatus. Now, this kind of providence is not what is attributed to God. Rather, God's providence is supposed to be universal.

In addition, Swinburne says that God's omniscience means that he has infinite beliefs and that his beliefs amount to knowledge. "Beliefs are freely attributed to God nowadays

¹⁹⁴ Ibid. On Agathon's affirmation, cf. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, VI, 2, 1139b 10.

¹⁹⁵ Swinburne, R., *Coherence of Theism*, 219.

¹⁹⁶ St. Thomas Aquinas, *De Veritate*, q.5, a.1, co.

in Anglo–American philosophical theology.”¹⁹⁷ William P. Alston notes that this practice undoubtedly is part of the twentieth–century popularity of the view that knowledge consists of true justified belief. I suggest, again, that this is a conception of God’s knowledge that results from limiting it to human standards. Like Brian Davies notes, Swinburne and other theistic personalists normally assert that “God’s knowledge of history may partly be acquired by him as history unfolds. On their picture, God’s knowledge of the world, especially the world of human affairs, is capable of increase.”¹⁹⁸

Thus, while rejecting God’s immutability, Swinburne says that “if God did not change at all, he would not think now of this, now of that. His thought would be one thought which lasted for ever...”¹⁹⁹ For Swinburne, God’s knowledge proceeds from one belief to another and then a connection between different beliefs. He takes God’s knowledge to be rational (i.e. discursive) just like human knowledge. If this however were the case, it would mean that God progressively acquires knowledge and so continually changes. Richard Gale, who considers Swinburne’s theodicy unsuccessful, rightly notes that: “Swinburne seems unaware that this way of restricting God’s omniscience creates an especially virulent instance of the paradox of perfection.”²⁰⁰ I shall shortly argue that indeed Swinburne’s conception of God’s omniscience is opposed to his infinite perfection. It is because Swinburne understands God’s knowledge this way

¹⁹⁷ Alston, W. P., «Does God Have Beliefs?», *Religious Studies* 22 (1986) 287.

¹⁹⁸ Davies, B., *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion*, 2004, 12.

¹⁹⁹ Swinburne, R., *Coherence of Theism*, 214.

²⁰⁰ Gale, R., «Swinburne on Providence», *Religious Studies* 36 (2000) 213.

that he finds great difficulty in accepting the conception of God's eternity as omnipresence to all places and times.

Considered as an atemporal mind, God cannot deliberate, anticipate, remember or plan ahead, for instance; all these mental activities involve time... But it is clear that there are other mental activities that do not require a temporal interval or viewpoint. Knowing seems to be the paradigm case; learning, reasoning, inferring take time, as knowing does not.²⁰¹

e) Limits to God's Perfection and Eternity

The present heading is a continuation of the discussion of Swinburne's conception of God's omniscience. I shall focus on the most controversial issue that arises in this discussion: the eternity of God. This issue also brings to the forefront our understanding of God's perfection, immutability and omnipresence. The Christian tradition in claiming that God knows future events (including future human actions) relied on an understanding of God's eternity which was the result of the philosophical and theological reflection on the attributes of God. God's eternity was understood as God being outside time. This view was considered to be a direct consequence of the immutability of God, which in turn follows necessarily from God's infinite perfection. Swinburne rejects this kind of understanding of eternity but admits that it has "the advantage of saving the former doctrine against obvious difficulties."²⁰²

²⁰¹ Stump, E. and Kretzmann, N., «Eternity», 51.

²⁰² Swinburne, R., *Coherence of Theism*, 219. The former doctrine that he refers to is God's knowledge of future human actions.

He, on the other hand, thinks that God's being eternal ought to be understood as his being everlasting rather than as his being timeless. God's being everlasting would simply mean that he "always has existed and always will exist."²⁰³ He notes that claiming that God is timeless or 'outside time' has more serious implications. He believes that it is unnecessary that the theist burden himself with these implications. He adds moreover that it is very difficult to make any sense of this claim. I have already presented the objections that he has against this view.²⁰⁴

Swinburne's first objection to understanding God's eternity as 'timelessness' is that this doctrine is absent in the Christian tradition until the third or fourth century. He claims that it is not to be found in the biblical writings but rather due to neo-Platonic influence. It is not within the scope of this study to carry out a biblical exegesis or a historical study of the development of the biblical concepts. However, I should only take note of the fact that speculative reflection on the Christian Sacred Scriptures and doctrine has been a progressive process. For example, fundamental Christian dogmas (e.g. about the Trinity, the divinity of Jesus) did not acquire their explicit and definitive formulation until the fourth or fifth century. It should therefore not surprise us that the doctrine of timelessness was not explicitly formulated – supposing that it was not – before the third century.

Neither is it surprising that the Christian tradition employed neo-Platonic concepts in explaining theological doctrines. It has always been the case that Christians have taken advantage of philosophical concepts of their times in order to define Christian doctrines with precision. It should be noted that Swinburne has set for himself a similar task:

²⁰³ Swinburne, R., *The Existence of God*, 7.

²⁰⁴ Cf. p. 61.

that of elucidating and explaining the philosophical issues present in different Christian doctrines.²⁰⁵ Hence, the present study is about examining the suitability of Swinburne's concepts for this task. Therefore, that a Christian doctrine about God has developed with the help of neo-Platonic or any other philosophical concepts is no objection against its Christian authenticity.

It has been argued by writers in the Christian tradition that what are successive moments to men – from the time that men first existed and forever – are to God all in one. They are present to him. This is part of the omnipresence of God. Swinburne reports Boethius' exposition of the doctrine in his *Consolation of Philosophy* as follows:

God, Boethius says, is eternal, but not in the sense that he has always existed and always will exist. Plato and Aristotle thought that the world had always existed... But even if [they] had been right, that would not mean that the world was eternal in the sense in which God is eternal. 'Let us say that God is eternal, but that the world lasts for ever. God, however, is eternal in being present at once to all times which from our view at any one time may be past or future. God is thus outside the stream of temporal becoming and passing away. Boethius's much-quoted definition of eternity is that it is 'the complete and perfect possession at once of an endless life'. 'For it is one thing to be carried through an endless life which Plato attributed to the world, another thing to embrace together the whole presence of an endless life, a thing which is the manifest property of the divine mind.' The obvious analogy is to men travelling along a road; at each time they can see only the neighbourhood on the road where they are. But God is above the road and can see the whole road at once. Taking man's progress along the road as his progress through time, the analogy suggests that while man can enjoy only one time at once, God can enjoy all times at once. God is

²⁰⁵ Cf. Swinburne, R., *Providence and the Problem of Evil*, back cover.

present to all times at once, just as he is present to all places at once.²⁰⁶

This is Boethius' view as exposed by Swinburne. It seems to me a good explanation of how God is present to all times. Moreover, it explains that God's omnipresence not only refers to space but also to time. On the other hand Swinburne acknowledges God's omnipresence but limits it to space. That Boethius' argument is a good one is also shown by the fact that Swinburne does not challenge any of its claims. The only way he seems to challenge it is by his affirmation that the claim that God is timeless contains an inner incoherence. This is the first part of his second objection according to the way I have summarised them. I present here what he considers to be the incoherence:

The inner incoherence can be seen as follows. God's timelessness is said to consist in his existing at all moments of human time – simultaneously. Thus he is said to be simultaneously present at (and a witness of) what I did yesterday, what I am doing today, and what I will do tomorrow. But if t_1 is simultaneous with t_2 and t_2 with t_3 , then t_1 is simultaneous with t_3 . So if the instant at which God knows these things were simultaneous with both yesterday, today and tomorrow, then these days would be simultaneous with each other. So yesterday would be the same day as today and as tomorrow – which is clearly nonsense.²⁰⁷

It should be noted that Swinburne simply repeats the argument of his opponents and only adds that it is clearly nonsense. Of course it would be nonsense if the person that we were talking about were a human person. Swinburne seems not to take into consideration this difference and what it entails. This becomes manifest from the other part of his second objection: He says that “so many things which the

²⁰⁶ Swinburne, R., *Coherence of Theism*, 216.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 220.

theist wishes to say about God – that he brings about this or that, forgives, punishes, or warns – are things which *are true of a man* at this or at that time or at all times.”²⁰⁸ Indeed these things are true of a man because he is subject to time and experiences the moments of his life successively. On the other hand, God’s eternity is ‘the complete and perfect possession at once of an endless life’, as Boethius says. Swinburne’s opponents claim that to a divine person it is not incoherent that a man’s yesterday, today and tomorrow be all at once. This is the claim that Swinburne repeats in his argument above but he does not show that it is incoherent to suppose this of a divine person.

William Hasker believes that Boethius’ conception of God’s eternity, which, in general lines, is the one used by almost all classical philosophers, is “coherent and intelligible.”²⁰⁹ He further thinks that the understanding of God’s knowledge in the classical way follows from it. He argues that “the mode in which God knows temporal entities need not be the same as the mode in which they exist,”²¹⁰ in the same way that God does not need to have a skin in order to know what it is like to be hit in the face with a snowball. Similarly, Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann agree with Boethius that whatever has the complete possession of its life cannot be temporal, “since everything in the life of a temporal entity that is not present is either past and so no longer in its possession, or future and so not yet in its possession.”²¹¹ They note that none of the classical philosophers who accepted eternity as a real atemporal mode

²⁰⁸ Ibid., 221. The italics are mine.

²⁰⁹ Hasker, W., «From God, Time and Knowledge», in Stump, E. and Murray, M. J. (eds.), *Philosophy of Religion: The Big Questions*, Malden (Massachusetts); Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1999, 57.

²¹⁰ Ibid., 56.

²¹¹ Stump, E. and Kretzmann, N., «Eternity», 44.

of existence, with the possible exception of Parmenides, denied the reality of time. The classical philosophers simply proposed two separate modes of existence.

At this point, let me also take note of the conclusion of L'uboš Rojka's comparative study of Bernard Lonergan's and Swinburne's conceptions of God's eternity. Rojka concludes that Swinburne's conception is a more probable view than the atemporality that is defended by Lonergan. He says that Swinburne employs a concept of time that has greater explanatory power and is nearer to common sense. On the other hand, he affirms, Lonergan's explanation of how an atemporal being knows concrete temporal events is more complex. I suggest however, that Rojka's work is influenced by the theistic-personalistic approach, similar to that used by Swinburne, which he uses.²¹² However, Rojka does not deny the coherence of the concept of atemporality.²¹³ Here is a summary of his evaluation:

Swinburne's objection is not strong enough as to make us abandon the argument from the imperfection of temporal life. Although it seems that Lonergan's argumentation is coherent, it presupposes the exhaustive explanation of the paradoxes between atemporal knowledge and temporal existence. According to Swinburne's perspective, this would make the theory less simple and therefore less probable.²¹⁴

Let me now return to Swinburne's objections against the timelessness of God. His third and last objection is that the reasons that theists give for asserting God's timelessness are not good. It should first of all be noted that if the arguments that I have given in response to his first two objections succeed in showing that the objections are not

²¹² Cf. Rojka, L., *L'Eternità di Dio: Lo studio comparativo di Bernard Lonergan SJ e Richard Swinburne*, Assisi: Cittadella Editrice, 2013, 424.

²¹³ Cf. *Ibid.*, 448.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 424. The translation is mine.

compelling, then this last objection does not count. For, it does not matter which reasons they have had provided their assertion is not shown to be false. Still, it may be noted that the first reason which he gives is that the scholastics thought that it would provide the explanation of the doctrine of God's total immutability. Swinburne however does not think that God's total immutability needs explanation since he thinks that theists do not have to hold that God is totally immutable.²¹⁵

However, if we consider why the scholastics held that God had to be totally immutable, it would become easily understandable why it is necessary to hold this position. If we did not hold that God was totally immutable, we would compromise his infinite perfection. For, anything that changes becomes either better or worse, more or less perfect than its previous state. This is what philosophers and theologians in the Christian tradition have sought to deny about God: that he may become more or less perfect than he is. God cannot become less perfect because in that case, his new state would not be the most perfect that any being could be. On the other hand, he could not become more perfect because it would mean that his actual perfection is not the maximum possible. This is what they mean by claiming that all his perfections are infinite. This denies the possibility of adding anything to God's perfection. Hence, St. Thomas argues that:

[Everything] which is *moved* acquires something through its *movement*, and attains to what it had not attained previously. But since God is infinite, comprehending in Himself all the plenitude of perfection of all being, He cannot acquire anything new, nor extend Himself to anything whereto He was not extended previously. Hence *movement* in no way belongs to Him. So, some of the ancients, constrained, as it

²¹⁵ Cf. Swinburne, R., *Coherence of Theism*, 212-215; 219.

were, by the truth, decided that the first principle was *immovable*.²¹⁶

It does not seem that we could consider something that is in a state of change to be perfect. We should therefore find it reasonable that St. Thomas agrees with the ancients who saw God's immutability as a necessary consequence of his infinite perfection. Finally, for completeness' sake, let me mention the other two reasons that Swinburne says that theists had for asserting God's timelessness. The second is that it safeguards the general Christian tradition that God's omniscience includes knowledge of future free human actions. It is clear that God's knowledge of future free human actions follows from his timelessness. Swinburne acknowledges this.²¹⁷ The third reason which Swinburne gives is part of the first one (i.e. that a temporal being is imperfect).

In summary, Swinburne rejects the understanding of God's eternity as timelessness or omnipresence to all times. One consequence of this rejection is Swinburne's assertion that God cannot know future human actions. Given that providence depends on knowledge and that it is not about the past but what is to come, this view seems to rule out God's providence over human actions. Besides, this view greatly compromises God's perfection since it implies that he changes continually. I have on the other hand presented both the classical view and some contemporary views that affirm that understanding God's eternity as timelessness is not only coherent but also necessary for safeguarding his infinite perfection.

²¹⁶ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, q.9, a.1, co. It should be noted that 'movement' is used in a wider sense to refer to all change.

²¹⁷ Swinburne, R., *Coherence of Theism*, 219.

3. The Arguments for the Existence of God

Throughout human history, many people have taken for granted God's existence – and probably many others, his non-existence – without consciously formulating reasons for their beliefs.²¹⁸ Swinburne notes that others have formulated the reasons for their belief in explicit forms. And some formulations which have been frequently discussed have been given names (e.g. the cosmological, ontological arguments). Swinburne has presented and analysed in several of his works the arguments that are given in favour or against the existence of God. He has consistently defended the rationality of theism.

In this section, I shall present his views about the different types of arguments, which ones he considers to be good ones and how he thinks we should proceed if we are to prove the rationality of theism (in Sub-section 3.1). I shall then discuss these views and present some criticisms that have been made about them (in Sub-section 3.2). I shall discuss and defend the classical view of the possibility of the demonstration of the existence of God. This discussion is important because Swinburne deals with providence, which, for him, is above all the problem of evil, in the context of the defence of the existence of God. The problem of evil arises because it seems to be an obstacle to rationally believing that there is an omnipotent and provident Being. His views on what kinds of arguments for the existence of God are good influence greatly the role (and solution) that he gives to the problem of evil.

²¹⁸ Cf. Swinburne, R., *The Existence of God*, 8.

3.1 *What Swinburne Says about the Arguments*

In his book, *The Existence of God*, which he considers to be “the central book of all that [he has] written on the philosophy of religion,”²¹⁹ he presents eleven arguments for or against the existence of God. He says that he selects these from the various a posteriori arguments that have had the greatest appeal in human history. He thinks that only these eleven have considerable force. Of these, only one – the argument from the existence of evil – is against the existence of God. He notes that atheistic arguments, apart from the one from evil, are largely criticisms of the theist’s arguments.

a) The Types of Arguments

The arguments that he considers in *The Existence of God*, he says, are all *a posteriori* arguments, that is, “arguments which claim that something that humans experience is grounds for believing that there is a God or that there is no God.”²²⁰ He says that he does not discuss *a priori* arguments, that is, “arguments in which the premisses are logically necessary truths – namely, propositions that would be true whether or not there was a world of physical or spiritual beings.”²²¹ He explains that because of this, he does not discuss the ontological argument and its variants. He believes moreover that “ontological arguments for the existence of God are very much mere philosophers’

²¹⁹ Ibid., v.

²²⁰ Ibid., 8.

²²¹ Ibid.

arguments and do not codify any of the reasons that ordinary people have for believing that there is a God.”²²²

He notes that the greatest theistic philosophers of religion have generally rejected ontological arguments and relied on *a posteriori* ones. He gives the example of St. Thomas Aquinas. Thus, he says, in reaching the final conclusion about how probable it is that there is a God, he assumes that no *a priori* arguments and no *a posteriori* arguments other than the ones he discusses have any significant force.²²³

b) The Possibility of a Proof

Before presenting Swinburne's evaluation of the arguments for or against the existence of God, I wish to consider his views on whether a proof of the existence of God is possible. Like Anthony Kenny lamented over 40 years ago about the lack of interest and confidence in the possibility of a rational argument among contemporary philosophers²²⁴, so does Richard Swinburne. Kenny attributes the philosophers' disinterest to a belief that Kant had discredited all kinds of proofs definitively.²²⁵ Likewise, Swinburne blames Immanuel Kant and David Hume for the prevailing scepticism among contemporary philosophers. These philosophers worked to show that reason could never reach

²²² Ibid.

²²³ Cf. Ibid., 9.

²²⁴ Cf. Kenny, A., *The Five Ways*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd, 1969, 2.

²²⁵ Cf. Ibid., 3.

justified conclusions about matters much beyond the range of immediate experience.

He notes that many other philosophers have in recent years argued in the same spirit: “there is today deep scepticism about the power of reason to reach a justified conclusion about the existence of God.”²²⁶ Swinburne however believes that Hume and Kant are mistaken. He defends the view that human reason can reach justified conclusions outside the narrow boundaries drawn by these philosophers. He suggests that recent developments in philosophy “especially developments in inductive logic, often called confirmation theory, provide tools of great value for the investigation”²²⁷ of the existence of God.

He believes however that, “although reason can reach a fairly well-justified conclusion about the existence of God, it can reach only a probable conclusion.”²²⁸ He sees an advantage in this in that it leaves “abundant room for faith in the practice of religion.”²²⁹ He quickly dismisses any possibility of a deductive proof because “relatively few philosophers today would accept that there are good deductive proofs.”²³⁰ While he strongly defends the cosmological argument as a good argument in favour of the existence of God that starts from evident facets of experience, he nevertheless thinks that it is “equally evident that no argument from any such starting points to the existence of God is deductively valid.”²³¹ He considers Aquinas’ first four of his ‘five ways’ “to be one of his least successful pieces of

²²⁶ Swinburne, R., *The Existence of God*, 2.

²²⁷ *Ibid.*, 2.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*

²²⁹ *Ibid.*

²³⁰ *Ibid.*, 14.

²³¹ *Ibid.*, 136.

philosophy.”²³² He argues that if an argument from the existence of a complex physical universe to the existence of God were deductively valid, then it would be incoherent to assert that a complex physical universe exists and that God does not exist. Swinburne does not think that it is. He asserts that:

it seems easy enough to spell out in an obviously coherent way one way in which such a co-assertion would be true. There would be a complex physical universe and no God, if there had always been matter rearranging itself in various combinations, and the only persons had been embodied persons; if there never was a person who knew everything, or could do everything, etc. Atheism does seem to be a supposition consistent with the existence of a complex universe, such as our universe.²³³

Similarly, Swinburne believes that no teleological argument, whether Aquinas' fifth way or any other argument, can be a good deductive argument. The reason he believes this is so is that although the premise (i.e. that a vast pervasive order characterises the world) is undoubtedly correct, the step from premise to conclusion is not a valid deductive one. He adds that although “the supposition that one person is responsible for the orderliness of the world is much simpler and so more probable than the supposition that many persons are responsible,”²³⁴ the latter supposition seems to be logically compatible with the data. He says that the same kind of considerations apply to all the other arguments and for that reason he does not repeat them but simply assumes that they are not deductively valid.

²³² Ibid.

²³³ Ibid.

²³⁴ Ibid., 155.

c) The Inductive Probability of Theism: Swinburne's Procedure

Having highlighted Swinburne's rejection of the possibility of a deductive proof of the existence of God, I now proceed to present the procedure that he believes should be followed in carrying out this task. As I have already noted, he thinks that confirmation theory (i.e. contemporary inductive logic) avails the tools necessary for carrying out rigorously a rational justification of theism. He appeals to its success in the scientific field. He notes that arguments of scientists from their observational evidence to conclusions about what are the true laws of nature or predictions about results of future experiments are not deductively valid but are inductive arguments.²³⁵ So, this inductive procedure, which has afforded such remarkable success in the scientific field should be able to do the same in testing the hypothesis 'God exists.'

Swinburne presents two kinds of inductive arguments. A correct P-inductive argument is "an argument in which the premisses make the conclusion probable."²³⁶ A correct C-inductive argument is "an argument in which the premisses add to the probability of the conclusion (that is, make the conclusion more probable than it would otherwise be)."²³⁷ He says that obviously among correct C-inductive arguments, some will be stronger than others (i.e. some premisses will

²³⁵ Cf. *Ibid.*, 5.

²³⁶ *Ibid.*, 6.

²³⁷ *Ibid.*

raise the probability of a conclusion more than other premises). He believes that for rational discourse, it is not sufficient that an argument be valid or correct. It should, in addition, be a good argument. A deductive, P-inductive or C-inductive argument is good if its premises are not only true but are also known to be true by those who dispute about the conclusion.²³⁸ In the arguments for or against God, he considers whether each argument from the observed phenomena to the conclusion 'God exists' is a good C-inductive argument. And then finally, he considers whether the argument from all the evidence taken together to the conclusion 'God exists' is a good P-inductive argument.

Swinburne thinks it unfortunate that there has been a tendency in recent philosophy of religion to treat the arguments for the existence of God in isolation from each other. He notes that among "those who have assumed that there are no good arguments other than deductive ones, and that arguments are not cumulative, are both (the early) Alasdair MacIntyre and Anthony Flew."²³⁹ He says that there is no problem with initially treating each argument in isolation for simplicity's sake. He adds that the fact that arguments may support and weaken each other is even more evident when dealing with inductive arguments. He thus makes the case for taking into consideration the cumulative effect of all arguments in favour of or against any given hypothesis. I shall return to this argument and the example he uses to defend it later on.

I have up to this point presented some preliminary considerations by Swinburne about the inductive procedure and how it can be applied to arguments for the existence of God. I shall now go on to the specifics of how he proceeds in

²³⁸ Cf. *Ibid.*

²³⁹ *Ibid.*, 12, footnote 10.

his own argument. The hypothesis that is under consideration here and whose probability Swinburne seeks to establish is 'God exists'. The evidence includes those observable phenomena from which the arguments in favour or against the existence of God start. He says that when trying to establish the inductive probability of a hypothesis, the hypothesis up for investigation is often represented by h . He explains that it is often useful to divide the evidence available into two parts: new evidence and background evidence. The former is normally represented by e and the latter by k . The background evidence is that knowledge that is taken for granted before new evidence turns up. He says that the division between new evidence and background evidence can be made where one likes but that it is often convenient to include all evidence derived from experience in e and to regard k as being what is called in confirmation theory mere 'tautological evidence', that is, in effect all our irrelevant knowledge.²⁴⁰

So, let the hypothesis 'God exists' be h – he proceeds – and let the evidence available be e & k . Our task therefore is to establish the probability of h given e & k . This is written as $P(h \mid e \& k)$. Now, keeping in mind the definition of a correct C-inductive argument, an argument from e to h is a correct C-inductive argument if (and only if) $P(h \mid e \& k) > P(h \mid k)$. That is, it is correct because taking e into consideration makes the probability of h higher than if only the background knowledge k was considered. Now generally, the probability that p is true given q and the probability that p is not true given q sum up to one (i.e. $P(p \mid q) + P(\sim p \mid q) = 1$). It follows from this that an argument from e to h is a correct

²⁴⁰ Cf. *Ibid.*, 16-17.

P-inductive argument if (and only if) $P(h \mid e \& k) > \frac{1}{2}$, (i.e. if $P(h \mid e \& k) > P(\sim h \mid e \& k)$).²⁴¹

In his argument for the existence of God, Swinburne takes $e_1, e_2 \dots e_{11}$ to be the various propositions that people bring forward as evidence for or against God's existence. He begins with the cosmological argument which starts from the evidence e_1 that 'there is a physical universe'. In considering this argument, he assumes that there is no other relevant evidence and so k will be mere tautological evidence. Then $P(h \mid e_1 \& k)$ represents the probability that God exists given that there is a physical universe and given mere tautological evidence. If $P(h \mid e_1 \& k) > P(h \mid k)$, then the cosmological argument is a correct C-inductive argument and inasmuch as the premises are known by all, it is a good one.²⁴²

Secondly, Swinburne considers the teleological argument, which starts from the evidence e_2 of 'the conformity of the universe to a temporal order'. But since he wants to take into consideration the cumulative value of all the arguments, k will now include the premise of the first argument e_1 . So, $P(h \mid e_2 \& k)$ will represent the probability that God exists, given that there is a physical universe and that it is subject to temporal order. And when considering the third argument from e_3 , k will represent the premise of the second argument ($e_1 \& e_2$). And so on, until all the eleven arguments are considered.

The crucial question of Swinburne's book, *The Existence of God*, is whether $P(h \mid e_{11} \& k) > \frac{1}{2}$. If it is the case, the probability that God exists will be greater than the probability that God does not exist (i.e. that $P(h \mid e_{11} \& k) > P(\sim h \mid e_{11} \& k)$).²⁴³ This would mean that the premises make

²⁴¹ Cf. *Ibid.*, 17.

²⁴² Cf. *Ibid.*

²⁴³ Cf. *Ibid.*

the conclusion that God exists probable. The argument therefore, from the premises of the eleven arguments taken cumulatively to the conclusion that God exists would be a good P-inductive argument. That is, Swinburne's view is that as long as the probability value of all the arguments in favour or against God taken together is greater than half ($\frac{1}{2}$), theism will be a justified hypothesis.

Swinburne suggests that most of the eleven arguments (taken separately and together) for the existence of God are good C-inductive arguments (i.e. $P(h \mid e_n \& k) > P(h \mid k)$, where $n = 1, 2 \dots 11$). That is, their premises make it more probable that God exists than it would otherwise be. He notes that of course some of these arguments confirm the existence of God much more strongly than the others. He concedes that the argument against the existence of God from evil is a good C-inductive argument (i.e. $P(h \mid e_n \& k) < P(h \mid k)$). He thinks however that it is of limited force. He further argues that the argument from hiddenness of God to non-existence of God and the argument from the existence of morality to the existence of God have no force (i.e. $P(h \mid e_n \& k) = P(h \mid k)$). Swinburne's final verdict is that the argument from all the evidence considered in the eleven arguments to the existence of God is a good P-inductive argument (i.e. $P(h \mid e_1 \& k) > \frac{1}{2}$).²⁴⁴

It is interesting to note how Swinburne arrives at the final probability. While our main concern is to get the values $P(h \mid e_n \& k)$, and eventually $P(h \mid e_{11} \& k)$, Swinburne's arguments do not lead directly to these values. Rather, the arguments that he gives lead to the values of $P(e_n \mid h \& k)$. Hence, he summarises the procedure he follows in the last chapter of *The Existence of God*, entitled 'The Balance of Probability', as follows: "In the previous chapters I have

²⁴⁴ Ibid.

urged that various occurrent phenomena are such that they are more to be expected, more probable, if there is a God than if there is not.”²⁴⁵ Instead of arguing for and stating the probability of the hypothesis ‘God exists’ given the phenomena observed, he argues for and states the probability that these phenomena will be observed given the hypothesis ‘God exists’. That is, the starting point is the hypothesis ‘God exists’ while the conclusion is that we would expect these phenomena to occur. I shall later on argue that this way of proceeding makes his proofs a priori and not a posteriori as he claims.

In order to arrive at the values in which we are interested (i.e. $P(h \mid e_n \& k)$), Swinburne applies Bayes’ theorem to the values of $P(e_n \mid h \& k)$. The use of Bayes’ theorem in the justification of theism is considered by many as Swinburne’s prime contribution to the philosophy of religion.²⁴⁶ Bayes’ theorem is expressed by the following formula:

$$P(h \mid e \& k) = \frac{P(e \mid h \& k) P(h \mid k)}{P(e \mid k)}$$

Swinburne notes that Bayes’ theorem follows directly from the axioms of mathematical calculus of probability. It is not necessary to go through the steps of deriving the theorem from the said axioms but it is interesting to consider the variables of which it is composed. I noted earlier, while considering the grounds on which we judge the truth of a theory, that according to Swinburne, the probability of a

²⁴⁵ Ibid., 328.

²⁴⁶ Cf. Chartier, G., «Richard Swinburne», 467.

hypothesis h depends on its prior probability and on its explanatory power. The latter increases with the predictive power of h and decreases with the prior probability of e . It is this relation that is represented by Bayes' theorem. As was reported, the predictive power of h is the measure of the probability that the observed phenomena e would occur if the hypothesis h is true. The predictive power of h then will be $P(e \mid h \& k)$ while the prior probability of h (i.e. the probability of h before we consider any evidence) will be $P(h \mid k)$ and that of e (i.e. supposing that h is not true) as $P(e \mid \neg h \& k)$. It may be noticed that the product of these factors is the same one of Bayes' theorem.

3.2 The Limits to the Arguments for the Existence of God

I have considered in Section 2 during the discussion of God's necessity some indicators of why there must be a being that necessarily *is*. Under this sub-section, I would like to highlight only those issues to do with Swinburne's consideration of the arguments for the existence of God that I have not already mentioned. I shall refer to his criticism of those who do not consider that it is possible to prove the existence of God. I shall then consider whether Swinburne's arguments are *a posteriori* as he claims. I shall also take note of some criticisms of his claims about the simplicity of theism. Finally, I shall revisit and restate the classical view that it is possible to demonstrate the existence of God. If this were accepted, then evil would not present any serious problem for the existence of God. We would already know that God exists and therefore the occurrence of evil would not put in doubt his existence.

a) The Criticism to Kant

Swinburne criticises Immanuel Kant for his analysis of the arguments for the existence of God. To begin with, he thinks that “Kant produced a threefold classification of arguments for the existence of God that has had a permanent and [...] far from beneficial influence on the subsequent discussion of this topic.”²⁴⁷ Kant went on to claim that the three arguments could be reduced to one of them: the ontological. Swinburne agrees with him that the ontological argument does not prove the existence of God but does not accept his claim that all other arguments are reduced to the ontological. Above all, he rejects Kant's view that it is impossible to provide a rational argument or proof for the existence of God.

In spite of this apparent radical disagreement, I wish to suggest that Swinburne's position is not different from Kant's. There is only a difference in what either of them calls a proof. When Kant says that there is no proof, he means that it is not possible to provide an argument from which it follows necessarily that God exists (i.e. a demonstration). Hence, while Kant insists that it is not possible to demonstrate the existence of God, he formulates several arguments in his works which to some seem to be proofs or arguments for the existence of God. For example, Swinburne considers Kant's argument in which he claims that the existence of God is a ‘postulate of pure practical reason’ to be

²⁴⁷ Swinburne, R., *The Existence of God*, 10.

an argument from morality to God.²⁴⁸ He notes that Kant would “vigorously deny that this constitutes an argument for the existence of God, since he would deny that the binding obligation to keep the moral law can in any way be formulated as a theoretical truth.”²⁴⁹ Swinburne insists that from what he says, “in effect Kant seems to be putting forward an argument from the fact that there are binding moral truths.”²⁵⁰ Ángel L. González analyses Kant’s position as follows:

The postulate of morality, which requires (leads to) God, is not transcendent. That is, it is not a demonstration, since, as is well known, the postulates of practical reason according to Kantian doctrine, can only be applied in practical use. They do not attain a transcendental value and therefore cannot found knowledge that may go beyond what is sensible.²⁵¹

González further notes that, for Kant, speculative proofs of the existence of God are not possible but that does not rule out a practical proof. And probably a practical proof is more important for Kant than a theoretical one since he seems to consider morality as the nucleus of what is human. “What can be said about God theoretically is not irrelevant but it acquires its authentic relevance inasmuch as it is referred to the area of importance, that is, morality.”²⁵² Moreover, it seems that what Kant wanted was to leave room for faith. It did not matter to him whether it was an objective faith or not.²⁵³ Swinburne also sees an advantage in the fact

²⁴⁸ Cf. Kant, I., *Critique of Practical Reason*, 5:124-5:125. The edition used in this work is the one of Gregor, M. J. (ed.), *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant*, X, Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

²⁴⁹ Swinburne, R., *The Existence of God*, 212, footnote 4.

²⁵⁰ Ibid.

²⁵¹ González, A. L., *Teología Natural*, 35.

²⁵² Ibid., 36.

²⁵³ Cf. Ibid., 35.

that there is no deductive proof of the existence of God: “for this reason, there is abundant room for faith in the practice of religion.”²⁵⁴

It can therefore be concluded that Kant does not reject the possibility of a probable argument. What he rejects is the possibility of a theoretical argument (i.e. a demonstration). Here, we may recall the Aristotelian parallel, whereby the theoretical is necessary while the practical is contingent.²⁵⁵ From the previous discussions, it may be seen that Swinburne holds the same position: we can only give probable arguments for the existence of God but no deductive proof.

b) Swinburne's Arguments: Are they a Posteriori?

Swinburne claims that the arguments that he considers in *The Existence of God* in order to reach the final conclusion about the probability of the existence of God are all *a posteriori* arguments. He notes that these are “arguments which claim that something that humans experience is grounds for believing that there is a God or that there is no God.”²⁵⁶ He also notes that in preferring this procedure, he follows what the greatest theistic philosophers of religion, like St. Thomas Aquinas, have generally done.

However, like I already noted, Swinburne summarises his procedure as follows: “In the previous chapters I have urged that various occurrent phenomena are such that they are more to be expected, more probable, if there is a God than

²⁵⁴ Swinburne, R., *The Existence of God*, 2.

²⁵⁵ Cf. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, VI, 1, 1139a 11-15; 4, 1140a 1-2.

²⁵⁶ Swinburne, R., *The Existence of God*, 8.

if there is not.”²⁵⁷ It may therefore be seen that the arguments are: ‘if God exists, then humans should expect to have such experience.’ The arguments are not: ‘given this human experience, it follows that God exists.’ Swinburne begins by postulating God (i.e. a being with certain attributes) and then he goes on to argue that, given a being with such attributes, it is to be expected (it is probable) that there will be, for example, an ordered physical universe. There is a great contrast with, for example, the five ways of St. Thomas Aquinas. Apart from the fact that Aquinas’ ways are demonstrative arguments (at least claim to be) while Swinburne’s arguments seek the probability of God’s existence, they also start from the effect and conclude to the necessity of a cause. Herbert McCabe notes that in “Aquinas’ view, we do not know anything about the world through knowing something about God. God is never, for him, an explanation of the world. The movement is always in the other direction.”²⁵⁸

It is clear then that Swinburne’s arguments are the reverse of what would be an a posteriori procedure. That they are a priori may also be seen from the probability that Swinburne states in each argument. It is $P(e_n \mid h \& k)$, that is, the probability that the phenomenon e_n will be observed given that God exists and given tautological evidence. The probability that God exists given the observed phenomena – which is what we are interested in – is only reached by a mathematical formula (i.e. by the application of Bayes’ theorem). Swinburne’s arguments therefore have all the shortcomings that a priori proofs of the existence of God have been traditionally said to have including some that are

²⁵⁷ Ibid., 328.

²⁵⁸ McCabe, H., *God and Evil: In the Theology of St Thomas Aquinas*, London; New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2010, 68.

stated by Swinburne himself. St. Thomas is one of those who state that the proofs of the existence of God must start from his effects. He explains that “because we do not know the essence of God, the proposition [‘God exists’] is not self-evident to us; but needs to be demonstrated by things that are more known to us, though less known in their nature, namely, by effects.”²⁵⁹

Now, Swinburne's arguments start from a hypothesis that a person with certain properties exists. The properties and the amount of them that he will have are decided by the one who postulates. It is the case of the winner being decided before the contest begins since it is one of the contestants that decides the rules. This may also be seen from the formula for calculating the $P(h \mid e \& k)$.²⁶⁰ According to Swinburne, in order for us to show that God exists, we only need to show that $P(h \mid e \& k)$ is greater than $\frac{1}{2}$. That means that the numerator only has to be slightly more than half of the denominator. This will not be very difficult to achieve since the part ‘ $P(e \mid h \& k)$ ’ depends principally on what the hypothesis of theism is postulated to consist. On the other hand, it is unlikely that the denominator ($P(e \mid k)$) will be large since it depends on tautological evidence, which Swinburne says is ignorable.

Swinburne uses a priori arguments in showing the existence of God because they are what are principally used in the scientific context. Contemporary scientists generally begin their studies from hypotheses, which may attain wide ranging acceptance even before they are experimentally shown to have some basis in reality. It is also true that modern science has not always operated this way. For example, according to Frederick Copleston, Sir Isaac Newton

²⁵⁹ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, q.2, a.1, co.

²⁶⁰ Cf. p. 105.

was seriously opposed to this procedure. He notes that Newton “gave a powerful impetus to the development of empirical science, as distinct from a priori theorizing...”²⁶¹ There is no doubt however that the hypothesis-based procedure has yielded enormous results for contemporary science and probably for this reason Swinburne proposes that it should also be used in philosophy.

c) The Justification of Theism via Simplicity

Swinburne has wanted to justify the existence of God by the use of scientific criteria. He has argued that by following the same criteria, it is possible to show that the hypothesis ‘God exists’ is the ultimate explanation with the highest probability. Like I have noted, he claims that in order to show this, it is enough to show that the probability that God exists given the evidence we have is greater than the probability that God does not exist given the evidence we have. In other words, the probability that God exists given the evidence we have only needs to be greater than $\frac{1}{2}$. Swinburne argues that this is, indeed, the case. In order to argue his case however, he gives a central role to the simplicity of the hypothesis. I shall discuss here some objections that have been raised against his probabilistic procedure. Firstly, is a God who only probably exists worthy of worship? Secondly, does the criterion of simplicity have as much importance in scientific explanation as Swinburne claims? Finally, is theism simple, and is it simpler than materialism or other world-views?

²⁶¹ Copleston, F. C., *A History of Philosophy*, V, New York: Image Books, 1964, 167.

With regard to the first objection, it may be recalled that Swinburne admits that the kind of attributes that God is said to have will determine his worthiness of worship. However, even before we get to this point, we need to ask ourselves whether one could offer unconditional and complete worship to a God whom one only believes to probably exist. If God is a personal being and has created men in order to have communion with them, can one have this relation with God if one thinks that God only probably exists? Domingos de Sousa asks:

Can we treat God as an hypothesis that best explains observable phenomena and human experience? Since new evidence could arise at any time to show that the hypothesis was mistaken, would this not imply that we can only believe tentatively?²⁶²

Furthermore, de Sousa rightly suggests that if religious beliefs were matters of probability, we would have to formulate them more precisely in the form: 'I believe that it is probable that God became incarnate in Jesus.' I should think however that this is not the attitude of most people who have religious belief (i.e. they do not believe that it is only probable). Hence, Plantinga, while responding to Swinburne's insistence on giving probabilistic arguments for Christian beliefs from evidence available to all, says:

When examining probabilistic arguments for the truth of Christian belief, I was claiming only that these arguments are not sufficient to support full belief, the sort of belief accorded to the great things of the Gospel by those who actually believe them.²⁶³

²⁶² de Sousa, D., «Epistemic Probability and Existence of God: A Kierkegaardian Critique of Swinburne's Apologetic», *The Heythrop Journal* 55 (2014) 45.

²⁶³ Plantinga, A., «Rationality and Public Evidence: A Reply to Richard Swinburne», *Religious Studies* 37 (2001) 221.

In an earlier work, Plantinga had argued that the theistic belief was not and could not be just a hypothesis that explains what is observed in the world:

[It] is an enormous and in my opinion wholly false assumption to think that belief in God, or more broadly, the larger set of Christian (or Jewish or Muslim) beliefs of which belief in God is a part, is, at any rate for most believers, relevantly like a scientific hypothesis. The evidence for these beliefs is not the fact (if it is a fact) that they properly explain some body of data.²⁶⁴

I shall now proceed to consider the objection that has been made that the criterion of simplicity does not have such overriding importance in scientific investigation as Swinburne claims it to have. Like I mentioned, he considers that the criterion of fit with background evidence can be reduced to that of simplicity. He also argues that the criterion of scope has very little importance. He thus claims that the truth of a hypothesis depends basically on its simplicity and its explanatory power.²⁶⁵ However, Göhner et al. argue that Swinburne fails to justify his claim that the criterion of fit with background evidence can be reduced to that of simplicity.²⁶⁶ Besides they argue that his use of the term 'background evidence' is ambiguous. On one hand, he uses it to refer to empirical data (or phenomena or observations) and on the other, not to empirical data but to scientific theories.²⁶⁷ Similarly, Quentin Smith argues that the criterion of fit with

²⁶⁴ Plantinga, A., «On Being Evidentially Challenged», in Howard-Snyder, D. (ed.), *The Evidential Argument from Evil*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996, 249.

²⁶⁵ Cf. pp. 41-43.

²⁶⁶ Cf. Göhner, J., Kaiser, M. I. and Suhm, C. «Is Simplicity an Adequate Criterion of Theory Choice?», in Mößner, N., Schmoranzer, S. and Weidemann C. (eds.), *Richard Swinburne: Christian Philosophy in a Modern World*, Frankfurt: Ontos Verlag, 2008, 39-40.

²⁶⁷ Cf. *Ibid.*, 37-38.

background knowledge cannot be reduced to that of simplicity. And, like I noted earlier, Smith argues that theism does not fit with the other scientific data and theories.²⁶⁸

Alvin Plantinga argues in his 1979 article²⁶⁹ that probabilistic arguments are incapable of showing the truth or falsity of theism given the occurrence of evil. He claims that there is no way of assigning content and hence a priori probability to contingent propositions in a way that is consistent both with the probability calculus and with intuition.²⁷⁰ He examines the different solutions that have been proposed in order to overcome this difficulty faced by confirmation theory. And when he comes to the solution proposed by Swinburne, which is the simplicity of a hypothesis, Plantinga says that it cannot be right because:

In the first place, the notion of simplicity as a property of *propositions* as opposed to *sentences* is at best problematic. Although this is a deep and important difficulty, discussing it here would take us too far afield. But even if we waive this problem we can see that *a priori* probability, if there is such a thing, does not depend in any straight-forward way upon simplicity. In particular, it is not true that the simpler a proposition, the greater its *a priori* probability. For if that *were* true, all logically equivalent propositions would be equally simple (since they have the same *a priori* probability) and no contingent proposition could be simpler than any necessary proposition (since every necessary proposition has an *a priori* probability of 1).²⁷¹

In the same vein, Korbmacher et al. suggest that there is room for doubt on whether we do in fact treat simplicity as

²⁶⁸ Cf. Smith, Q., «Swinburne's Explanation of the Universe», 93-95.

²⁶⁹ Cf. Plantinga, A., «The Probabilistic Argument from Evil», *Philosophical Studies* 35 (1979) 1-53.

²⁷⁰ Cf. *Ibid.*, 25; 47-48.

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 22. The italics are in the original text.

evidence of truth.²⁷² They argue that the examples that Swinburne uses to show that this is the case are not compelling. In general, they say, his examples do not obey the *ceteris paribus* restraint. That is, although he argues that it is simplicity that made the theories in the examples preferable to others, it is clear that in his examples he does not keep the other factors constant. It could then be any of the other factors that are responsible for the preference of the theories. For example, they suggest that, although Swinburne claims that Kepler's theory on planetary motion was preferred to Copernicus' theory for its simplicity, historical facts show that more in its favour was that his data was much more accurate than any other's (thirty times more accurate than that of Copernicus).²⁷³

It therefore appears that no objective reasons can be given in support of the claim that the simpler an entity is, the more likely it is to exist uncaused... Other confirmation theorists, including, most notably, Karl Popper, do not make this recommendation.²⁷⁴

In brief, I have wanted to take note of some of the objections that have been made against Swinburne's claim on the importance of simplicity in the scientific field. I do not think that it pertains to the present study to pronounce itself on what are the important or best scientific procedures. However, these objections make it clear that the foundation upon which Swinburne has constructed his arguments for the existence of God is not a firm one. He assumes that there is

²⁷² Cf. Korbmacher, J., Schmoranzer, S. and Seide, A. «Simply False? Swinburne on Simplicity as Evidence of Truth», in Mößner, N., Schmoranzer, S. and Weidemann C. (eds.), *Richard Swinburne: Christian Philosophy in a Modern World*, Frankfurt: Ontos Verlag, 2008, 39-40.

²⁷³ Cf. *Ibid.*, 53-54.

²⁷⁴ Parson, K., *God and the Burden of Proof*, 99.

consensus among scientists about the importance of the criterion of simplicity. It is clear however that this is not so.

I shall now consider the third and last objection. This is the objection that Swinburne's hypothesis of theism is neither simple nor simpler than materialism or other world-views. To begin with, some critics have claimed that Swinburne hardly distinguishes between the simplicity of the hypothesis 'God exists' and the ontological simplicity of God. Thus, Bruce Langtry notes that "even if *There is a God* is very h-simple, and God's de re necessary properties are very simple ones, it does not follow that God is very ontologically simple."²⁷⁵

Furthermore, Jeremy Gwiazda claims that Swinburne's case from mathematical simplicity for the probability of God's existence is not successful. He says that Swinburne relies heavily on the 'principle P,' which states that "hypotheses attributing infinite values of properties to objects are simpler than ones attributing finite values."²⁷⁶ Swinburne's inductive probabilistic argument for theism almost wholly rests on this principle. "In particular, Swinburne uses the principle to argue that $P(h|k)$ is high. But it is a principle which I argue is not adequately supported by Swinburne. I also suggest that the principle may be false."²⁷⁷ The $P(h|k)$ or the intrinsic probability of theism is an important element in the calculation of $P(h|e \& k)$, that is, the probability of theism given all the evidence that we have. Swinburne claims that the latter value is high because the former value is also high. Now, according to Swinburne, the

²⁷⁵ Langtry, B., «Swinburne on Simplicity of Theism», *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 3 (2011) 421.

²⁷⁶ Gwiazda, J., «The Existence of God and the Principle P», *Sophia* 48 (2009) 394.

²⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 393.

intrinsic probability of theism is high basically because it is simple.²⁷⁸

Gwiazda goes further to argue that even if we were to grant Swinburne that principle P is true, the God according to Swinburne's argument would not be simple. He notes that the 'infinite properties' that Swinburne assigns to God are in fact limited. "The crucial point is that God is not maximally omniscient or omnipotent, but rather is restrictedly omniscient and omnipotent. God is perfectly free, and due to this, cannot be maximally omniscient or omnipotent."²⁷⁹ In other words, Swinburne takes freedom to be the most important attribute and so grants it the highest degree. This makes it necessary for him to limit God's omnipotence and omniscience in order for them to be compatible with God's perfect freedom. However, Gwiazda argues that since Swinburne claims that 'zero' is as simple as 'infinity,' then a God who is maximally omnipotent and omniscient with zero freedom is simpler than the God in Swinburne's hypothesis.²⁸⁰

In a reply to Gwiazda, Swinburne concedes the points made by him about the shortcomings of God's simplicity as developed in *Coherence of Theism* and in *The Existence of God*. Swinburne however explains that he solved those problems in *The Christian God*:

I did however give what I regard as a satisfactory (although perhaps sometimes unclear) justification in *CG*, 151–158, when I claimed that these three properties understood in my way all follow from a very simple property of 'having pure, limitless intentional power'. I acknowledge that I should have

²⁷⁸ Cf. Swinburne, R., *The Existence of God*, 93.

²⁷⁹ Gwiazda, J., «Richard Swinburne's Argument to the Simplicity of God via the Infinite», *Religious Studies* 45 (2009) 488.

²⁸⁰ Cf. *Ibid.*, 492.

repeated that account in *The Existence of God*. So I will repeat it here in a clearer form.²⁸¹

So, in this new strategy, Swinburne begins with the attribute of infinite power and considers that he succeeds in fitting in well the other attributes. Indeed, one wonders why Swinburne, if he believes that the formulation in *The Christian God* succeeded in solving this not so light difficulty in a satisfactory manner, did not use it in his subsequent works like *Providence and the Problem of Evil* and the second edition of *The Existence of God*. However, we need not press this point much farther. What is clear is that even in this clearer form that he offers, he still insists on the attributes being 'understood in my way.' That is, it is not omniscience or omnipotence in an unqualified way but in a restricted way. Thus, he maintains that "Gwiazda is right to point out that the simplest kind of omniscience, taken on its own, is incompatible with omnipotence defined in a non-restricted way, and also with perfect freedom so defined."²⁸²

It is apparent then that the clearer form of explaining God's simplicity is only a form of affirming the infinite properties of God without having to make explicit the limits that are implied. My view however is that if the simplicity of God depends on the order in which we explain his attributes and on formulations that leave unsaid what is implied, then it does not seem to be intrinsic to him but only in our conception (i.e. in our mind). Moreover, apart from these uses of 'infinity' limited by definition, Quentin Smith claims that Swinburne uses various senses of infinity without clearly distinguishing them. Hence, he suggests that "a critic of Swinburne's argument may say that his thesis that theism is a

²⁸¹ Swinburne, R., «How the Divine Properties Fit Together: Reply to Gwiazda», *Religious Studies* 45 (2009) 495.

²⁸² *Ibid.*, 497.

‘simpler’ hypothesis than materialism is the conclusion of an argument based on an equivocation on ‘infinity.’”²⁸³

I have here limited myself to the main element of Swinburne’s inductive argument for theism (i.e. its simplicity). There are however other objections that have been raised against his whole inductive probabilistic project in favour of theism. Let me mention just one of these. It is what Plantinga calls the ‘principle of dwindling probabilities.’²⁸⁴ William Hasker is of the view that Swinburne has not adequately dealt with the issue.

This principle comes into play in cases where we are evaluating the probability of a fairly complex hypothesis, comprising a number of logically independent propositions...

The difficulty, of course, is that, even if the individual probabilities are reasonably high, multiplying them together causes them to diminish rapidly. For instance, if each of the four probabilities on the right side of the formula is a healthy 0.7, the product of the four will be only 0.24, about one chance in four.

I conclude that Swinburne still has a lot of work to do, if he is to overcome the problem of dwindling probabilities.²⁸⁵

In Swinburne’s defence, Agnaldo Cuoco says that the dwindling effect results from Plantinga’s failure to apply correctly the Bayesian method of calculating the probabilities concerned.²⁸⁶ Cuoco however admits that, firstly, “Swinburne’s insistence on the principle of simplicity

²⁸³ Smith, Q., «Swinburne’s Explanation of the Universe», *Religious Studies* 34 (1998) 93.

²⁸⁴ Cf. Plantinga, A., *Warranted Christian Belief*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2000, 280.

²⁸⁵ Hasker, W., «Is Christianity Probable? Swinburne’s Apologetic Programme», *Religious Studies* 38 (2002) 256.

²⁸⁶ Cf. Cuoco Portugal, A., «Plantinga and the Bayesian Justification of Beliefs», *Veritas* (Porto Alegre) 57 (2012) 21-23.

sometimes obscures the crucial importance of conditionalization in a Bayesian analysis.”²⁸⁷ And secondly, “strong belief is not the same as certainty,”²⁸⁸ which means that Plantinga is right in claiming that probabilistic arguments cannot be sufficient ground for the kind of beliefs that are contained in the gospels.

In short, I cannot discuss the difficulties with which Swinburne's inductive probabilistic proposal in defence of theism is faced with in greater detail than I have. I believe however that I have managed to show that many legitimate objections have been raised against it, to which Swinburne has not yet responded satisfactorily. Whereas there is no doubt that he has meticulously laid out his defence following the scientific criteria, it is evident that the object with which he is dealing does not let itself be handled by this method. I suggested earlier that when it comes to dealing with Infinite Being, a metaphysical approach is the most adequate one. “It is not just that natural theology belongs to metaphysics, but that, at least since the Greeks, metaphysics is its natural place.”²⁸⁹

I shall under the next heading present the steps involved in the movement up to the Infinite Uncaused Being. Although Swinburne and many of his interlocutors reject the possibility of a deductive proof of the existence of God, the discussion in Section 2 has shown that there are many indicators of the necessity of God's existence. The objective of the next heading will be to restate this classical view while relating it to some of the ideas that have come up during the

²⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 21.

²⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 24.

²⁸⁹ Moros, E. R., «Presupuestos de la demostración de la existencia de Dios», 431, foot note 35.

discussion of Swinburne's views about God's existence and essence.

d) Deductive Arguments

I have highlighted Swinburne's view that reason can only reach a probable conclusion about the existence of God. I shall argue here that deductive proofs for the existence of God are possible. However, there is a need of a clarification of what it means to prove or demonstrate the existence of God. Like Jacques Maritain notes, to "prove or to demonstrate is, in everyday usage, to render evident that which of itself was not evident."²⁹⁰ However, firstly, like I highlighted earlier, the existence of God is evident in itself although not to us. Secondly:

what our arguments render evident for us is not God Himself, but the testimony of Him contained in his vestiges, His signs or His 'mirrors' here below... They give us only evidence of the fact that the divine existence must be affirmed, or of the truth of the attribution of the predicate to the subject in the assertion 'God exists'.²⁹¹

Before I present the elements involved in a deductive proof of the existence of God, I wish to begin with a brief consideration of the alternative that Swinburne proposes. He says that it is possible to have several inductive arguments which cumulatively could make the existence of God more probable. He notes that there has been an unfortunate tendency in recent philosophy of religion of considering that arguments cannot be cumulative. At this point, I do not wish

²⁹⁰ Maritain, J., *Approaches to God*, New York: Collier Books, 1962, 24.

²⁹¹ *Ibid.*

to take a position on whether arguments can be cumulative or not. I wish however to highlight a deficiency in Swinburne's defence of this possibility.

He says that clearly arguments (whether inductive or deductive) may back up or weaken each other.²⁹² He argues that the argument from 'all students have long hair' to 'Smith has long hair' is invalid, and so is the argument from 'Smith is a student' to 'Smith has long hair'. He says that if you put the arguments 'all students have long hair' and 'Smith is a student' together, you can reach a valid conclusion that 'Smith has long hair'. The first arguments however are not valid because no argument from one premise can be valid. The case here therefore is not of a cumulative effect of two arguments but rather one of forming a valid argument from two premises. Swinburne therefore needs to find another explanation for why arguments can be cumulative.

I shall now proceed to Swinburne's view that deductive proofs for the existence of God are not possible. Although he strongly defends the cosmological argument as a good argument in favour of the existence of God, he nevertheless declares that no argument from any such starting points to the existence of God is deductively valid.²⁹³ He argues that if an argument from the existence of a complex physical universe to the existence of God were deductively valid, then it would be incoherent to assert that a complex physical universe exists and that God does not exist. Swinburne does not think that it is. Hence, he argues that God's existence cannot be logically necessary. And when some philosophers speak of metaphysical necessity, it does not make sense to him. The only necessity that he

²⁹² Cf. p. 101.

²⁹³ Cf. p. 98.

appropriates to God is the factual one (i.e. as a brute fact that is the terminus of explanation).

I have defended the view that God's existence is not only metaphysically but also logically necessary. I have argued that although the proposition 'God exists' may not be evident to us (*ad nos*), it may be shown to be evident in itself (*per se*). Since it is accepted by all that a proposition in which the predicate is included in the subject is evident and necessary, showing that existence pertains to the essence of God, whether by a demonstration or by any other means would show that the proposition is necessary. I shall argue here that it is possible to show this by demonstration. I have reported Swinburne's evaluation of some deductive proofs of the existence of God that have been provided throughout history.

I have also highlighted Swinburne's view about St. Thomas' five *ways*. Apart from the fifth (the teleological argument), which he considers to have value only as a probable argument, he considers the other four ways as Aquinas' least successful pieces of philosophy. St. Thomas' *ways* start from the *being* of things, which we capture directly by our intellect. This provides him with a necessary starting point, from which it is possible to reach a necessary conclusion. Maritain expresses these ideas that are requisite in order to grasp the demonstrative value of the five *ways* and other deductive arguments:

What is it, then, that a philosopher ought to know so as to be in condition to grasp on the level of critical reflection the demonstrative value of the philosophic proofs of God's existence? He ought to know that the intellect differs from sense by nature, not just by degree; that what it is looking for

in things is Being; and that Being is, to one degree or another, intelligible or attainable by the intellect...²⁹⁴

Swinburne's arguments, on the other hand, do not start from the being of things. They start from phenomena – which are contingent – and so no necessary conclusion can be reached from them. The being of phenomena is only propositional. Like Gilson notes, “[from] the fact that existence is not includable in our concepts, it immediately follows that, to the full extent to which it is made up of concepts, philosophical speculation itself is existentially neutral.”²⁹⁵ So, whereas, “relatively few philosophers today would accept that there are good deductive proofs,”²⁹⁶ I suggest that a return to the procedure which does not leave being aside would greatly enrich philosophical speculation. This is so because what we are interested in and what leads us to seek an explanation is the real existence of God and of the things.

I shall now proceed to present the main issues and concerns involved in deductive proofs of the existence of God. The main question would be: if the being of the things that we observe is necessary, why do they need an explanation of their existence? Furthermore, how do we arrive at the necessary Uncaused Cause and why must it be essentially at a different level? And finally, why must the Uncaused Cause be only one?

While the various deductive proofs of the existence of God have different starting points (as may be seen from Aquinas' five ways), for brevity's sake, I wish to suggest that what is common to them is our recognition of the

²⁹⁴ Maritain, J., *Approaches to God*, 31.

²⁹⁵ Gilson, E., *Being and Some Philosophers*, 2 ed. Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2005 (reprint), 4.

²⁹⁶ Swinburne, R., *The Existence of God*, 14.

composition in the things. We recognise that being (*esse*) is common to all things but each thing is in a certain way (i.e. each thing has a different essence). In other words, being does not belong to the essence of the things. Otherwise we would not be able to conceive their essences without conceiving being as part of them.²⁹⁷ Therefore, we ask ourselves what or who is the cause of this composition and above all of the *esse* which does not belong to the things.

The central metaphysical point in this transit consists in that once the being (*ens*) appears to us to be composed or structured by essence (what it is) and by *esse* (that by which it is), the question of why the being is should immediately arise.²⁹⁸

The search for an answer to this takes us all the way to a being that is simple because any cause that is composed also asks for the explanation (cause) of its composition and being. In other words, the composition of the things leads us to recognise that the being of things is not proper to them but is received from *Another*, to whom being is proper. St. Thomas explains that the *esse* of a thing cannot have its cause in the essence or quiddity of the thing:

Now being itself cannot be caused by the form or quiddity of a thing (by 'caused' I mean by an efficient cause), because that thing would then be its own cause and it would bring itself into being, which is impossible. It follows that everything whose being is distinct from its nature must have being from another. And because everything that exists through another is reduced to that which exists through itself as to its first cause, there must be a reality that is the cause of being for all other things, because it is pure being. If this were not so, we would go on to infinity in causes, for everything

²⁹⁷ Cf. St. Thomas Aquinas, *De Ente et Essentia*, Ch. 4, par 6. The translation used here is the one of the Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies (2 ed) by Armand Maurer, 1968.

²⁹⁸ González, A. L., *Teología Natural*, 93.

that is not pure being has a cause of its being, as has been said.²⁹⁹

Prior to the above passage, St. Thomas argues that there can only be one being that exists through itself (i.e. a being that is Pure Act). After showing that there is no matter-form composition in separate substances (i.e. the soul, intelligences and the First Cause), he goes on to argue that – except for the First Cause – “their simplicity is not so great as to free them from all potentiality and thus render them pure act.”³⁰⁰ St. Thomas says that these separate substances have the composition of being-essence.³⁰¹

From this it is clear that being is other than essence or quiddity, unless perhaps there is a reality whose quiddity is its being. This reality, moreover, must be unique and primary; because something can be multiplied only by adding a difference... Now, granted that there is a reality that is pure being, so that being itself is subsistent, this being would not receive the addition of a difference, because then it would not be being alone but being with the addition of a form... It follows that there can be only one reality that is identical with its being. In everything else, then, its being must be other than its quiddity, nature or form.³⁰²

It is after arguing here that not even spiritual substances are free from composition that St. Thomas goes on to argue in the passage that I cited above for the necessity of a simple being that is Pure Being and from whom all others must have received being. Therefore, given that all beings that we observe have received their being (i.e. they are composed), we conclude the necessity of a being who has not received *esse* (i.e. who is not composed) and who gives being

²⁹⁹ St. Thomas Aquinas, *De Ente et Essentia*, Ch. 4, par 7.

³⁰⁰ Wippel, J. F., *Metaphysical Themes in Thomas Aquinas*, Washington, D. C: The Catholic University of America Press, 1984, 109.

³⁰¹ Cf. St. Thomas Aquinas, *De Ente et Essentia*, Ch. 4, par 6.

³⁰² *Ibid.*

to all. And there cannot be an infinite regress of causes because our starting point is the *esse* of the things which is evident. If we did not posit the First Uncaused Cause, we would deny what is evident. St. Thomas defends this Aristotelian doctrine³⁰³ as follows:

In all ordered efficient causes, the first is the cause of the intermediate cause, whether one or many, and this is the cause of the last cause. But, when you suppress a cause, you suppress its effect. Therefore, if you suppress the first cause, the intermediate cause cannot be a cause. Now, if there were an infinite regress among efficient causes, no cause would be first. Therefore, all the other causes, which are intermediate, will be suppressed. But this is manifestly false. We must, therefore, posit that there exists a first efficient cause. This is God.³⁰⁴

Thus, from the composition of being and essence in all things that we observe, we are led to the necessity of a being from whom they must have received their being and who has not received being. This being can only be one. On the other hand, Swinburne's only explanation for there being one God is that it is a simpler theory. However, according to his theory of simplicity, we postulate only as many substances as are necessary to account for the observable data. And, "of course, it is often the case that only a theory that is less than perfectly simple can satisfy the other criteria (for example, explanatory power) for probable truth."³⁰⁵ There would not therefore be a problem in postulating a further substance if this way we account better for what we observe.

And so, when it comes to the problem of evil, which is the main subject of this study, it seems that to postulate a

³⁰³ Cf. Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, II, 2, 994a 1-19.

³⁰⁴ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra Gentiles*, I, 13, par 33.

³⁰⁵ Swinburne, R., *The Existence of God*, 53.

second divine being (i.e. a second God) would provide a hypothesis with much greater explanatory power. It would provide an easy and satisfactory theodicy and it would not go against the criterion of simplicity, which is the only reason that he has for postulating only one God. Now, in our world we observe many good things but also many bad things. We could attribute the bad things to an evil divine being – the way, for example, the Manicheans did³⁰⁶ – as a solution to the great dilemma of how a perfectly good being brings about evil. It should be noted that in *The Existence of God*, Swinburne concedes that evil counts against the existence of God. If therefore we insist that there is only one God, and that it is to him that evil must be attributed, it must be on the basis of a different criterion from the one of simplicity. A metaphysical deduction like the one above provides stronger grounds for holding that there is only one God.

It remains now to consider the precision that the classical philosophers add that the infinite regress that is ruled out is one of essential causes. And here, we may note two essential (metaphysical) differences of God from all other causes: first, that he is uncaused (i.e. he does not receive being from another); secondly, that his causality is transcendental while that of all other causal agents is predicamental. That is, only God can give *esse* to others because *esse* is proper to him (only he is Pure Being). All the other causal agents cannot give *esse* (being) but only *fieri* (becoming). So, the causality of all agents other than God is, at most, that of substantial change.

While the second causes explain the *fieri* of the effect, the uncaused cause accounts for the *esse* of the cause, the causal activity and of the effect itself. Therefore, if a cause exists, it is necessary to go all the way back to a First Cause which

³⁰⁶ Cf. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, II.II, q.25, a.5, co.

makes it to be: the cause of the being of things and of all created effect.³⁰⁷

The following considerations will make the above points clearer: While we praise Michelangelo for ‘creating’ the *Pieta*, it is clear that we speak in a different way from when we speak of God creating the universe or anything in it. Creation by God is traditionally referred to with the formula ‘ex nihilo’. What this means is that before God creates something, there isn’t anything and then by a simple act of the will the thing comes to be. To create from ‘nothing’ does not mean that the material from which God creates is ‘nothingness’, since nothingness does not exist. That is, God gives *being* to something that previously *was* not. God did not create the universe from anything. On the other hand, Michelangelo needed a block of marble to make the *Pieta*. The block already *was* (i.e. had being) in a different way and Michelangelo makes it *be* in another way.

According to Swinburne, saying that the *Pieta* was made by Michelangelo would be a sufficient explanation of its existence (otherwise we would fall into the completist fallacy). Such an explanation however would only account for how the *Pieta* came to be a *Pieta* (i.e. its way of being or essence) and not its being (existence). It would explain its becoming (*feri*) and not its being (*esse*). Similarly, although Swinburne suggests that the complex physical universe could have formed from matter rearranging itself in various combinations, even if God did not exist,³⁰⁸ we can still ask how this matter came to be. The matter already *was* (existed). Therefore, whatever agent or process that may have combined the matter in the various ways and steps in order for it to develop into the differentiated complex universe did

³⁰⁷ González, A. L., *Teología Natural*, 93.

³⁰⁸ Cf. p. 99.

not give it *esse* but only *fieri*. There is still room for asking who or what gave being to the matter that rearranges itself. Swinburne's method however does not allow him to go further and for that reason considers it absurd to think that there could ever be "explanations of such things as the origin of our galaxy."³⁰⁹

In conclusion, if we have a necessary starting point for an argument, it is possible to reach a necessary conclusion. In other words, it is possible to construct a deductive proof. For the arguments to the existence of God, we have such a starting point in the being (*esse*) of the things which is universal, evident and necessary. If on the other hand we have phenomena for our starting point, we cannot expect to reach a necessary conclusion. Since Richard Swinburne's arguments start from phenomena, it is to be expected that they only arrive at a probable conclusion. However, it is clear that if we do not limit ourselves to phenomena, our reason should be able to reach greater heights and infer the necessary existence of the Pure Being from whom all things have received their being. Moreover, if we followed Swinburne's procedure consistently, postulating a second 'divine Being' responsible for evil would be a simpler theory than postulating only one. That we do not must follow from something more compelling than simplicity (e.g. metaphysical deduction).

e) Conclusion

In conclusion, Swinburne's work about the attributes and existence of God has received wide-ranging evaluation. I

³⁰⁹ Swinburne, R., *The Existence of God*, 76.

have highlighted only some of this. The aim of this chapter has not been to discuss exhaustively Swinburne's categories of God and arguments for the existence of God but to place his views on divine providence in context. I have highlighted various inadequate aspects of his treatment of the divine attributes. I have suggested that these shortcomings lead to an inadequate conception of God's providence.

I have noted that the divine attributes that he proposes are limited by requiring them to be coherent with what we can expect of the persons that we know (i.e. human persons). Is the being with such attributes God or is he simply a superman? Furthermore, given the inadequacy of the categories of God, a pertinent question that results is one that was suggested by Richard Swinburne himself: is such a God worth of worship and is he the God believed in by Christianity and the other Western religions? With respect to the proofs of God's existence, which as I have reported Swinburne considers cannot be demonstrative but only probable, should one be expected to offer unconditional and complete worship to a God that only probably exists?

I have on my part suggested, like many philosophers in the classical and Christian traditions, that the way to follow is to seek a demonstration of the existence of God. There does not seem to be any weighty motive for abandoning the classical view that this is possible. By restating this classical view and comparing it with Swinburne's theory of explanation, it has become clear that the human quest for explanation of everything that exists asks for more than a probable explanation. Moreover, once we attain the certainty of God's existence through a demonstration or any other way (e.g. by faith), the problem of evil presents itself in a different form: it will no longer be a cause of doubt about God's existence although it will still present some questions that will need answers.

Therefore, a change from the inductive-logical approach of confirmation theory to a more metaphysical approach would give Swinburne better results about the attributes of God and about the fact of his existence. In the same vein, William Hasker suggests that the failure of Swinburne's apologetic program for Christianity is not owed to the Christian doctrine itself. Rather, he argues, all attempts to defend complete worldviews by Swinburne's approach would face the same fate.

The moral to be drawn is not that Christianity is unworthy of acceptance, but rather that human beings who wish to reach conclusions about the general character of life and the universe are best advised to employ some method other than Swinburnean confirmation theory.”³¹⁰

³¹⁰ Hasker, W., «Is Christianity Probable? Swinburne's Apologetic Programme», 257.

II. THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

In the previous chapter, I have presented Swinburne's conception of the divine attributes. I have earmarked some limits that he places on the attributes and suggested that they will equally limit the divine providence. I shall likewise propose, in this and the following chapters, that the recuperation of some notions from the classical metaphysical tradition is necessary for a proper understanding God's providence, which is the divine attribute that is the subject of this study. In this chapter, I shall discuss the problem of evil, which for Richard Swinburne is the principal theme of divine providence.

I shall begin by presenting his understanding of divine providence and his statement of the problem of evil (in Section 1). Since he proposes a theodicy because he believes that the hitherto suggested Christian theodicies are not adequate, I shall, before I proceed to his own theodicy, present his consideration of these theodicies (in Section 2). I shall then examine some of the logical and philosophical implications of his response to the 'atheist's argument (in Section 3). In this same section, I shall present a summary of other contemporary views about the problem of evil. I shall go on to deal with the main issue that arises from this chapter (i.e. the concept of good and evil that he uses) in Chapter III. The alternative concept of good and evil that I shall propose

in the third chapter should be able to provide a basis for a more satisfactory theodicy.

1. Providence: What a Good God Would Do

God, who is all-powerful and perfectly good, has created and sustains the “Universe with its billions of galaxies, each with billions of stars, many of them probably orbited by smaller and colder bodies which we call ‘planets’...”¹ God has also created animals and human beings to inhabit the planet Earth. There may also be animate beings on other planets, but of them we have as yet no knowledge. Swinburne notes that the traditional theist believes that God has created and sustains all these wonders for supremely good purposes.²

The theist believes that some of these good purposes have already been realised while others are yet to be realised. Some of them will be realised in this life and others in the life to come. In short, God foresees and meets the needs of his creatures. This is what Christian theism refers to as God’s providential care for the world. Some of the good purposes of God concern all creatures or all humans, and these are referred to as his general providence. Others concern particular individuals and these are referred to as his special providence.³

Thus, God’s providence stems from his goodness, which in turn depends on his freedom and knowledge. God

¹ Swinburne, R., *Providence and the Problem of Evil*, ix.

² Cf. *Ibid.*

³ Cf. *Ibid.*

being “[a] perfectly free person will inevitably do what he believes to be (overall) the best action and never do what he believes to be an (overall) bad action.”⁴ And since he is omniscient, he will always have true beliefs about what is good.⁵ God is therefore perfectly good. It is because of his perfect goodness that God will always seek to provide his creatures with the good things that they need. And being omnipotent, he will always be able.

However, if this is the case, why is it that the world contains much suffering and other evil? That this is so is quite evident to everyone.⁶ If there were a God, who was good and provident, he would seek to prevent all this evil. And if there were a God, who was omnipotent, he could prevent all this evil. The conclusion that there is no God seems to be justified. Christian tradition has throughout its history strived to respond to this problem in order to avoid such a dramatic conclusion. Swinburne also endeavours to provide a response.

Apart from the above basic considerations, Swinburne’s account of divine providence consists almost entirely in his response to the problem of evil. Other themes that have been traditionally dealt with under providence are not given considerable attention by him as themes of providence. He either considers them in his discussion of the attributes of God (e.g. creation) or as independent arguments for the existence of God (e.g. miracles). He deals with some of these themes extensively while he mentions others just in passing. I shall return to these other themes of providence later on. For now, in order to give a complete picture of his

⁴ Swinburne, R., *Is there a God?*, 12.

⁵ Cf. *Ibid.*

⁶ Cf. Swinburne, R., *Providence and the Problem of Evil*, ix.

view on God's providence, I shall summarise his response to the problem of evil.

I have noted that, for him, divine providence consists in the goodness of God, who prepares and avails good things to his creatures. Being omniscient and omnipotent, he will provide them with the best goods possible. Why then is there evil? He responds to this query by developing a theodicy. He does this by making a list of goods (dozens of them) and giving arguments (for each good) why we should all consider them as goods.⁷ He then goes on to make a list of evils and to give arguments (for each evil) why they are necessary and what good(s) they make possible. He tries to show that a number of the goods that the evils make possible are of a great value to us (often greater than it seems at first sight).⁸ Finally, he tries to show that the final outcome of the combination of the goods and evils is positive.⁹

Of the eleven arguments which Swinburne considers in *The Existence of God*, two of them have to do with divine providence and the problem of evil. He calls the first one 'The Argument from Providence'¹⁰ and the second one 'The Problem of Evil.'¹¹ These arguments basically follow the steps summarised in the above paragraph. In the former, he takes note of the fact that the world in which we live has many opportunities for us to do much good. These necessitate the occurrence of many evils. However, this occurrence of evil widens our range of significant choices and this is a further good.

⁷ Cf. Swinburne, R., *Providence and the Problem of Evil*, Part II.

⁸ Cf. *Ibid.*, Part III.

⁹ Cf. *Ibid.*, Part IV. I shall present and discuss his theodicy in greater detail in Section 3.

¹⁰ Cf. Swinburne, R., *The Existence of God*, Chapter 10.

¹¹ Cf. *Ibid.*, Chapter 11.

This argument from the opportunities we have for making significant differences I call the argument from Providence. The world in which we are placed is in this all-important respect providential... However, these opportunities to make significant differences require the occurrence of actual evils, and the possible occurrence of many more evils; and the question inevitably arises of whether a good God would be right to give us these opportunities in view of the evils they bring with them.¹²

That is, we can make significant differences by the choices we make in order to provide for ourselves and for others. The actual world is made in such way that this is possible. Swinburne emphasises especially that this world gives us a wide range of choice: we can choose from both good and bad (including wrong) possibilities. We live in “an environment where geography provides dangers, food is limited, there are predators and other humans compete with us for things that will satisfy our desires.”¹³ These provide us with opportunities to make significant choices on whether to learn or not about how the world works, do science or not, gradually improve or worsen our character, co-operate with other human beings or not, benefit others or harm them, be slothful or not, and so on.¹⁴ In this argument, Swinburne suggests that we are more to expect such a providential world if God exists than if he did not.

In the latter argument (*The Problem of Evil*), he gives reasons why granting these opportunities which necessitate the occurrence of evil is compatible with God’s goodness. He admits however that the argument from evil counts against the existence of God. His view is that the difficulty is not in justifying the occurrence of evil and the kinds of evil but the

¹² Ibid., 219.

¹³ Ibid., 220.

¹⁴ Cf. Ibid., 221-227.

amount that actually occurs.¹⁵ He thinks that theism would need some additional theses in order to be able to withstand the challenge of the problem of evil. He says that Christian theism provides these theses (e.g. that God compensates with heaven those in whose life evil outweighs the good; that God becomes man and shares in our suffering).¹⁶ However, he considers that adding further theses to 'bare theism' makes it less simple and therefore less probable.¹⁷

It can be seen that, for Swinburne, the consideration of God's providence and goodness arises within the context of the justification of theism. In this context, the problem of evil (i.e. the objection, given the occurrence of evil, to the existence of an omnipotent and perfectly good being) immediately comes to the forefront. Hence, the problem of evil is, for him, the central theme of divine providence. I have thus presented an overview of his argument for the existence of God (in Chapter I) in order to give the context within which his discussion of the problem of evil arises. A main consideration of his argument for the existence of God is that there is no way of demonstrating the existence of God. For, if we could demonstrate the existence of God, the occurrence of evil would not suggest his non-existence.¹⁸ Swinburne, on the other hand, believes that the existence of God can be shown only through a cumulative consideration of all the arguments in favour and against. One of these is the argument from the occurrence of evil. He considers it to be the only weighty argument that has been proposed against the existence of God.

¹⁵ Ibid., 263.

¹⁶ Ibid., 266.

¹⁷ Ibid., 265.

¹⁸ Cf. Davies, B., *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion*, 2004, 211.

The above is Swinburne's account of divine providence. I believe that, although it is quite simple, it captures what is essential about providence. St. Thomas Aquinas also principally considers providence as availing means (useful goods) to the subjects of providence for obtaining their ends (ultimate goods).¹⁹ The difference, and what I shall suggest to be main deficiency of Swinburne's account, is his failure to consider the finality of the goods. Hence, trying to find an adequate concept of good for a proper understanding of providence and a satisfactory theodicy will be the principal task of the present work. Although this may depart from the usual treatment of the topic of providence, it is not a deviation from it but rather a consideration of what is essential to it.

2. Theodicy in the Christian Tradition

Swinburne considers his theodicy to be in continuation with the Christian tradition although he declares clearly that he intends to formulate it in his own way. He says: "I shall want to use many of the various strands in the Christian tradition of theodicy, emphasizing some and downplaying others, in the articulation my own theodicy."²⁰ He adds that he will also use the Christian understanding of what is good and bad for the inanimate world and for human and animal life. In *Providence and the Problem of Evil*, he discusses at length the themes of the fall of Adam, the free will defence and *privatio boni*. Other themes of theodicy that he mentions briefly include the much greater good that the

¹⁹ Cf. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, q.22, a.1, co.

²⁰ Swinburne, R., *Providence and the Problem of Evil*, 44.

Incarnation brought about; the value of suffering for humans; and the embodiment and finitude of humans.

Concerning several issues, he believes that his position is in line with the most genuine and authentic tradition while the positions that have become generally accepted in Western theology and philosophy are a diversion from the original Christian thought. On some of these occasions, he claims that the authentic Christian tradition has been upheld and continued in the Eastern tradition. It is necessary, before I present his theodicy, to present his views about the theodicies in the Christian tradition. This will show why he thinks that he needs to provide another version of Christian theodicy. Below, I shall present the major themes of theodicy in the Christian tradition that he considers and the repercussions of his way of considering them on his own theodicy.

2.1 Privatio Boni

Swinburne says that *privatio boni* is a doctrine according to which “the bad is simply imperfection, the absence of some sort of good.”²¹ He says that it is a form in which Christian writers of different epochs have expressed the view that it is logically impossible for God to prevent the occurrence of all bad states since any world is bound to lack some sort of perfection. Prior to this affirmation, he tries to show the error of those writers that claim – in response to the ‘atheist’s argument’ against the existence of God – that it is logically impossible for God to prevent all bad states.²² He

²¹ Ibid. 31.

²² Cf. Ibid. 8.

says that it is highly “implausible to claim that pain and other suffering, bad desires, wicked acts are just an absence of some good.”²³ He adds that he suspects that most writers in the *privatio boni* tradition were half aware of this since they often combined this view with the view that God brought about the bad for the sake of some good which could not otherwise be realised.

He notes that this view came to Christian doctrine from Neo-Platonism. He traces it from Plato through Pseudo-Dionysius up to St. Thomas Aquinas. He says that writers who sustained this doctrine thought that “each thing belongs to a kind (participates in a Form essential to it) and the bad consists in not being a perfect specimen of the kind.”²⁴ He quotes St. Thomas as saying that nothing that exists is called evil insofar as it is a being, but rather insofar as it lacks some being.²⁵

It seems to me that Swinburne’s presentation of the matter is not accurate, nor does it do justice to Aquinas. For example, right in the article previous to the one Swinburne quotes, Aquinas says:

Again, according to the Platonists, who, through not distinguishing primary matter from privation, said that matter was non-being, goodness is more extensively participated than being; for primary matter participates in goodness... but it does not participate in being, since it is presumed to be non-being...²⁶

²³ Ibid. 32.

²⁴ Ibid. 31.

²⁵ Cf. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, q.5, a.3, ad 2.

²⁶ Ibid. q.5, a.2, ad 1. Also, in the same article quoted by Swinburne (ad 3), Aquinas indicates that he has a different view from that of the Platonists.

Here, Aquinas is arguing that although being and goodness in reality are the same, they are different as ideas and that the idea of being is prior to that of goodness in thought. My point however is to show that he did not take up the neo-platonic doctrine in its entirety but only what he considered to be true and useful to his system. This may also be seen from another text where St. Thomas says: “[This] manner of speaking is common among the Platonists, with whose doctrines Augustine was imbued; and the lack of advertent to this has been to some an occasion of error.”²⁷

It should however be noted that, although Aquinas picked the concept of participation from the Neo-Platonists, he greatly modified it. Ángel L. González, following Cornelio Fabro, considers that by combining the best from Plato and Aristotle, St. Thomas was able to reach a notion that became the turning point of his philosophical system:

By combining the platonic principle of *perfectio separata* with the Aristotelian principle of act, St. Thomas carries out the convergence and identity of the *esse subsistens* (platonic) and the Pure Act (aristotelic) such that God’s own ‘position’ has to be characterised as *Esse est*.²⁸

The writers in the *privatio boni* tradition were not only half aware that evil was not just absence of good but in fact did not take it to be that. Neither do they consider pain to be the absence of pleasure nor bad desires, wicked acts, etc. just an absence of good. St. Thomas understands evil not as the absence of any good but of one that is due. He states this explicitly on various occasions and indeed Swinburne seems to be aware of it but brushes it aside as if it were not consequential. For example, St. Thomas says:

²⁷ Ibid., II.II, q.23, a.2, ad 1.

²⁸ Cf. González, A.L., *Teología Natural*, 120-121.

As was said above, evil [implies] the absence of good. But not every absence of good is evil. For absence of good can be taken in a privative and in a negative sense. Absence of good, taken negatively, is not evil; otherwise, it would follow that what does not exist is evil, and also that everything would be evil, through not having the good belonging to something else; for instance, a man would be evil who had not the swiftness of a roe, or the strength of a lion. But the absence of good, taken in a privative sense, is an evil; as, for instance, the privation of sight is called blindness.²⁹

While Swinburne quickly dismisses the doctrine of *privatio boni*, I shall later propose that it would solve some of the difficulties that arise while he presents his theodicy. I shall for example argue that goods are not beliefs that we have a priori but must be in reference to some appetite. I also believe that he does not satisfactorily explain why the frustration of a given good is an evil, given that the absence of good is not an evil. On the other hand, I shall try to show that the doctrine of *privatio boni* provides Aquinas and other thinkers a tool with which to respond to these difficulties.

Let me return to Swinburne's claim that writers in this tradition thought "that each thing belongs to a kind (participates in a Form essential to it) and the bad consists in not being a perfect specimen of the kind." Indeed, it is this view that I defend in the present study³⁰, not however in the Platonic sense but in the Aristotelian sense. In the latter sense, the form is a constitutive principle of the thing, while in the former it exists independently in the world of ideas, which would be the real world. It is in this Aristotelian sense that St. Thomas offers the example which Swinburne uses to illustrate his point. Thus, blindness in the eye is an evil

²⁹ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, q.48, a.3, co. Other places include: q.48, a.1, ad 2; q.48, a.5, ad 1; q.49, a.1, co.

³⁰ Cf. Chapter IV, especially Sections 2 and 3.

because it consists in the absence of a proper perfection; and a man is evil because there is absence of due order in the goods he chooses. What is surprising however is that Swinburne seems to defend the same point that he denies here when he considers the criterion of simplicity and how we explain the different phenomena. He says: “it is a fortunate fact, which I shall be going on to emphasize quite a lot, that objects fall into kinds whose members all behave in the same way.”³¹ It is indeed evident that all things belong to a certain nature and operate according to the nature they have. What remains is for Swinburne to incorporate this concept of nature into his philosophical framework.

His view about *privatio boni* manifests the rejection of the teleological concept of nature by modern philosophy. It is impossible to conceive the idea of *privatio boni* without the teleological concept of nature. As earlier mentioned, *privatio boni* does not refer to the absence of any good. Rather, “evil is the absence of the good, which is natural and due to a thing.”³² Each nature has a proper good, that is, each nature comprises of a group of perfections which make it a principle of specific operations that lead to the attainment of certain goods. This is what Aristotle refers to as the proper function of a nature.³³

Absence of any perfection or property would prevent a nature from attaining fully this good to which it is directed. This would be an imperfection, an evil. And if the imperfection is such that the nature cannot attain its ultimate good, it would be an absolute evil. Therefore, while the writers in the *privatio boni* tradition may have admitted that God brought about the bad for the sake of some good which

³¹ Swinburne, R., *Is there a God?*, 23.

³² *Ibid.* q.49, a.1, co.

³³ Cf. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, I, 7, 1097b 24-30.

could not otherwise be realised, they also considered that the different goods were relative to a supreme good that was proper to each nature. God could not will the evil of missing the ultimate good. In fact, only a free and intelligent being can miss its ultimate good – and this because it freely chooses to – while the other beings necessarily attain their good. Only the loss of this ultimate good for which the nature was intended would be an absolute evil. I must note that when I speak of ‘nature’, I am referring to a thing that exists but only use ‘nature’ in order to refer to its principle of operation.

The concept of evil as *privatio boni* does not fit in Swinburne’s system because as I have highlighted, he rejects the teleological concept of nature. The rejection of *privatio boni* in turn leads him to consider evil as having real being and free will to be a choice between two pre-existent realities (i.e. a choice between good and bad). His concept of freedom makes the real existence of evil indispensable. According to his concept, if natural evil did not exist, man could not choose between good and evil and so free will would not be possible.

2.2 *Free Will and Grace*

For Swinburne, the ‘free-will defence’ is an essential part for any theodicy. This defence explains why moral evil exists and claims that “the bad states caused (or negligently allowed to occur) by human beings result from their own free choice; and that it is such a good thing that humans should have free will that it is worth the risk that they will abuse it in various ways.”³⁴ He says that this defence has also been

³⁴ Swinburne, R., *Providence and the Problem of Evil*, 33.

central to the theodicies provided by almost all Christian authors with the exception of a few classical Protestant theologians.

He says however, that some Christian theologians who have affirmed ‘free will’ have done so only in the compatibilist sense and not in the libertarian sense.

By an agent having free will in the libertarian sense, to repeat, I mean that which intentional action he does is not fully caused – either through some process of natural causation (i.e. in virtue of laws of nature) or in some other way (e.g. by an agent such as God acting from outside the natural order)... The compatibilist sense of ‘free will’ has been expounded in various subtly different ways, but the basic idea is that someone has free will in this sense if they do what they want and value (and do not act in consequence of psychological or physical pressure), even if they are fully caused to want and value what they do.³⁵

Swinburne notes that in the compatibilist sense, an agent may have free will “even if God (or any other cause) causes him (via causing him to want and value what he does) inevitably to make the choices he does.”³⁶ He says that, in the libertarian sense, such an agent would not have free will. His view is that the natural primitive understanding of ‘free will’ is as libertarian free will, while the compatibilist sense is a sophisticated less natural sense.

Our movements are not free if someone causes us to make them – my movement of my hand is not free if someone else moves it for me. But if someone else (or something else) causes those movements, they are not intentional actions of ours, i.e. caused by our wills. Analogously, our will is not free if someone or something else causes us to will as we do – whatever the way that cause operates (e.g. whether via

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid., 34.

causing us to will what we value, to will what we do not value).³⁷

He is of the view that if humans had free will only in the compatibilist sense, the free-will defence would be an uphill task. He thinks that the “free-will defence clearly becomes more plausible if ‘free will’ means libertarian free will.”³⁸

Further on, he says that while it is not always clear what various theologians meant when they ascribed ‘free will’ to humans, we should assume, “unless the context positively suggests otherwise, that when an ancient theologian ascribes to humans ‘free will’ and thereby seeks to excuse God from responsibility for our bad actions, he is ascribing libertarian free will.”³⁹ Taking this consideration into mind, according to Swinburne’s assessment, Eastern Christian theologians have always believed in human free will in the libertarian sense, while in the West, all in the first four centuries and most Western Catholic theologians from Duns Scotus onwards. He however says that St. Augustine, at least in his later writings, seems to believe that humans have free will only in the compatibilist sense. He says that it is unclear to him whether Western theologians subsequent to St. Augustine and before Duns Scotus in general believed in libertarian free will. He adds that it is however clear that “the greatest one, St Thomas, was ambivalent on the issue.”⁴⁰

For the present discussion, which is about the problem of evil and the responses that Christian tradition has along its history provided, I do not think it necessary to carry out a historical study about the exact senses in which the different

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 35.

authors have understood freedom. Moreover, the application of libertarian or compatibilist labels, which are contemporary categories, to mediaeval authors may be anachronistic. It is however important that I make the point that St. Thomas believed that humans had free will in the full sense, and that his position is not ambivalent. Given however that I shall rely greatly on his doctrine when I come to consider the concept of freedom in the last chapter, I shall here limit myself to citing the *Prologue* to the *Secunda Pars* of the *Summa Theologiae*, which contains his most systematic treatment of human actions:

Since, as Damascene states (*De Fide Orth.* ii, 12), man is said to be made in God's image, in so far as the image implies "an intelligent being endowed with free-will and self movement": now that we have treated of the exemplar, i.e. God, and those things which came forth from the power of God in accordance with His will; it remains for us to treat of His image, i.e. man, inasmuch as he too is the principle of his actions, as having free-will and control of his actions.⁴¹

I wish now to return to Swinburne's objection that human actions would not be free if we claimed that they are caused by God. St. Thomas and many of his contemporaries defended the view that there is nothing that has being that has not received it from God (i.e. everything that is has been caused by God).⁴² Similarly, some contemporary authors have insisted that if we accepted that God did not cause free human actions, we would be ceding in an important point concerning divine creation. Anthony Flew, for example, insists that the doctrine of divine creation "requires that, whether or not the creation had a beginning, all created beings – all creatures, that is – are always utterly dependent upon God as their sustaining cause. God is here the First

⁴¹ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, II, Prooemium.

⁴² Cf. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra Gentiles*, III, 67, 3.

Cause in a procession which is not temporally sequential.”⁴³ Brian Davies suggests, in response to those that defend libertarianism that the view that free actions are caused by God does not imply a contradiction.

If ‘X is caused by God’ entails that X cannot be a free action, then it does. But theists do not have to accept this entailment, and they have reason for refusing to do so. For how do we proceed when deciding whether or not people have acted freely on a given occasion? We look to see if there is any identifiable thing in the world which has impinged on them to determine their behaviour. But God, by definition, is not such a thing. If classical theists are right, he is the cause of there being such things and the cause of them continuing to be. And if that is what God is, then it makes sense to say that his being the cause of human actions need not render such actions unfree.⁴⁴

Davies goes further to argue that according to classical theists, God is the necessary condition of the being of things and their being what they are. This means that God is also the necessary condition of the being of free actions and of their being free. Herbert McCabe explains that “[the] creative causal power of God does not operate on me from outside, as an alternative to me; it is the creative causal power of God that makes me *me*.”⁴⁵

I shall continue later on with the issue of how God causes free actions without their ceasing to be free. While, I agree with Davies’ and McCabe’s explanations, I think that

⁴³ Flew, A., *Presumption of Atheism*, London: Elek/ Pamberton, 1976, 88.

⁴⁴ Davies, B., *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion*, 2ed. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1993, 43. I use both the second and third editions because both of them contain interesting insights. Although Davies has substantially revised the third edition, he does not seem to take any contradictory position to what he says in the second edition.

⁴⁵ McCabe, H., *God Matters*, 2ed. London; New York; Continuum International Publishing Group, 2005, 13.

they do not respond fully to Swinburne's objection. For, I quoted Swinburne earlier as saying that:

By an agent having free will in the libertarian sense, to repeat, I mean that which intentional action he does is not fully caused – either *through some process of natural causation (i.e. in virtue of laws of nature)* or in some other way (e.g. by an agent such as *God acting from outside the natural order*)...⁴⁶

From this, it can be seen that Swinburne's objection has two parts: the first part is 'through some process of natural causation (i.e. in virtue of laws of nature).' McCabe and Davies, following St. Thomas' doctrine, respond to this by showing that God does not cause human willing through laws of nature. They argue that he does not act on the human will externally, in the manner that natural laws affect things in the universe. They explain that God continually gives free actions their being and their nature. That is, God causes free actions to *be* and to *be free*.⁴⁷ The second part of the objection is the one of God 'acting from outside the natural order.' Davies and McCabe do not respond to this. It would seem that this part of Swinburne's objection refers to the other way that Christian theologians have argued that God moves men to act. According to Christian doctrine, God moves men to act by grace and this is outside the natural order. Rather, more precisely, God through grace elevates the human nature to a supernatural order.

The difficulties that Swinburne refers to in the second part of his objection, then, seem to be a result of what Christian doctrine teaches about grace and its relation with man's freedom. Indeed, how this relation is has been a

⁴⁶ Swinburne, R., *Providence and the Problem of Evil*, 33. The emphasis by italics is mine.

⁴⁷ I shall present further considerations by McCabe and Davies about this first part of the objection when I discuss the nature of moral evil later on.

controversial question throughout the history of Christianity. The problems may even be greater if one seeks a purely rational explanation, since the action of grace belongs to the order of faith. Christian writers have sought to give rational explanations while keeping in mind (as a starting point) what the faith says. They operate on two different levels: the natural level and the supernatural level. They do not always make the distinction explicitly since ultimately they are speaking about man who remains a unity. Nevertheless, they consider the Christian man to have two principles of operation: the human nature (i.e. a gift received at creation), which is what pertains to the scope of this study, and the supernatural or divine nature (i.e. a gift received in the Sacrament of Baptism), which I consider to belong to the scope of theology.

The transformation of a man on becoming a Christian is a central topic of all the Christian theologians although there are different emphases. They consider that man is ‘divinised’ or ‘deified’ and becomes capable of “divine actions” on receiving Baptism and other Sacraments. Although it is a theological issue, I wish to dwell on it a little more since it will allow me to consider the notion of ‘nature’ as a principle of operation, which during the development of my thesis, I intend to show to be ‘a missing link’ in Swinburne’s system toward an adequate concept of the good.

The divine nature present in a man (as a principle of operation) makes him capable of actions that he would otherwise not be capable of; actions beyond the human capacity and therefore called supernatural actions. Hence, the action of grace is considered to be an elevation. Man can desire (want) goods that he would otherwise not have desired; goods that would be beyond his aspirations.⁴⁸ The fact is that

⁴⁸ Cf. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I,II, q.110, a.2, co.

none of the authors who say that God moves people to act (to want and value some things, as Swinburne says) in a certain way ever says that God can move a human being to do evil. Neither does it seem that God ever causes anyone to do good necessarily since it is common Christian doctrine that this divine life (grace) remains in a man only as long as he wants. Rather, St. Thomas says that “grace does not destroy nature but perfects it.”⁴⁹ It is clear therefore that grace is a new principle of good actions that God gives to those who are already disposed to do good in order to help them do more good than they would be naturally capable of.

In a way, this theological concept is like the answer to Aristotle’s dilemma, whereby the life that he considered to be most perfect for man seemed nevertheless impossible. After describing what he considers to be the most excellent activity of man, he adds:

But such a life would be too high for man; for it is not in so far as he is man that he will live so, but in so far as something divine is present in him... But we must not follow those who advise us, being men, to think of human things, and, being mortal, of mortal things, but must, so far as we can, make ourselves immortal...⁵⁰

Thus, Aristotle thought that even though it were not possible to attain the perfect life, men should not desist from striving for it. He thought that the life according to virtue was a way of immortalising himself (i.e. of participating in the divine life) and that this was the best that a man could do in this life. On the other hand, this Christian doctrine seems to suggest a way that a man can be divinised through the direct help by God. Hence, St. Thomas speaks of imperfect and

⁴⁹ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, q.1, a.8, ad 2.

⁵⁰ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, X, 7, 1177b 26-32. The comments that I make with respect to this text include ideas taken from discussions with Prof. Ana Marta Gonzalez.

perfect happiness.⁵¹ The former would be the happiness that man can attain through nature (the life of virtue), while the latter would be the one attained with the help of God (the life that culminates in the beatific vision). In the same vein, Jacques Maritain notes that “nothing is more human than for man to desire naturally things impossible to his nature,”⁵² since the human nature is not closed up in matter but is “infinetized by the spirit.”⁵³ He says that the human intellect thirsts for being and being is infinite.

Maritain further notes that to say that our intellect naturally desires to see God is to say that it naturally desires a knowledge of which nature itself is incapable. “According as it reaches thus for an end which transcends every end proportioned to nature, the desire to see God is an ‘inefficacious’ desire – a desire which it is not in the power of nature to satisfy...”⁵⁴ Hence, inasmuch as the human desire moves toward an end which is beyond the end for which the nature of man is constituted, it is *transnatural*. But inasmuch as it emanates from human nature, it is a *natural* and necessary desire. He concludes that:

it is necessary that by some means (which is not nature) it *be able* to be satisfied, since it necessarily emanates from nature. In other words it is necessary that an order superior to nature be possible in which man is capable of that of which nature is incapable but which it necessarily desires.⁵⁵

Thus, according to Aristotle, the ultimate end of man is a supernatural end (i.e. it is beyond his natural reach). It could likewise be said that St. Thomas’ argument, as synthesised by Maritain, is a rational argument for the

⁵¹ Cf. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I.II, q.3, a.2, ad 4.

⁵² Maritain, J., *Approaches to God*, 98.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 99.

existence of a supernatural order. Maritain however is more cautious:

Thus the argumentation of St. Thomas in the question 12, a.1, of the *Prima Pars*, establishes rationally the *possibility*, I do not say of the *supernatural order* such as the faith presents it to us and as it implies the specifically Christian notion of grace, but of *an order superior to nature*, the notion of which remains still indeterminate, except in this, that through the divine generosity man can therein be rendered capable of knowing God in His essence.⁵⁶

In conclusion, my intention in this sub-section has been to argue that the doctrine on free will of Western Christian writers between the fourth and thirteenth century, especially St. Thomas Aquinas, is not opposed to an understanding of freedom in a full sense (i.e. man as the principle of all his actions). These writers simply affirm that the human nature and grace are two principles of action in man, not opposed to each other but at different levels. So, when a Christian writer claims that God causes a man to want something, he does not deny that the man has free will but only affirms that, by the man being 'divinised', he has a new principle of action (i.e. the divine nature). And only this way is the man capable of attaining perfect happiness. Hence St. Thomas affirms that "two things are required in order to obtain eternal life: the grace of God and man's will."⁵⁷ Finally, I have tried to set the ground for developing arguments later on – rather for recovering the Aristotelian concept – in favour of the idea of 'nature', as the principle of

⁵⁶ Ibid., footnote 3.

⁵⁷ St. Thomas Aquinas, «The Lord's Prayer», in *The Aquinas Catechism: A Simple Explanation of the Catholic Faith by the Church's Greatest Theologian*, Manchester, New Hampshire: Sophia Institute Press, 2000, 132.

all operations and as necessary for a proper concept of the good.

2.3 *The Fall*

Theology has given much prominence to Adam, the first human, as the source of much of the world's evil. Swinburne attributes this largely to St. Augustine. He contends that many of the aspects of this doctrine, also commonly known as the doctrine of original sin, are not part of the authentic and universal Christian doctrine but are later developments of Western Theology. A clear sign that the *Fall* of Adam has not been considered to be at the centre of the Christian faith, he says, is its lack of explicit mention in the Christian Creeds. He strives to demonstrate – in my view, without much success – that this doctrine has not been central to the universal Christian doctrine. This is not the place to carry out a historical study of the doctrine. I shall however only note, first that there are many central Christian doctrines that are not mentioned in any of the common Christian Creeds – not even implicitly (e.g. the Eucharist). Secondly, Baptism which is explicitly mentioned in the Creeds is considered in the Christian tradition to be first and foremost the removal of the original sin.

He notes that according to the doctrine of original sin, there are three effects of the first sin committed by Adam: proneness to death, suffering and sin. St. Augustine adds a fourth one: guilt of all men. Augustine's claim receives outright rejection from Swinburne "on moral grounds [since] I cannot be guilty in respect of the sins of another."⁵⁸ With

⁵⁸ Swinburne, R., *Providence and the Problem of Evil*, 41.

regard to the first two effects of Adam's sin, he is willing to admit that death and suffering are results of Adam's sin only on the condition that this is to be understood in such a way that the immortality and impassibility of Adam were only due to a temporary intervention by God. In this case, the effect of Adam's sin was to stop God's supernatural intervention on behalf of man. This has in fact been the reading by most Christian writers including – as Swinburne notes – Augustine, Aquinas and Scotus.⁵⁹

He rejects the third effect, that is, the claim that Adam's sin caused the proneness to sin both of Adam and later men. He says that Augustine and almost all who followed him in Western Christendom until the last two centuries held that Adam's sin caused our sinfulness (i.e. the bad desires, proneness to do wrong) and his own sinfulness which he did not have before. He suggests that even if we were to admit that Adam had been supernaturally given a temporary non-proneness to sin, as in the cases above of suffering and death, the claim would be open to an initial difficulty not raised by the first two claims: "how, if he had no active bad desires, could he have sinned?"⁶⁰

The problem here is the view of Adam that Augustine had. Swinburne believes that this was different from that of most theologians that preceded Augustine as well as theologians in the East later than him. He says that this view, of an Adam that was a perfect man without significant proneness to sin, began with St Athanasius and "reached its extravagant fullness in Augustine."⁶¹ Let me note that these are two great figures that represent, one the Eastern and the other, the Western traditions of Christianity. I think that it

⁵⁹ Cf. *Ibid.*, 38.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 38.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 39.

would be an uphill task to show that it is their position that is opposed to the Christian tradition and not his. Swinburne seems to claim that Pelagius better represents the Western Christian tradition when he laments that in the West they chose to follow Augustine rather than Pelagius.⁶²

With regard to the Eastern Christian tradition about whether Adam's sin caused our sinfulness, he adduces two authorities of two 'important doctrinal statements' of the Orthodox Church. While this is not the place to carry out an exegesis of the texts, it seems to me clear enough that both of them support the doctrine he criticises.⁶³ He concludes his discussion of the *Fall* by suggesting that we should consider the Genesis story as merely describing an incident in early history without enormous cosmic significance. Alternatively, he adds, some early Fathers, like Gregory of Nyssa, considered it not as history but as a representation by a myth of the state of each one of us.

With regard to the view of Adam that theologians before Augustine had, the only authority he presents is that of St. Irenaeus. He quotes Irenaeus as saying: "man was a child, not yet having his understanding perfected. Wherefore he was easily led astray by the deceiver."⁶⁴ In my opinion, these words do not in any way indicate that man had any proneness to sin. They speak about man's imperfect understanding in comparison to that of 'the deceiver' but do not mention anything about his will or desires, wherein would lie his sinfulness. To sin is to want something that should not be wanted. In addition, when we do something bad, we always do it because we are pursuing a good. We pursue it because

⁶² Cf. *Ibid.*, 40.

⁶³ Cf. *Ibid.*, 39, footnotes 22 and 23.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 39.

reason presents it as a good. This is explained by St. Thomas Aquinas in the following way:

[Since] every inclination results from a form, the natural appetite results from a form existing in the nature of things: while the sensitive appetite, as also the intellective or rational appetite, which we call the will, follows from an apprehended form. Therefore, just as the natural appetite tends to good existing in a thing; so the animal or voluntary appetite tends to a good which is apprehended. Consequently, in order that the will tend to anything, it is requisite, not that this be good in very truth, but that it be apprehended as good. Wherefore the Philosopher says (Phys. ii, 3) that 'the end is a good, or an apparent good.'⁶⁵

It could therefore be said that Adam, on being tempted by a higher intelligence, failed first in the intelligence (by thinking that God could be mistaken or deceiving) and then sinned only the moment he desired that which he now thought was good. At this moment sin entered in the world. Furthermore, we can only speak of proneness to sin after we have a record of several occasions of sin: if someone never sinned, we could never say that he is prone to sin. We know that after his first sin (i.e. in his current state), man sinned continuously and felt himself inclined to do evil. This is what the doctrine of original sin explains and it does this by referring to a state to which philosophy has no access; that is, man's state at creation.

It can therefore be seen that Swinburne has problems with the doctrine of original sin mainly because of the Adam that is presented in this doctrine. He presents some arguments to show the weakness of the doctrine but above all tries to show that it has not had a central place in the Christian tradition. The Adam in a state of 'original righteousness' presented by Athanasius and Augustine does not have bad

⁶⁵ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I.II, q.8, a.1, co.

desires; and this for Swinburne is inadmissible because “we cannot knowingly do wrong in the absence of bad desires.”⁶⁶ According to his concept of freedom, for man to act with serious free will, he must have bad desires and that he must have a choice between good and bad. These I shall discuss more fully later on when I deal with the concepts of good and freedom.

As a conclusion to this sub-section, I wish to note that the doctrine of original sin is an explanation in the Christian faith of the condition of man. It is a theological doctrine that makes reference to an original condition in which man was before his current state, something that is not within the reach of philosophy. I mean, for example, that if man previously had the so-called praeternatural gifts, there is no way that philosophy or science could prove or disprove this. But this doctrine also tries to account for man’s current condition: it says that the inclination to do evil that is present in man – and which is evident to us – started after the *Fall* of the first man and was passed on to all his descendants in their nature (rather than by nurture). It is a fact (i.e. man’s tendency to evil) with which we are confronted currently and so to which philosophy has access. Philosophy therefore can reflect on it and find additional explanations. But again, I think that it cannot prove or disprove the theological explanation, which is based on the same event to which philosophy has no access. Two important philosophical points however arise from Swinburne’s consideration of this doctrine: his view that evil must have existed previously if the first man were to exercise free will; secondly, the role that he gives to desires in human action. These two points will be central to the later discussion.

⁶⁶ Swinburne, R., *Providence and the Problem of Evil*, 38.

3. Weighing Good against Bad: Swinburne's Theodicy

'*Weighing Good against Bad*' is the title of the concluding chapter of Swinburne's *Providence and the Problem of Evil* and it completely reflects his entire theodicy. Thus he says: "I emphasize continually throughout the book that goods and evils have to be weighed against each other..."⁶⁷ I hereby (under this title) wish to present a summary and discussion of his theodicy. In general, Swinburne has exposed his theodicy as one among other arguments in favour or against the existence of God. Thus, the first edition of *The Existence of God*⁶⁸ is his first detailed account of the problem of evil and of the theist's response to it. This culminated in the publication of *Providence and the Problem of Evil*, the last piece of his tetralogy on philosophical issues in the Christian doctrine. He has also published some minor works on the problem of evil (e.g. *The Problem of Evil*;⁶⁹ *Knowledge from Experience and the Problem of Evil*;⁷⁰ *Does Theism Need a Theodicy*⁷¹).

⁶⁷ Swinburne, R., «Reply to Richard Gale», *Religious Studies* 36 (2000) 224.

⁶⁸ Swinburne, R., *The Existence of God*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1979, Chapter 11.

⁶⁹ Swinburne, R., «The Problem of Evil», in Brown, S. C. (ed.), *Reason and Religion*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977.

⁷⁰ Swinburne, R., «Knowledge from Experience and the Problem of Evil», in Abraham, W. J. and Holtzer, S. W. (eds.), *The Rationality of Religious Belief*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987, 150-168.

⁷¹ Swinburne, R., «Does Theism Need a Theodicy», *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 18 (1988) 287-311.

His doctrine on what should be a successful defence of God in the face of evil has undergone some minor modifications over time. For example, like Swinburne acknowledges in *Providence and the Problem of Evil*, he changes in this work his earlier accounts of why natural evil is necessary for our knowledge.⁷² He modifies this account once again in the second edition of *The Existence of God*.⁷³ In addition, he has over time conceded more ground to the atheist's argument from evil to the extent that he admits, in the second edition of *The Existence of God*, that it is a good C-inductive argument (i.e. it counts against the existence of God).⁷⁴ However, I agree with Swinburne that his view has been constant in its main facets. He says:

Although my views on many minor matters involved in the argument of the first edition of *The Existence of God* have changed, I remain convinced of the correctness of its general approach to the topic, and of its resulting conclusion. A diligent student of the earlier editions will, however, detect marginally more sympathy for the argument from evil against the existence of God, balanced by marginally greater confidence in the force of the argument from moral awareness for the existence of God (and also considerable confidence in the force of an argument from the miracle of the Resurrection of Jesus...⁷⁵

As earlier highlighted, he considers that if one is not provided with a satisfactory theodicy, one is justified to deny the existence of God. For, God is presented by Western religion as an omnipotent, omniscient and perfectly good being. Whereas there may be other rational responses for preventing the inference of God's non-existence from the existence of evil, he believes that the majority of us need a

⁷² Cf. Swinburne, R., *Providence and the Problem of Evil*, 177.

⁷³ Cf. Swinburne, R., *The Existence of God*, 236, footnote 1.

⁷⁴ Cf. *Ibid.*, 266.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, preface.

theodicy.⁷⁶ For him, a theodicy consists in an account of possible reasons that God has for allowing a bad state to occur.⁷⁷ On this, he differs from Plantinga for whom ‘theodicy’ means the actual reasons that God has for allowing evil to occur. He says that what he calls ‘theodicy’, Plantinga and many other writers call a ‘defence’.⁷⁸

3.1 The Existence of Bad States: Terminology Used

Swinburne says that although the ‘problem’ which *Providence and the Problem of Evil* deals with “is called ‘the problem of evil’ (and so those words form part of the title of this book) it is really the problem of bad states of affairs...”⁷⁹ Before I delve into his theodicy, it seems to me pertinent that I should present briefly some of the terminology that he uses.

Although Swinburne does not reject the traditional terminology in which the ‘good’ is contrasted with the ‘evil’, he prefers to contrast the ‘good’ with the ‘bad’ “when talking about the actions of agents and their characters, and also when talking more generally about states of affairs...”⁸⁰ He uses ‘states of affairs’ in the widest sense to include the things that happen to people as well as their intentional actions. He thinks that an agent of very bad actions and character is appropriately called evil. He thinks however that it is odd to call pain and other suffering, which are bad states of affairs, evil, even if an agent allowing them to occur would

⁷⁶ Swinburne, R., *Providence and the Problem of Evil*, 17.

⁷⁷ Cf. *Ibid.*, 15.

⁷⁸ Cf. *Ibid.*, footnote 8.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

be doing an evil act.⁸¹ On the other hand, in Part III of *Providence and the Problem of Evil*, he divides the bad states into the two traditional groups of ‘moral evils’ and ‘natural evils’. It seems therefore that he would accept to use the terms ‘bad’ and ‘evil’ interchangeably (even though he believes that it is odd in some cases).

Apart from the above case where the adjective ‘moral’ distinguishes a certain kind of bad states from others (moral evil from natural evil), he also uses the term ‘moral’ in a wider sense. He says that in this wider sense, ‘moral’ means ‘overall’ or ‘overriding’. Thus, “a morally good act is one which is overall a good act.”⁸² It might be bad from some points of view, but if it is overall a good act, it is morally good. “A morally bad act is one which is overall bad; and among such acts are ones which are wrong, i.e. obligatory not to do.”⁸³ And a morally good (bad) state of affairs is one that it is overall good (bad) that it occur.⁸⁴ In this wider sense, which is the one used in his theodicy unless specified, natural evils would be included among morally bad states. He says that he maintains this double usage of the term ‘moral’ in order to keep in line with its common usage in current philosophical literature.

When Swinburne speaks about ‘good’ or ‘bad’, unless he specifies, it is about what is ‘objectively good’ or ‘objectively bad’. He explains the difference of these from subjectively good (bad) acts:

An act is objectively good (bad) if it is good (bad) in its nature or consequences, apart from what the agent believes about it. But an act may have a nature or consequence of

⁸¹ Cf. *Ibid.*

⁸² *Ibid.*, 5.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ Cf. *Ibid.*

which the agent is ignorant. An act is subjectively good (bad) if its agent believes that it is good (bad) in nature or consequences... A subjectively perfectly good agent will do many subjectively good acts and no subjectively bad acts. Such an agent notoriously may do many acts with many bad consequences, unforeseen by him but foreseeable by more knowledgeable agents.⁸⁵

However, God being omniscient will know all the consequences of his actions which it is logically possible for him to know. And from Swinburne's understanding of God's omniscience, God will not know incorrigibly the consequences of all actions. He will however know the consequences that actions are likely to have. Swinburne thus notes that in a more precise use, he understands 'objective goodness' in a different way from the above definition. The precision he makes is that the goodness of an action with respect to "its consequences is a matter only of its objectively likely consequences, not its actual consequences."⁸⁶ Besides, not every act which has some predetermined bad consequences is objectively a bad act. Therefore, God is an objectively perfectly good agent and so will do many objectively good acts and no bad acts.

3.2 A Reply to the Atheist's Argument

The atheist believes that the world has some bad states which are incompatible with the existence of God. He therefore affirms that God does not exist. As earlier highlighted, Swinburne thinks that according to the Principle of Credulity, the atheist is justified to believe so unless by a

⁸⁵ Ibid., 6.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

rational explanation he is made to believe otherwise. Moreover, he concedes to the atheist that “[our] understanding of an agent being good would be gravely deficient unless we thought that, other things being equal, a good agent will stop pain and other suffering, if he can do so easily.”⁸⁷

The onus therefore is on the theist to produce such an argument. “[In] the absence of positive evidence of sufficient strength for the existence of God, we need some reason for doubting the strength of the original atheistic inference in order to continue justifiably to believe.”⁸⁸ Throughout the Christian tradition, different theodicies in response to this challenge have been formulated and Swinburne wants to continue in the same line by providing his own theodicy. He says that his theodicy assumes that God has done and will do all the things that Christian revelation claims.

Swinburne notes that the atheist’s argument is initially in the form of an apparently deductive argument. In *Providence and the Problem of Evil*, he presents the atheist’s argument as follows:

1. If there is a God, he is omnipotent and perfectly good.
2. A perfectly good being will never allow any morally bad state to occur if he can prevent it.
3. An omnipotent being can prevent the occurrence of all morally bad states.
4. There is at least one morally bad state.

So (conclusion): There is no God.⁸⁹

⁸⁷ Ibid., 23.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 24.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 7.

Swinburne does not deny that the argument is valid. So he goes ahead to consider whether each of the premises is true. He notes that *premise 1* is the basic content of what theists usually affirm that God is. He says that God's goodness cannot be understood as other than moral goodness because in that case, the existence of pain and other suffering would not be an objection to the existence of God. There is a problem, he says, only because it is bad for an agent who can prevent the existence of bad states to allow them to occur.⁹⁰ He thus concludes that *premise 1* of the atheist's argument is true. *Premise 4*, he notes, is obviously true. Then he goes on to argue that the objection that some theists have made to *premise 3*, saying that an omnipotent being can do only what is logically possible and that to prevent all morally bad states is not logically possible, is not plausible. It is clear that God could have created a world in which "conscious beings are predetermined to live lives of unalloyed pleasure."⁹¹ He adds that it would not be logically possible to prevent all morally bad states only if the bad were understood not as moral badness but as "*privatio boni*, taken simply as the absence of some good... since whatever world God makes, he can always make a better one."⁹² *Premise 3* must therefore stand.

At this stage, firstly, I wish only to refer to the discussion of the concept of *privatio boni* in the previous section, where I have noted that his presentation of this concept is not accurate. Secondly, let me take note of this important position that Swinburne takes: that God's goodness must be moral goodness. This will form a principal part of the later discussion. For now, I shall continue with his argument. Up to this point, he has defended the veracity of

⁹⁰ Cf. *Ibid.*, 4.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁹² *Ibid.*

premises 1, 3 and 4 of the ‘atheist’s argument’. He says however, that the normal challenge to the argument and by far the most plausible is to *premise 2*. He believes that it is this premise that makes the argument not to be a sound deductive argument. He argues that *premise 2* is false because:

it is not always a bad act to bring about or to allow to occur a bad state of affairs. For it may be that the only way in which an agent can bring about some good state is by bringing about first (or simultaneously) some bad state, or by allowing such a state to occur...⁹³

So he suggests that the atheist should amend *premise 2* and present it as follows:

A perfectly good being will never allow any morally bad state E to occur if he can prevent it, unless (i) allowing E to occur is something which he has the right to do, (ii) allowing E (or a state of affairs as bad or worse) to occur is the only morally permissible way in which he can make possible the occurrence of a good state of affairs G, (iii) he does all else that he can to bring about G, and (iv) the expected value of allowing E, given (iii), is positive.⁹⁴

Swinburne adds that he will sometimes summarise the amended *premise 2* as: “A perfectly good being will never allow any morally bad state to occur if he can prevent it – except for the sake of a greater good”⁹⁵. This seems to follow directly from the new *premise 2*: From (ii), it is apparent that the perfectly good being seeks G because it is a better state of affairs than the one that would hold if E was not allowed. The same is manifest from (iv) since the occurrence of G despite E is expected to give a positive value. Nevertheless, he

⁹³ Ibid., 10.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 13.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 13.

emphasises that he will always imply the carefully spelt out formulation above.

The amendment of *premise 2* leads to an amendment of *premise 4* in order to incorporate the new conditions. In the new argument, the theist now accepts *premise 2* but denies that *premise 4* is true. Now the new *premise 2*, if true, will be a necessary truth because moral judgements, if true, are necessary.⁹⁶ Earlier, I presented Swinburne's arguments that *premises 1* and *3* are necessary truths since they simply make explicit what is contained in the terms God, omnipotence and goodness. Therefore, whether the new 'atheist's argument' is sound, turns solely on whether *premise 4*, which is a contingent matter, is true. So, in order to respond satisfactorily to the atheist, the theist has to show that *premise 4* is not true. He will do this by showing that conditions (i) – (iv) are "probably satisfied in respect to all the world's morally bad states."⁹⁷ If he does this, he will have provided an adequate theodicy.

Now, the atheist's claim that there is at least a bad state *E* which does not fulfil the conditions (i) – (iv) will be of two kinds. It may depend solely on necessary moral truths or on both necessary and contingent issues. For example, he may claim that God does not have the right to cause a child to suffer for the sake of some good however great. In this case, his objection turns solely on whether a proposed moral principle is a necessary moral truth or not. Alternatively, the atheist may point out that, although God may be justified to permit that a child suffer under certain contingent conditions,

⁹⁶ Later when I present Swinburne's concept of good, I shall note that he considers statements about the good (bad) to be necessary if true.

⁹⁷ Swinburne, R., *Providence and the Problem of Evil*, 15.

such conditions do not in fact hold. In this case, the truth of *premise 4* turns on both necessary and contingent issues.⁹⁸

In summary, Swinburne considers that his theodicy, which is principally developed in *Providence and the Problem of Evil*, is concerned with first: arguing that if *premise 2* is to be true, it must be in its new carefully formulated form that he proposes.⁹⁹ The second step involves showing that the new *premise 4* is false (i.e. that there is no bad state which does not fulfil conditions (i) – (iv)).¹⁰⁰ He does this by providing a list of the good things that a good God would want to give to his creatures especially man; showing that these would not be possible without God allowing some evils to occur (i.e. that the evils are necessary); claiming that God has a right to allow these evils; and showing that the final outcome is positive.¹⁰¹

3.3 *Questions that Arise from Swinburne's Theodicy*

It is necessary to reflect on Swinburne's consideration of *premise 2*. It is important first of all to consider whether the terms in which the new *premise 2* is formulated are fair and acceptable (to the atheist and to other theists). After this, it will also be necessary to consider the content of the new *premise 2*. With regard to the content of the new premise, there are difficulties that arise regarding the attributes of God. Further, the new formulation states that a good God may not

⁹⁸ Cf. *Ibid.*, 17; 20.

⁹⁹ Cf. *Ibid.*, 9,

¹⁰⁰ Cf. *Ibid.*, 15.

¹⁰¹ Cf. *Ibid.*, x.

allow a morally bad state (an evil) unless he has the right. Two questions arise: Can anyone have the right to cause or allow evil (a morally bad state) to occur? And, is there anything that we can say that God has no right to do?

Moreover, at the core of the new formulation – and of the theodicy that Swinburne develops in response to it – is the position that the evil that occurs in the world is necessary since certain goods would not be possible without some evil. The main question that arises is: Given that no good is necessary, as he notes in his argument against the doctrine of *privatio boni*, why would God be bent on realising a good that necessarily implies an evil? Besides, Swinburne believes that given these modifications to *premise 2*, he can justify each and every morally bad state that occurs in the world. However, even while accepting that God has the ‘right’ to permit the evil, it seems to me that some questions could still be raised on whether all the evil that God permits is necessary: Are natural evils for the sake of some good, and if so, couldn’t this good be achieved in some other way? And, if evil is for the sake of goods (if the only reason why evil occurs is because of goods that would be missed and no other reason), why then isn’t it proportionally distributed?

a) The Terms Contained in Premise 2

Swinburne argues that *premise 2* in the original atheist argument is not true and proposes an amended form in which he considers it to be true. My discussion here is concerned with the linguistic or logical consequences of introducing the proposed amendments. I shall consider two alternative courses to be followed. The first one is to show that given his definitions, *premise 2* is true and therefore in no need of

amendment. The second one is to show that if we were to admit Swinburne's amendment and use his definitions consistently, *premise 2* would acquire a tautological form.

In the first alternative, it should first of all be recalled that Swinburne presented *Premise 2* in the original argument as follows: "A perfectly good being will never allow any morally bad state to occur if he can prevent it." Now following Swinburne's terminology, a 'morally bad state' is a state that it is bad overall that it occur. An overall bad state may have some positive aspects but on the balance, it is bad that it occur. On the other hand, a 'morally good state' may be bad from some points of view but it is overall (on balance) good that it occur.¹⁰² Thus, the bad state in question may be the pain of undergoing a surgical operation but if it brings with it good health, then it is a morally good state. If on the other hand the surgical operation will be very painful and expensive and will not greatly improve the health of the subject, it may seem that it is overall bad. It may therefore be better not to have it. The atheist's claim that 'A perfectly good being will never allow any *overall* bad state to occur if he can prevent it' seems therefore to be true.

I should however make a precision here. I say that *premise 2* is true if we use Swinburne's terms and concepts consistently. From my own conception of good and evil, the atheist's claim (*premise 2*) would not be true with respect to moral evil. Indeed, from my point of view, moral evil is evil absolutely (in Swinburne's terms, it is 'overall' bad that it occur) yet God allows it to occur. I shall say more about this later on when I propose a line of theodicy with respect to moral evil. However, the bad states that are the subject of this claim seem to be pain and suffering (i.e. natural evils) and for that reason Swinburne concedes to the atheist that "[our]

¹⁰² Cf. *Ibid.*, 5.

understanding of an agent being good would be gravely deficient unless we thought that, other things being equal, a good agent will stop pain and other suffering, if he can do so easily.”¹⁰³ Moreover, for Swinburne, although moral evil includes cases in which humans do what they believe to be bad but no suffering results, it first and foremost refers to pain and suffering which are deliberately or negligently caused by humans.¹⁰⁴ Hence, he thinks that the paradigm properties for overall goodness or badness of actions are causing pleasure or pain.¹⁰⁵ I believe that if we limit the bad states to natural evils (pain and suffering) and use Swinburne’s terms consistently, then *premise 2* of the atheist’s argument is true.

The second alternative involves considering what would happen if we accepted the amendments that Swinburne proposes. *Premise 2* originally stated that: “A perfectly good being will never allow any morally bad state to occur if he can prevent it.” This can be restated using other statements commonly used by Swinburne as follows: ‘a perfectly good being is obliged not to allow...’ or ‘It is not morally permissible for a perfectly good being to allow...’ Furthermore, Swinburne points out on several occasions that when he says that someone (e.g. God) ‘has a right to...’, he simply means that it is ‘morally permissible for him to ...’¹⁰⁶ It follows from these considerations that if we accept the amendments that Swinburne proposes, the new *premise 2* will be as follows:

¹⁰³ Ibid., 23.

¹⁰⁴ Cf. Swinburne, R., *Providence and the Problem of Evil*, 4; *Is there a God?*, 97.

¹⁰⁵ Cf. Swinburne, R., *Responsibility and Atonement*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1989, 17.

¹⁰⁶ Cf. Swinburne, R., *Providence and the Problem of Evil*, 5; 11; 223.

It is not morally permissible for a perfectly good being to allow any morally bad state E to occur if he can prevent it, unless (i) allowing E to occur is something which is morally permissible to him, (ii) allowing E (or a state of affairs as bad or worse) to occur is the only morally permissible way in which he can make possible the occurrence of a good state of affairs G...

Clearly, conditions (i) and (ii) cannot be part of the subordinate clause because they are what are contained in the main clause. The two propositions that are completed by (i) and (ii) have the form of: *x* is not unless *x*. It is evident that the amendments introduced turn *premise 2* into a tautological statement. Whereas a tautology is always a true statement, in this case it invalidates the syllogism. The effect of its insertion in the ‘atheist’s argument’ is that Swinburne can now tell the atheist that: ‘bad state *e* is morally permissible to God because it is the only morally permissible way of bringing about good state *g*.’ This is certainly not a satisfactory answer to the atheist’s objection that bad state *e* is not morally permissible to God. Swinburne, on the other hand, considers that he has satisfied the atheist and so can now go on to claim that the bad state *e* is not an objection to the existence of God. He will claim that the same is the case for all or many of the other bad states. As a result, he can now deny *premise 4*, which he had initially said to be *obviously* true. Thus, Atle O. Søvik suggests that the “main claim in Swinburne’s theodicy is that there are no genuine evils.”¹⁰⁷ It is the introduction of this tautological premise that makes it seem possible to deny the obvious universal experience of the occurrence of evil.

¹⁰⁷ Søvik, A. O., *The Problem of Evil and the Power of God*, Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2011, 161.

b) The Principle of Justification: What We can Allow God to Do

After considering the logical concerns, it is now necessary to tackle other issues of a more philosophical nature. The first consideration may be on whether we do not overstep our limits by setting conditions or criteria which God must fulfil if he is to be perfectly good. Paul Draper notes that “many arguments from evil and all theodicies presuppose [...] a ‘principle of divine justification’ – a principle specifying criteria which must be satisfied in order for the occurrence of an evil to be compatible with the existence of God.”¹⁰⁸ In other words, it is a principle that states what we can allow God to do if he is to be considered good. As highlighted, Swinburne’s theodicy includes a principle of divine justification. I shall under the next headings discuss the philosophical shortcomings of this procedure, and specifically, of the difficulties that arise from the criteria set by Swinburne. I shall begin by considering under this heading that these criteria undermine God’s essence.

The claim that God would allow bad states only if he compensated them with good states such that the result would be positive can only be made and defended from a human point of view and with human reasons. The ‘weighing’ must be done from our point of view. This seems to discard an idea that has been important in all the principal theodicies in the Christian tradition: that God’s wisdom is infinitely beyond human wisdom. A situation of the occurrence of a variety of goods and evils, as is the case with our world, suggests that

¹⁰⁸ Draper, P., «Review of Providence and the Problem of Evil», *Noûs* 35 (2001) 456.

we should submit to the divine wisdom. Like Stephen Wykstra suggests:

if we think carefully about the sort of being theism proposes for our belief, it is entirely expectable – given what we know of our cognitive limits – that the goods by virtue of which this Being allows known suffering should very often be beyond our ken.¹⁰⁹

Davies, on his part, notes that “what falls within the plan of an omnipotent, omniscient God will be something understood only by what is omnipotent and omniscient.”¹¹⁰ Hugh J. McCann makes the same point when he says that “an all-powerful, all-knowing and all-loving God could easily have aims exceeding any we have ever imagined.”¹¹¹ That is, we should not expect to be able to have in consideration all the factors that God would consider in permitting any suffering, if it is that he considers any factors. It is no wonder that Swinburne, when discussing how much and what kind of free will God should give humans, admits that he has “no easy algorithm for working out which kind of free will is the best to have.”¹¹²

Besides, it seems, given the proposed amendments, that the goodness of God would be a result of his capacity to calculate with precision on all occasions the balance between goods and evils. It would not be an intrinsic goodness but rather a technical goodness (i.e. like a sharpness of mind). Moreover, it seems that in order to affirm the existence of God, we would have to claim that there is a perfect balance of good and evil in the world. And as I shall later be pointing

¹⁰⁹ Wykstra, S., «The Humean Obstacle to Evidential Arguments from Suffering», 91.

¹¹⁰ Davies, B., *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion*, 1993, 40.

¹¹¹ McCann, H. J., «Divine Providence», URL = <<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/providence-divine/#LogConIndEvi>>.

¹¹² Swinburne, R., *Providence and the Problem of Evil*, 87.

out, we would also have to show that this is the case for each individual person. But by claiming that there is a perfect balance, we would in a way deny the individual experiences of evil.

From the above, it can be seen that while we initially spoke of ‘a perfect being who would never...’, the being whom we now have in the amended *premise 2* is not a perfect being. He is neither infinitely wise nor perfectly good. This is neither the kind of being that Western religion calls God nor the kind of being to whose existence the atheist initially objected. Earlier, while discussing the logical implications of Swinburne’s amendments, I made the clarification that I believed that *premise 2* of the original ‘atheist’s argument’ was true if Swinburne’s terms were used consistently but not from my own conception of good and evil. For, I believe that the atheist’s *premise 2* and Swinburne’s amended *premise 2* are two extremes that do not offer an adequate account of the experience of evil and of the transcendence of God.

It should be possible to find a middle ground that does not compromise either God’s transcendence or the experience of evil. From the above, it may be seen that theodicies which presuppose a ‘principle of divine justification’ inevitably end up compromising the attributes of God. David O’Connor, who claims that Swinburne’s theodicy is not successful (especially the view that natural evil is logically necessary in order for human beings to become morally mature and responsible), suggests that the failure of Swinburne’s attempt “may have implications for that approach to theodicy beyond those it has for Swinburne’s own particular version.”¹¹³ I suggest that a complete turn-about with regard to the strategy employed is what is required. I back an account that is both

¹¹³ O’Connor, D., «Swinburne on Natural Evil from Natural Processes», *Philosophy of Religion* 30 (1991) 86.

more metaphysical and experiential: one that would probe into the ontological nature of good and evil, and at the same time examine whether our common intuition indicates an incompatibility of all evils with the existence of God. It is in this same vein that Sam Newland suggests that the definition of evil as *privatio* should be revisited, given that one of the most notable failings of the current approaches to the problem of evil lies in the lack of a clear definition of 'evil'.¹¹⁴

c) Does God Have the Right to Permit Evil?

I shall now consider the concept of 'right'. Is it a divine concept? Can we properly attribute rights to God? This also brings to the forefront the concept of obligation or duty. Can God have obligations? Swinburne explains that all God's obligations are ones he has voluntarily entered into.¹¹⁵ In my view, if someone cannot be brought to task for failure to fulfil a commitment that one has taken up, then it can only be said improperly that he has an obligation. Only those who are at the same level or at a higher level than someone can bring him to task concerning his obligations. Brian Davies suggests that it is not reasonable to claim that God has any obligations:

Could he, for instance, have duties or obligations to himself?
Should he, for example, strive to keep himself healthy?
Should he try not to let his talents or abilities go to seed? One

¹¹⁴ Newlands, S., «Evils, Privations and the Early Moderns», in S. MacDonald and A. Chingell, eds., *Evil*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming, pro manuscripto, 36. Cited in Echavarría, A., «Thomas Aquinas and the Modern and Contemporary Debate on Evil», in *New Blackfriars*, Oxford: John Wiley & Sons, 2013, 733-754.

¹¹⁵ Cf. Swinburne, R., *Providence and the Problem of Evil*, 10.

might say that God has obligations to others: that he is, for example, obliged to reward good people with happiness. But this suggestion also makes no sense. What can oblige God in relation to his creatures? Could it be that there is a law which says that God has obligations to them? But what law? And where does it come from? Is it something set up by someone independently of God? But how can anyone set up a law independently of God? Is God not the maker of everything apart from himself?¹¹⁶

Likewise, rights are prerogatives which members of a community recognise to their equals (the other members) as due to them (as *ius suum*). It is something which the other members of a community recognise as due to one of them and which in turn he is entitled to demand from them. Alfredo Cruz explains the concept of 'right' in the following way:

We should keep in mind that what one has as a right, is not a right by virtue of its materiality, but rather by the relation that it has simultaneously with its possessor and with the others... [It] rests on a relation, which affects that possession: a relation of attribution with respect to the possessor and of demand (claim) with respect to the others... Consequently, to have something as a right... consists in having it in a relative and stable way: counting on its attribution and recognition as proper to one by the others...

To recognise (*reconocer*) something as being proper to someone, as that which corresponds to a subject, presupposes prior recognition of that subject. And to recognise (*reconocer*) a subject... means to know (*conocer*) him as an equal, as another 'I', like one of us...

The existence of a community, the consciousness of something in common, of having a common identity, is the

¹¹⁶ Davies, B., *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion*, 1993, 50.

foundation of the reciprocal recognition. And this recognition is requisite for the recognition of each one's right.¹¹⁷

Since we are no equals of God, we cannot form a community of equals with him, in which there is mutual recognition and demand. We cannot claim any rights from him nor can we concede him any rights. Since God – as the theistic belief holds – has created and ordained all that exists and conserves it in existence, he is clearly in a position different from that of all the rest that exists. It cannot therefore be said that there is anything he is not entitled to. Similarly, Anthony Kenny argues along these lines to show that God cannot form part either of a moral community or of a political community.¹¹⁸

Can Swinburne give an example of anything which God has no right to do? He often gives the example that God has no right to let anyone suffer for too long. And, what is too long? His view is that the human lifespan is a short enough period while a duration longer than that would be too long.¹¹⁹ I should however think that if the atheist agreed with this view, he would not have made any objection against the existence of God in the first place. He would accept that all suffering lasts only a short period for which there is no need to complain. Therefore, if we agree to add condition (i) to *premise 2*, we close the debate right at the start.

A further question is whether anyone can have a right to cause an evil or a morally bad state. From the earlier discussion, I have pointed out that Swinburne considers a

¹¹⁷ Cruz Prados, A., *Ethos y Polis; Bases para la reconstrucción de la filosofía política*, 2 ed. Pamplona: EUNSA, 2006, 335-336. The translation is mine.

¹¹⁸ Cf. Kenny, A., *What is Faith?*, Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1992, 87.

¹¹⁹ Cf. Swinburne, R., *Is there a God?*, 106.

morally bad state to be one that it is 'overall bad' that it occur. In my opinion, someone cannot have the right to allow a state which is bad that it occur when all points of view are taken into consideration. Again, the fact that God allows moral evil to occur shows that the concept of 'right' cannot be applied to him or that for him there is nothing which's 'overall bad'. Moreover, I have also already mentioned that, for Swinburne, to have a right means that something is morally permissible to someone. Therefore, it seems to me a contradiction that it may be morally permissible for someone to allow or cause a morally bad state. If it is morally permissible for someone (i.e. he has the right) to perform some act, then it cannot be a morally bad act!

d) Is Evil Necessary?

Swinburne's amended *premise 2* includes the condition (ii) which states that a perfectly good being will never allow any morally bad state E to occur if he can prevent it, "unless allowing E (or a state of affairs as bad or worse) to occur is the only morally permissible way in which he can make possible the occurrence of a good state of affairs G." In his theodicy, he attempts to show that there is no such bad state. His procedure is as follows: He presents a long list of goods which he considers we would all seek and which a good God would seek to give to man and to other creatures. These, according to him are goods in themselves and are known to us a priori. In order for some of these goods to be realised, it is necessary that some evil first or simultaneously occur. The theodicy therefore consists principally in showing that all the evils that take place in the world are necessary.

That is, he tries to provide a ‘total theodicy.’ Some of his critics claim that he is over ambitious in attempting this.¹²⁰

His view has been referred to as the ‘greater-good-theodicy’ by some of his commentators. Many of them moreover consider this point (that evils are necessary for greater goods) to be the outstanding characteristic of his theodicy. Brian Davies, after going through some of the common contemporary responses to the atheist’s objection to the existence of God in the face of evil, states that a “much more common line of argument, however, is that the existence of some evil is a necessary means to some good. One version of this argument can be found in Richard Swinburne’s book *The Existence of God*.”¹²¹ Atle O. Søvik also says that “Swinburne represents what is often referred to as a ‘greater-good-theodicy.’”¹²²

Both Søvik and Davies think that Swinburne fails to show that all evils that occur are for the sake of a greater good. Davies suggests that many people could argue – and reasonably so – that a paradise, where there would be no suffering, would be better than our world. He notes that it is true that some virtues (e.g. courage, temperance) would probably not be present in paradise. However, he argues, it seems that we would be able to love and do good to others. Wouldn’t such a paradise-world be better than our world? He further notes that there would be no possibility to deal with pain and suffering. “But that would, surely, be a very good thing – better, indeed, than there being a world in which to be

¹²⁰ Cf. Draper, P., «Review of Providence and the Problem of Evil», 456; Søvik, A. O., *The Problem of Evil and the Power of God*, 25.

¹²¹ Davies, B., *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion*, 1993, 33.

¹²² Søvik, A. O., *The Problem of Evil and the Power of God*, 14.

a person is to be involved in a need to struggle to deal with pain and suffering and to overcome it.”¹²³

Similarly, Paul Draper, in his review of Swinburne’s *Providence and the Problem of Evil*, suggests that he fails to justify his claims about free will and about its value for us.¹²⁴ With regard to Swinburne’s claim that the capacity to cause or avoid causing suffering to others gives us responsibility, which is a great good, Draper suggests that:

While our responsibility in a Safe World would not be as great as it is in the actual world, this loss would be offset, not just by the absence of vast amounts of suffering, but also by an increase in the good of autonomy that is made possible when diseases cannot disable us and others cannot maim or kill us, either physically or psychologically.¹²⁵

I suggested in the introduction to this sub-section that the main question that arises from this claim (that evil is necessary) is: given that the absence of good is not evil, why would God seek a good that necessarily implies an evil? Swinburne’s account of why there is evil does not respond to this question. In Chapter III, I shall propose an alternative conception of the good that should be able to respond to this question. For the moment, I shall continue with the other questions that may arise from this claim. The first question is: why doesn’t God ensure an equal distribution of evil among all people? Or, why doesn’t everyone get as much suffering and pain as goods? Our experience seems to show that some people have more than a fair share of suffering while others seem to be overflowing with goods. Swinburne may respond to this by saying that “it is no objection to theism that God

¹²³ Davies, B., *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion*, 1993, 39.

¹²⁴ Cf. Draper, P., «Review of Providence and the Problem of Evil», 458-465.

¹²⁵ Draper, P., «Review of Providence and the Problem of Evil», 467. By ‘a Safe World,’ he refers to a world without suffering.

allowed something bad to occur, in order to achieve some good, when he could have achieved the good by allowing a different but equally bad state to occur instead.”¹²⁶ It may however be argued that the same bad state will not be equally bad if it happens to one who already has a lot of suffering as when it happens to one who has little or no suffering. It does not seem that God would allow so much evil to come to one person while everything he does to realise the good *G* and to ensure a positive balance (which is what conditions (iii) and (iv) demand), he does it to others. What is apparent is that God allows evil according to his freedom and wisdom.

Another question that arises is whether the natural evils (diseases, earth quakes, floods, etc.) that occur in the world are for some good that could not be attained by any other way. Swinburne could respond by saying that these natural evils give us opportunities to exercise great goods like compassion, patience, courage and so on. But then, couldn't these goods be attained by allowing only moral evil and no natural evils? This is an objection that he foresees but I believe that his response is far from convincing. He argues that if God removed natural evil, then he would have to increase greatly the amount of moral evil in order for us to continue having the same opportunities for choices to do good. He thinks that, for this to happen, God would have to increase the inbuilt depravity of humans.¹²⁷ I should think however that, given so much calamities that have been caused by men along history, few would think that human depravity has not reached its zenith (i.e. that humans need to do worse evils than what they have already done in order for them to have more opportunities to do good).

¹²⁶ Swinburne, R., *Providence and the Problem of Evil*, 12.

¹²⁷ Cf. Swinburne, R., *The Existence of God*, 242-243.

A world without natural evil would be like what Swinburne calls the ‘Eden world.’ In this kind of world, our bodies would not be subject to disease or any form of deterioration. Swinburne thinks that in such a world, we would be continually subject to sloth, which he says to be the most dominant temptation for humans. In our actual world, on the other hand, this temptation is under check due to the possibility of decay.¹²⁸ I think however that Paul Draper’s response to this is not off the mark: Draper suggests that in the Eden world “inactivity would not be bad, and so sloth, the inclination to inactivity, would not be a bad desire.”¹²⁹ Besides, there would still be many other things that would stimulate our desire to act (e.g. desire for knowledge, sports).

As an ultimate answer, Swinburne claims that natural evil is necessary if humans are to have free will. They need to be able to choose between good and evil. “Its main role... is to make it possible for humans to have the kind of choice which the free will defence extols, and to make available to humans specially worthwhile kinds of choice.”¹³⁰ His view is that, first of all, we need to have knowledge of the effects of natural evil in order to cause moral evil. Secondly, evil must already exist if we are to choose it. This explanation however involves a conception that grants a positive existence to evil. My view, following St. Thomas Aquinas, which I have already highlighted in the discussion on *privatio boni* and which I shall develop further in the next chapter, is that only good *is*.¹³¹ Moreover, many of Swinburne’s critics believe that he fails in his attempt to extend the free-will defence to natural evil. For example, Paul K. Moser believes that Swinburne’s argument for this is invalid, since “one’s

¹²⁸ Cf. Swinburne, R., *Providence and the Problem of Evil*, 156-158.

¹²⁹ Draper, P., «Review of Providence and the Problem of Evil», 467.

¹³⁰ Swinburne, R., *Is there a God?*, 109.

¹³¹ Cf. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, q.5, a.3, ad 2.

knowing how to bring about moral evil with some action does not entail one's knowing that some action has evil consequences, and thus does not entail one's knowingly bring about moral evil with some action."¹³² Similarly, David O'Connor argues that Swinburne fails to justify his claim that natural evil from natural processes are necessary for moral maturity and choice of destiny.¹³³

In summary, I have under this sub-section endeavoured to show that Swinburne's reply to the atheist is lacking in many ways. I have done this by highlighting some weighty objections that could be raised or that have in fact been raised. But what is the cause of these deficiencies? I suggest that it is his starting point, that is, the concept of the good that he uses. Hardly, however, any of his critics touches this fundamental point. Instead, they direct their objections against individual goods from the list of dozens that Swinburne makes. Each critic selects and deals with one good or another that interests him and tries to show that this good does not have as much value for us as Swinburne claims, or that this good could be had even if God did not permit that evil, or that some evil is pointless (i.e. it does not lead to any good).

It seems to me that by this procedure, it will be impossible to reach rationally a satisfactory theodicy. This procedure requires us to reach a consensus, first of all, on the list of goods, and secondly, on the value of each good to all people and in every circumstance, and finally on whether the sum of goods outweighs the sum of evils. It will be impossible since every author and all of us consider the

¹³² Moser, P. K., «Natural Evil and the Free Will Defense», *International Journal of Philosophy of Religion* 15 (1984) 52.

¹³³ Cf. O'Connor, D., «Swinburne on Natural Evil from Natural Processes», 77.

goods from different points of view. The issue at hand is that, apart from the Ultimate Good, nothing is simply good: everything is good for something. We give value to a good according to the end that we have in mind. This fact – that the good has the nature of an end – is an important point that is lacking in the concept of good used by Swinburne and his interlocutors. Here is the root of the problem and this is where we need to concentrate our forces.

My view therefore is that, rather than arguing about the value that we should attach to each good on the list, the correct strategy is to deal with the issue at its root: examine the starting point (i.e. his concept of good) and propose a more realistic concept of good. This is what I propose to do in Chapter III. Before this however, in the next sub-section, I shall present some views about the problem of evil by some of the important contemporary authors. It will become clear that not only in their criticism of Swinburne's account do they use the same concept of good as him, but also in their own accounts of the problem (and solution).

3.4 Other Contemporary Views on the Problem of Evil

I would like, under this sub-section, to present some views on the problem of evil in the prevalent debate in Anglo-American contemporary philosophy. I believe that the authors that I have chosen are among the principal figures in this debate and that they represent the wide panorama of views on the subject. Like I have noted, the principal problem of Swinburne's theodicy is the concept of good (and evil) that he uses. I hope to manifest the relation of these views with

Swinburne's view: that they are based on the same concept of good as that used by Swinburne. This means that we would have to search for an alternative concept – the need of which I have suggested – elsewhere. I propose in the present study that this alternative could come from the classical-metaphysical tradition and especially from the doctrine of St. Thomas Aquinas. I shall begin by presenting three views that suggest that the problem of evil is an obstacle to rationally holding to theism. I shall then present three different defences of theism that have been proposed. And finally, I shall make a brief evaluation of the whole debate.

a) The Difficulty Posed by Evil to Theism

The problem of evil has appeared in various forms throughout the history of philosophy since Epicurus first posed it. One form, and probably the most radical, is that evil presents a logical problem for theism. This involves an accusation against the theists of being irrational. However, the view that the evil in the world is logically incompatible with theism “has become associated with Hume in virtue of Philo's position in the *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*.”¹³⁴ It is a view, besides, that has been held by several contemporary philosophers like J. L. Mackie, H. J. McCloskey and H. D. Aiken.¹³⁵ The participants in the

¹³⁴ Stump, E., «The Problem of Evil», in Stump, E. and Murray, M. J. (eds.), *Philosophy of Religion: The Big Questions*, Malden (Massachusetts); Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1999, 228.

¹³⁵ Cf. Plantinga, A., «God, Evil and the Metaphysics of Freedom» in Adams, M. M. and Adams, R. M. (eds.), *The Problem of Evil*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990, 83.

current debate normally have as a starting point J. L. Mackie's 1955 article.¹³⁶ Mackie states that:

The problem of evil... is a problem only for someone who believes that there is a God who is both omnipotent and wholly good. And it is a logical problem, the problem of clarifying and reconciling a number of beliefs: it is not a scientific problem that might be solved by further observations, or a practical problem that might be solved by a decision or an action.¹³⁷

So, Mackie claims that there is a contradiction between the propositions 'God is omnipotent,' 'God is wholly good' and 'evil exists,' such that if any two of them are true the third must necessarily be false. He acknowledges however that "the contradiction does not arise immediately; to show it we need some additional premises, or perhaps some quasi-logical rules connecting the terms 'good,' 'evil,' and 'omnipotent.'"¹³⁸

Mackie however modified his position a few years later. In *The Miracle of Theism*, he admits that we cannot take "the problem of evil as a conclusive disproof of traditional theism."¹³⁹ He thus changes his strategy of argument. Similarly, many other atheistic authors have admitted that the existence of evil does not present a logical problem for the existence of God. Hence, Peter van Inwagen can confidently declare that "the incompatibility of evil and God, as far as I can tell, is no longer defended."¹⁴⁰ The turning point seems to

¹³⁶ Cf. Mackie, J. L., «Evil and Omnipotence», *Mind* 64 (1955) 200-212.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 200.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*

¹³⁹ Mackie, J. L., *The Miracle of Theism: Arguments for and against the Existence of God*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982, 176.

¹⁴⁰ van Inwagen, P., «The Problem of Evil, the Problem of Air, and the Problem of Silence», in Howard-Snyder, D. (ed.), *The Evidential Argument from Evil*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996, 151.

have been Plantinga's argument in which he developed his 'free-will defence' and showed that there was no inconsistency in affirming simultaneously the existence of God and of some instance of evil.¹⁴¹

The atheistic writers however still maintain that evil presents an evidential problem for the existence of God. The new strategy is thus to argue that from all the evidence that we have, it is more probable that God does not exist than that he does exist. One of those who present arguments against the existence of God using this strategy is William Rowe. He also admits that there is "a fairly compelling argument for the view that the existence of evil is logically consistent with the existence of the theistic God."¹⁴² He attributes one such argument to Plantinga. Briefly, Rowe states the problem in form of a syllogism:

(1) There exist instances of intense suffering which an omnipotent, omniscient being could have prevented without thereby losing some greater good or permitting some evil equally bad or worse.

(2) An omniscient, wholly good being would prevent the occurrence of any intense suffering it could, unless it could not do so without thereby losing some greater good or permitting some evil equally bad or worse.

(3) There does not exist an omnipotent, omniscient, wholly good being.¹⁴³

Rowe then proceeds to present his famous case of a fawn trapped in a forest fire which undergoes a slow painful

¹⁴¹ Cf. Plantinga, A., «God, Evil and the Metaphysics of Freedom», 83-109; *God, Freedom and Evil*, New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1974, 29-59.

¹⁴² Rowe, W. L., «The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism», in Adams, M. M. and Adams, R. M. (eds.), *The Problem of Evil*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990, 126.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 127.

death. He goes on to argue that this is an example of intense animal suffering that is not for the sake of any greater good that God could not attain without it. He concludes that “[so] far as we can see, the fawn’s intense suffering is pointless.”¹⁴⁴ Therefore, since an omnipotent being could have prevented the fawn’s suffering and it does not seem that it was necessary to attain some greater good or to avoid an equally bad or worse evil, *premise* (1) seems to be true. Rowe admits however that the fawn’s apparent pointless suffering does not prove that (1) is true. Although we do not see how the fawn’s intense suffering is required for some greater good, it does not follow that it is not the case. Nevertheless, Rowe argues, “it is one thing *to know or prove* that (1) is true and quite another thing to have rational grounds for believing (1) to be true.”¹⁴⁵ Thus, we may not be able to prove that (1) is true but in the light of our experience and knowledge, it may be “nevertheless, altogether *reasonable* to believe that (1) is true, that (1) is a *rational* belief.”¹⁴⁶

Since Rowe takes for granted that both the theist and atheist would agree to *premise* (2), he suggests that the only via that remains to the theist is to try to show that (1) is not true.¹⁴⁷ He explores some of the strategies a theist might employ in order to achieve this. Rowe’s view however is that the atheist’s case is stronger than the best of the strategies that the theist could use.¹⁴⁸ He believes however that the atheist should adapt a posture of ‘friendly atheism.’ That is, although the atheist must hold that the theistic God does not exist, he can also believe that some of the other justifications

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 130.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 131.

¹⁴⁷ Cf. Ibid., 132.

¹⁴⁸ Cf. Ibid., 135.

of theism (ontological, cosmological, etc. arguments) do actually justify some theists to believe that God exists.¹⁴⁹

Another atheistic formulation of the evidential problem of evil is that by Paul Draper. He says:

The problem is not that some proposition about pain and pleasure can be shown to be both true and logically inconsistent with theism. Rather, the problem is evidential. A statement reporting the observations and testimony upon which our knowledge about pain and pleasure is based bears a certain significant negative evidential relation to theism. And because of this we have a prima facie good epistemic reason to reject theism...¹⁵⁰

He notes that some philosophers have preferred to argue that the evils in the world create an evidential problem for theism because it fails to explain these evils or most of what we know about them. He says that he finds this procedure attractive since it reflects the intuitions of many people. Nevertheless, he thinks that it is not the best since some philosophers who agree that these evils create a problem for theism do not agree that it is a prima facie reason for rejecting it. Furthermore, it does not seem to be easy to decide on how much and what kind of evil theism needs to explain in order to avoid disconfirmation. Draper prefers to follow David Hume's procedure. The important question that Hume asked, but which most contemporary philosophers have ignored "is whether or not any serious hypothesis that is logically inconsistent with theism explains some significant set of facts about evil or about good and evil much better than theism does."¹⁵¹ In other words, is there a hypothesis such

¹⁴⁹ Cf. *Ibid.*, 136.

¹⁵⁰ Draper, P., «Pain and Pleasure: An Evidential Problem for Theists», in Howard-Snyder, D. (ed.), *The Evidential Argument from Evil*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996, 12.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.* 13.

that we expect more the observations and testimony that we have about pain and pleasure given this hypothesis than given theism? Draper answers in the affirmative. There is at least what he calls ‘the Hypothesis of Indifference’ (HI):

Neither the nature nor the condition of sentient beings on earth is the result of benevolent or malevolent actions performed by nonhuman persons.¹⁵²

Draper considers that by showing that this thesis accounts for more of what we observe than theism does, and yet it is logically inconsistent with theism, he will have shown that theism is not probable.

Let me end by noting that although it is now generally agreed in the mainstream debate that evil no longer presents a logical problem, still there are some who believe that Plantinga’s solution does not close the case. David K. Johnson laments that currently no attention is being paid to the logical problem of natural evil and yet Plantinga did not solve it. “If one examines the literature on the problem of evil, one will see that attention has primarily been reserved for the evidential threat of moral evil; the threat that natural evil poses to theism is often ignored.”¹⁵³ Johnson is ready to concede with regards to the logical problem of moral evil but not with regards to that of natural evil. He thus makes an attempt to reopen the debate. And he is not alone in the enterprise: William Hasker, who proposes an alternative theodicy, does not think that Plantinga’s argument is successful, especially with regard to natural evil. Hasker is

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Johnson, D. K., «The Failure of Plantinga’s Solution to the Logical Problem of Natural Evil», *Philo: A Journal of Philosophy* 15 (2012) 146.

amazed that Plantinga has actually succeeded in convincing most philosophers that his defence is successful.¹⁵⁴

Here is one complication: the free-will defense has shown, we will assume, that the existence of God is consistent with the existence of *moral* evil; that is, with morally wrong choices and actions, and the pain and suffering that flow from them. But what about *natural* evil, evil arising from disease, floods, hurricanes, tornadoes and the like, much of which does not seem to be caused in any way we can understand by human wrongdoing? Is the existence of God consistent with this sort of evil as well?¹⁵⁵

Hasker admits that he does not know of anyone who has shown that there is a logical argument from natural evil, since we now agree that Mackie's effort was unsuccessful.¹⁵⁶ Nevertheless, he thinks that Plantinga's attempt to extend his 'free-will defence' to natural evil is absurd.¹⁵⁷ Hasker feels that "[we] need to find other ways to approach these topics"¹⁵⁸ and this is what he attempts to do in his book *The Triumph of God over Evil*.

b) The Defenders of God Given the Problem of Evil

Having presented the main lines of argument by the proponents of the thesis that evil presents a serious objection to theism, I shall now proceed to consider some responses

¹⁵⁴ Cf. Hasker, W., *The Triumph of God over Evil: Theodicy for a World of Suffering*, Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2008, 63.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Cf. Ibid., 64.

¹⁵⁷ Cf. Ibid., 65.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 73.

that have been given in ‘defence of God.’ Like the atheistic arguments, the responses in defence of God have also followed different lines of argument. Stump and Murray, in their *Philosophy of Religion*,¹⁵⁹ classify them into three: defences, theodicies and alternative perspectives. Defences are considered to be those responses that do not claim to be the true or probable reasons as to why God would permit evil but simply possible ones. On the other hand, theodicies are those responses that propose what they consider to be the true or probable reasons why God would permit evil. There are also other responses that may not fall under neither of the above. This use was popularised by Alvin Plantinga, who in turn attributes it to Henry Schuurman.¹⁶⁰ Richard Gale suggests that Swinburne’s project, *Providence and the Problem of Evil*, “falls between a Plantinga-style defence and theodicy.”¹⁶¹ Swinburne seems to agree that what he offers “is closer to what Plantinga calls a ‘defence.’”¹⁶² He prefers however to call his proposal a ‘theodicy’ because he believes this to be the traditional use of the term.¹⁶³

Alvin Plantinga has offered in various works what he calls a ‘defence’ for God’s allowing evil. Above all, his strategy has consisted in rebutting atheistic proposals and proving that they do not successfully show what they claim. I have already made mention of his argument which proved to be the turning point for the problem of evil in the contemporary debate. Many authors (e.g. J. L. Mackie) had

¹⁵⁹ Cf. Stump, E. and Murray, M. J. (eds.), *Philosophy of Religion: The Big Questions*, Malden (Massachusetts); Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1999, 485p.

¹⁶⁰ Cf. Plantinga, A., «God, Evil and the Metaphysics of Freedom», 108, footnote 22.

¹⁶¹ Gale, R., «Swinburne on Providence», 212.

¹⁶² Swinburne, R., *Providence and the Problem of Evil*, 15, footnote 8.

¹⁶³ Cf. *Ibid.*

hitherto argued that there was a logical inconsistency between the existence of God and the existence of evil. Plantinga notes that obviously the atheistic proponent did not mean to affirm that there was a formal contradiction between the propositions 'God is omnipotent, omniscient and wholly good' and 'There is evil in the world,' but rather that the conjunction of the two propositions is necessarily false (i.e. it is false in every possible world). Thus, through the free-will defence and the use of the logical tool of possible worlds, Plantinga undertakes to show that there is a possible world in which the two propositions are true.¹⁶⁴ He summarises for us his argument in a later article:

Pared to bare essentials, the argument proceeded by pointing out that G seems to be consistent with

(1) God is the omnipotent, omniscient and wholly good creator of the world; and every world God could have actualized that contains less than 10^{13} turps of evil, contains less good and a less favorable overall balance of good and evil than the actual world contains.

But the conjunction of G and (1) entails E; hence by a familiar principle of modal logic, G is consistent with E.¹⁶⁵

Here, G is 'God exists and is omniscient, omnipotent and wholly good' and E is 'There are 10^{13} turps of evil.' 'Turps' is a fictitious unit for measuring evil used by Plantinga and 10^{13} turps is an arbitrarily stated figure of the amount of evil in the actual world. It should be noted that, in his defence, Plantinga does not aim to argue or prove that (1) is true or even plausible but only that it is possible.¹⁶⁶ And if it is possible, then the conjunction of G and E is possible.

¹⁶⁴ Cf. Plantinga, A., «God, Evil and the Metaphysics of Freedom», 83-84.

¹⁶⁵ Cf. Plantinga, A., «The Probabilistic Argument from Evil», 2.

¹⁶⁶ Cf. Plantinga, A., «God, Evil and the Metaphysics of Freedom», 84.

Hence there is no inconsistency between theism and the occurrence of evil.

Subsequently, he tries to extend this argument, which he initially applies to moral evil, to natural evil. He thus argues that, like St. Augustine claimed, natural evil can be attributed to beings that are free and rational but non-human (i.e. devils). As expected, this position is not taken to be serious among contemporary philosophers. “The thought that all natural evil might be caused by fallen angels seems to many a particularly implausible view.”¹⁶⁷ Hasker, for example, comments about it: “I am not sure whether to describe this statement as outrageously funny or as just plain outrageous.”¹⁶⁸ However, for Plantinga, the “Free Will Defender [...] need not assert that this is *true*; he says only that it is *possible*.”¹⁶⁹ And if it is possible, again there is no inconsistency between theism and natural evil. Plantinga notes with satisfaction the success of his effort a few years later. He comments: “More recently, however, those who make an atheological argument from evil have conceded that the existence of evil may be logically consistent with that of God.”¹⁷⁰

After showing that evil presents no logical problem for theism, Plantinga does not rest contented but goes ahead to challenge the new atheistic strategy: that of claiming that evil presents an evidential problem. I have presented above two examples of this kind of argument (by Rowe and Draper). It goes without saying that Swinburne employs the same method, only that he claims that the evidence is in favour of theism. Plantinga does not think that probabilistic arguments

¹⁶⁷ Stump, E., «The Problem of Evil», 229.

¹⁶⁸ Hasker, W., *The Triumph of God over Evil*, 65.

¹⁶⁹ Plantinga, A., «God, Evil and the Metaphysics of Freedom», 108.

¹⁷⁰ Plantinga, A., «The Probabilistic Argument from Evil», 1.

can work in these matters, whether in favour or against theism. Like I mentioned earlier, he claims that there is no way of assigning content and hence a priori probability to contingent propositions in a way that is consistent both with the probability calculus and with intuition.¹⁷¹ Specifically, there is no way of assigning a value to the probability of G given a body of total relevant evidence E.

What the atheologian must show, if he wants to show that there is a viable objection to theism here, is that on some relevant body of *total* evidence – his own, perhaps, or the theist’s, or perhaps a body of total evidence shared by all those who are party to the dispute – G is improbable.¹⁷²

Thus, what I justifiably take to be the probability of G with respect to E depends upon my noetic structure. And so, different people may properly come to different views on this matter.¹⁷³ By the same token, while responding to Paul Draper’s argument that theism is evidentially challenged by the HI,¹⁷⁴ Plantinga asserts that there is no way Draper can prove this. By way of examples, he shows that “every belief of mine that is possible in the broadly logical sense is also evidentially challenged.”¹⁷⁵ That is, a belief *p* that I have may be highly probable with respect to another belief *q* that I have but improbable with respect to a third belief *r* that I have. Plantinga wonders if the fact that *p* is improbable with respect to *r* gives him a *prima facie* reason for rejecting *p*. Hence, he believes that “this method doesn’t resolve or tend to resolve the issue between [the theist and atheist]; nor does

¹⁷¹ Cf. *Ibid.*, 25; 47-48.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, 3.

¹⁷³ Cf. *Ibid.*, 44.

¹⁷⁴ Cf. pp. 193-194.

¹⁷⁵ Plantinga, A., «On Being Evidentially Challenged», 247.

it tend to show that one or the other is suffering from some noetic deficiency.”¹⁷⁶

Another solution to the problem of evil is the one proposed by Peter van Inwagen. He also responds to Paul Draper’s challenge of theism by the HI, which he refers to as “the most powerful version of the ‘evidential argument from evil.’”¹⁷⁷ His view is that “it is false that the defender must either make a case for theism or devise a theodicy.”¹⁷⁸ He seems to concede that there is no way of making a positive case for the existence of God. He thinks however that there is at least one other option:

Suppose that one were successfully to argue that S was not surprising on theism – and not because S was ‘just what one should expect’ if theism were true, but because no one is in a position to know whether S is what one should expect if theism were true.¹⁷⁹

‘S’ stands for a proposition that describes in some detail the amount, kinds and distribution of suffering. Here, we see van Inwagen appeal to what Richard Gale calls the “unsurpassable epistemological gap between God and man,”¹⁸⁰ to which some authors have appealed. On the other hand, like I have noted, Swinburne assumes that in most cases, we know what God is likely to do or what reasons he might have for doing what he does. In other words, for Swinburne, this gap is almost inexistent. van Inwagen’s suggestion is that if the defender of theism had a ‘story’ that accounted for the sufferings of the actual world and which

¹⁷⁶ Plantinga, A., «The Probabilistic Argument from Evil», 45.

¹⁷⁷ van Inwagen, P., «The Problem of Evil, the Problem of Air, and the Problem of Silence», 151.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 155.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid. Here, ‘surprising’ is used with an epistemic value, in the same way that Draper does.

¹⁸⁰ Gale, R., «Swinburne on Providence», 209.

was highly probable on theism, it could serve the purpose of the defence.¹⁸¹ It would undermine the atheist's evidentialist case for the proposition that the probability of S is lower on theism than on the HI. He uses an analogy to present what he has in mind:

Suppose that Jane wishes to defend the character of Richard III and that she must contend with evidence that has convinced many people that Richard murdered the two princes in the Tower. Suppose that she proceeds by telling a story – which she does not claim to be true or even more probable than not – that accounts for the evidence that has come down to us, a story according to which Richard did not murder the princes. If my reaction to her story is 'For all I know, that's true...' I shall be less willing to accept a negative evaluation of Richard's character than I might otherwise have been.¹⁸²

Although the argument that van Inwagen presented in Stump and Murray's *Philosophy of Religion* was classified there as a 'theodicy,' what he proposes here is closer to a Plantinga-type defence. However, there are two notable differences: firstly, while Plantinga compared propositions and tried to show that they were coherent or not, van Inwagen compares 'stories' and shows that they are, or not, in line with the evidence that we have. Secondly, whereas Plantinga's defence was not bothered by whether the proposed thesis was true or not but only required that it be possible, van Inwagen requires that the defence be true 'for all anyone knows.' Peter van Inwagen believes that the theist can find such stories and indeed, van Inwagen offers one.¹⁸³

¹⁸¹ Cf. van Inwagen, P., «The Problem of Evil, the Problem of Air, and the Problem of Silence», 156.

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ Cf. Ibid., 157-164.

Interestingly however, for van Inwagen, in the same way that these stories are ‘true for all anyone knows,’ they may also be ‘false for all anyone knows.’ Accordingly, they will not make us believe that the probability of S on theism is higher than it is on HI. “Rather, the stories will, or should, lead a person in our epistemic situation to refuse to make any judgment about the relation between the probabilities of S on theism and on HI.”¹⁸⁴ So, although I have noted above that van Inwagen appeals to the ‘unsurpassable epistemological gap between God and man,’ he in fact goes farther than this. His position is one that he calls ‘modal scepticism.’¹⁸⁵ He points out that on the basis of this kind of scepticism, he has “argued (and would still argue) against both Swinburne’s attempt to show that the concept of God is coherent and Plantinga’s attempt to use the modal version of the ontological argument to show that theism is rational.”¹⁸⁶

Finally, I shall highlight a few ideas from a view presented by Marilyn M. Adams in her 1989 article.¹⁸⁷ In Stump and Murray’s *Philosophy of Religion*, it is classified as an ‘alternative perspective.’ Like Swinburne and the rest of the authors that I have presented above, she assumes that God, if he is good, would allow only the amount and kind of evil that he is justified to. Her concern therefore, like the others, is whether the evils that God permits ‘defeat’ (i.e. outweigh) the goods, or vice versa.¹⁸⁸ She is specifically concerned about a class of evils that she calls ‘horrendous evils.’ She defines them as “evils the participation in (the doing or suffering of)

¹⁸⁴ Ibid. 156.

¹⁸⁵ Cf. Ibid., 162.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 164.

¹⁸⁷ Cf. Adams, M. M., «Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God», *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, Supplementary Volumes* 63 (1989) 297-310.

¹⁸⁸ Cf. Ibid., 300-302.

which gives one reason *prima facie* to doubt whether one's life could (given their inclusion in it) be a great good to one on the whole."¹⁸⁹ Adams notes that such reasonable doubt arises because it is so difficult humanly to conceive how such evils could be overcome.

Her final solution to the problem of horrendous evil is that the transcendental good of the beatific vision far outweighs whichever other good and evil. This solution however, as theodicy, will do only for those that have the Christian faith. It is true however that her concern is to show that Christianity has internal coherence and so is rational.¹⁹⁰ In addition, she brings to the fore an interesting and important element of theodicy, neglected by most other authors: that it does not do to explain the global picture of evils if this does not provide an explanation for the individual personal experiences.¹⁹¹

c) An Evaluation and the Way Forward

I have presented the summaries of six arguments (three atheistic and three theistic). Indeed, each argument differs from the others in some ways. I would like however, under the present heading, to highlight the similarities. My view is that these authors and Richard Swinburne have more in common than they have in contention and that these similarities are much more problematic than the differences when it comes to the efforts to find a solution to the problem of evil.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 299.

¹⁹⁰ *Cf. Ibid.*, 306.

¹⁹¹ *Cf. Ibid.*, 303.

We may begin by asking ourselves if pain and suffering presents a problem *prima facie*. I do not think that this question should be answered in the affirmative. That is, the answer would not be a clear ‘yes’ but, rather, would require some qualification. It may be noted that it is part of the Christian doctrine that at least some amount suffering is of value. Above all, Christians believe that the suffering of Jesus Christ has played a fundamental role in their salvation. This means therefore that there are many people (i.e. Christians) who do not reject all pain immediately. In the same vein, Eleonore Stump, although she stated in an earlier work that “all human suffering is *prima facie* evil,”¹⁹² seems to modify her view in *Wandering in Darkness*, where she says that “pain is bad *only prima facie*, other things being equal; and other things are not always equal.”¹⁹³ She goes ahead to make us consider that often, “for a variety of reasons, human beings voluntarily submit themselves to pain they could otherwise avoid.”¹⁹⁴ Hence, she thinks that not all pain or suffering requires justification. Moreover, she adds, that what is sometimes involved is acute pain. The subjects voluntarily submit themselves to it because they believe that it is necessary for their flourishing or for a good they care about.¹⁹⁵

On the other hand, the authors above take as a starting point that pain and suffering are rejected *prima facie* and that God who allows them can only do so if he has a good reason. Like Brian Davies notes in the Introduction to McCabe’s *God and Evil*, contemporary discussions are dominated by attempts to give reasons that might justify God or, on the other hand, try to argue that God does not have reason

¹⁹² Stump, E., «The Problem of Evil», 236.

¹⁹³ Stump, E., *Wandering in Darkness*, 5. Italics are in the text.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁹⁵ Cf. Ibid., 11.

enough to cause or permit them. He adds that Herbert McCabe prefers another approach.¹⁹⁶ Hence, for example, Rowe takes it for granted that theists and atheists would agree on his premise (2).¹⁹⁷ Like I noted earlier, Swinburne also begins his theodicy by conceding this point to the atheist.¹⁹⁸ And whereas the authors above mostly refer to ‘intense suffering’ in their arguments, it is not that they think that the small pains or suffering do not need explanation. They simply want to make their arguments more convincing to a greater public. Rather, like Richard Gale, they believe that a ‘theodicy’ (as opposed to a defence) “must show that it is probable that for *each* evil, E, there is a good, G, that satisfies these criteria.”¹⁹⁹ Similarly, the idea that all suffering or pain is bad and that if God allows it, he must be brought to task is shown by the following comment by Gwiazda: “The presence of evil shows that God has not maximized Happiness.”²⁰⁰ Here, ‘Happiness’ is understood as the total absence of suffering. Gwiazda thus suggests that moral failure should be imputed to God.

So, what do the authors above, and in general the participants in the prevalent debate on the problem of evil, suggest? They suggest that if God is to allow any evil, it should be necessary and that he should ensure that the good in the world outweighs the evil. The defenders argue that this is the case, while the accusers consider that it is not. And how do they hope to show this? Their procedure involves the

¹⁹⁶ Cf. McCabe, H., *God and Evil*, 2010, xiv.

¹⁹⁷ Cf. pp. 191-193.

¹⁹⁸ Cf. p. 167.

¹⁹⁹ Gale, R., «Swinburne on Providence», 212. He refers to the criteria that Swinburne says God must fulfil before allowing any evil. The emphasis by italics is mine.

²⁰⁰ Gwiazda, J., «A Reply to Schlesinger’s Theodicy», *Religious Studies* 43 (2007) 485.

comparison of propositions stating the facts. Of the authors presented above, only Marilyn M. Adams seems to be an exception. I have reported that the first strategy was to show that there was a logical inconsistency and this was later changed to the strategy of showing that one proposition was more probable than another. Thus, under the first strategy, Plantinga's response to Mackie's challenge simply involved showing that the conjunction of the propositions G and (1) entailed the proposition E and so by a familiar principle of modal logic, G was consistent with E.²⁰¹ Likewise, under the second strategy, Draper claimed that a "statement reporting the observations and testimony upon which our knowledge about pain and pleasure is based bears a certain significant negative evidential relation to theism."²⁰² The responses to his challenge are likewise in form of propositions or 'stories' that do not have to be true but possible or 'true for all one knows.'

As I have noted, in Plantinga's defence, (1) needed not be true but only possible. This defence convinced most philosophers that evil presented no logical problem. However, it may be asked: does solving the logical problem solve the real problem? Does showing that some propositions are inconsistent get to the real problem? Like it will become clear in the discussion of the ontological status of evil, "there is not always a being in reality that directly corresponds to veridical being which is established in the mind."²⁰³ This likely distance of logical solutions from the real problem is somehow reflected by the following observation by Eleonore Stump:

²⁰¹ Cf. p. 196.

²⁰² Cf. pp. 192-193.

²⁰³ Llano, A., *Metaphysics and Language*, 167; Cf. [discussion on pp. 269-273](#).

The problem with Plantinga's general strategy for the defense of theism against arguments from evil is that it leaves the presence of evil in the actual world mysterious. Plantinga's tendency is to show the weakness inherent in arguments from evil, not to provide a theodicy, and so it yields no explanation for why we in this world suffer from evil if our world is governed by a good God...²⁰⁴

Thus, it seems to me that by restricting themselves to the consideration of evil as a mere phenomenon and not trying to investigate its real nature, these philosophers miss the core of the problem. That is, we may find the solution to the logical problem but if this has little to do with the real problem, like Stump insinuates about Plantinga's solution above, then we shall not have made much progress.

Undoubtedly, the experience of evil presents a problem for all human beings. Like all problems however, we cannot but confront it. And for sure, many people successfully deal with the evils that face them, including the 'horrendous evils.' Success however will often depend on how a problem is approached. Now, in order to be able to take the correct measures against a problem, first of all, the real nature of the problem has to be known. Analogically, we may compare our problem to viruses. The continuous mutation of viruses makes it difficult to know their way of being and this, in turn, makes it impossible to find a panacea for them. Thus, the best way to deal with the problem of evil philosophically is by, first of all, undertaking an investigation of the nature of evil. More urgent than revisiting the logical problem of evil, as David K. Johnson suggests,²⁰⁵ is the examination of the ontological status of evil.

²⁰⁴ Stump, E., «The Problem of Evil», 229.

²⁰⁵ Cf. p. 194.

To be fair to Plantinga, I should note that he himself indicates the way that we should follow. He admits that it is not enough to limit oneself to the examination of the coherence of statements about evil. This is shown by the following comment with which he concludes his response to Draper's challenge:

This brings us to a wholly different set of topics and questions... that take us beyond coherence into the neighborhood of warrant. I believe these are the more important questions here... This question, however, takes us well beyond our present set of questions; it takes us from epistemology into metaphysics.²⁰⁶

Of course, it does not pertain to the present study to examine the kind of metaphysical project that Plantinga may have in mind. It is clear however that he acknowledges that there are more important questions that we need to ask ourselves than those about coherence and that these inevitably take us into the metaphysical arena.

In summary, like Swinburne, these authors consider that there are things (more precisely 'states of affairs') that are *simply* good and others that are *simply* evil. Thus, they take as starting point that pain and suffering are evil. But as I have highlighted (and will discuss further later on), it often happens that people do not take this to be the case. Might there be a concept that may explain better why things are sometimes good (evil) and other times not? In addition, these authors consider that God ought to grant good things and avoid permitting bad things. If he is to permit evil, it must be because there was no alternative and that the final outcome will be positive. Can we really show that this is the case? Is a logical solution to the problem enough? Or, is there a better

²⁰⁶ Plantinga, A., «On Being Evidentially Challenged», 260.

understanding that does not have to subject God to the moral test? A theodicy ought to provide answers to these questions.

Let me recall that I began the present work with St. Thomas Aquinas' thesis that "whoever denies final causality should also deny providence."²⁰⁷ I think that this affirmation is evident, given what providence is, or at least, what both Aquinas and Swinburne take it to be. They consider providence as consisting in the provider availing goods to his dependants in order to satisfy their needs.²⁰⁸ Providence thus refers to the provision of goods in view of a known end. Hence, to try to explain providence while at the same time avoiding any reference to some end is to say the least perplexing. I do not claim that this affirmation is as evident as the first principles but I believe that it follows immediately from the first practical principle.²⁰⁹ Not only providence but also 'good' and 'evil' cannot be understood adequately without reference to an end.

Unfortunately however, modern philosophy has taken the posture of ignoring or rejecting any kind of finality. This is what is at the root of the concept of the good (and evil) used by Swinburne and the authors above. Two main problems that are central to the problem of evil arise from the denial of finality: first is the impossibility of conceiving evil as *privatio boni*; and second is the failure to have the correct perspective of morality, which leads to a consequentialist view of morality and hence the consideration of God as a moral subject.

²⁰⁷ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Quaestiones Disputatae De Veritate*, q.5, a.2, co.

²⁰⁸ Cf. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I, q.22, a.1, co; Swinburne, R., *Providence and the Problem of Evil*, ix.

²⁰⁹ In simple terms, this principle states that only what we consider to be good moves us to act. In Chapter III, I shall present this principle using notions used both in the classical metaphysical tradition and in Swinburne's work.

So, like Aristotle says about the principle of non-contradiction, whereas we cannot demonstrate what is evident, still we may try to give arguments, not aimed at demonstration, but at making the interlocutor admit that he already accepts what you are saying.²¹⁰ This will be the purpose of Chapter III, in which I shall try to show, from ordinary common experiences and from some basic notions from the classical metaphysical tradition, the truth and evidence of St. Thomas' affirmation. I shall show that the goodness of any action or activity is judged from how fit it is for its end. This will have serious implications for the view that God's goodness is moral goodness. Similarly, things are said to be bad or evil not because they have a property of 'badness' but in reference to the perfection that is expected of their nature. I shall thus complete the argument that I began, while refuting Swinburne's objections to the notion of *privatio boni* in the Christian tradition of theodicy. It is necessary that we carry out this metaphysical probe about evil, and from this perspective, try to provide a theodicy. I agree with Agustin Echavarria that if we are able to establish the nature of evil, we may be able to place the ball back in the atheist's court:

Indeed, if the definition of evil is firmly established from the beginning, even before dealing with arguments concerning the 'logical' or the 'evidential' problem of evil, the burden of proof is on the atheist to explain the existence of evil without appealing to the existence of a first principle in the order of good.²¹¹

Echavarria, following St. Thomas, suggests that we would be able to reach this conclusion easily if we were to

²¹⁰ Cf. Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, IV, 4, 1006a 5-15.

²¹¹ Echavarria, A., «Thomas Aquinas and the Modern and Contemporary Debate on Evil», in *New Blackfriars*, Oxford: John Wiley & Sons, 2013, 752.

understand evil as *privatio boni*. And thus, rather than pose an objection to God's existence, evil would confirm his existence. I shall say more about this when I present a possible theodicy in Chapter III.

d) Conclusion

The theodicy which Swinburne offers consists in arguing that *premise 2* of the 'atheist's argument' is not true while conceding *premises 1, 3* and *4*. He thus proposes the amendment of *premise 2* by adding some conditions. I have tried both from logical and philosophical points of view to show that the proposed amendments are not acceptable. Not only do they apply inadequate categories to God, but also are unfair to the atheist. They tie up the atheist at beginning of the contest given that they empty his argument of content. I have besides argued that if Swinburne uses his terms consistently, on one hand, the original *premise 2* turns out to be true without any need of amendments; and on the other hand, the new *premise 2*, if accepted, will be in a tautological form. Since *premise 2* 'resists' amendment, an option that remains open to Swinburne is to admit *premise 2* while rejecting *premise 4*. That is, he would accept that God would never allow any 'overall bad' state and then go on to argue that there is no such bad state in the world.

However, an overview of the conceptions and methods used in the prevalent debate on the problem of evil shows that many views that make Swinburne's project of offering a satisfactory theodicy difficult are not proper to him. Rather, they form part of the philosophical context within which he operates. This is what has become manifest from the brief study of the views of the principal participants

in the current debate on the problem of evil. It is true, I have noted, that there are differences among the authors. The similarities however are weightier, when it comes to dealing with the problem of evil. Accordingly, evil is considered as a mere phenomenon (state of affairs) and the goodness of subjects is judged by weighing between the good and bad states of affairs that they cause. Since God is also believed to cause both good and bad states of affairs, his goodness is judged by the same standards. These positions, in my view, do not help the efforts to provide a satisfactory theodicy. This is because they do not consider the real way of being of both good and evil.

Therefore, the best way out of the philosophical and logical quagmire – better than the option that I have suggested above to be open to Swinburne – is to employ a metaphysical conception of good and evil. Such an account would explain that God in his infinite wisdom and power can set an end for each one of his creatures and guide them in the way that he wills through different intermediate goods towards it. That is, there is an ultimate good to which all the goods that God grants to his creatures are related as a means. It would follow that missing a good that is not necessary for attaining the ultimate good would only be a relative evil. In this case, there would be no reason to think that God would not allow it. I shall present a conception of the good along these lines in the next chapter and suggest that an adequate theodicy should be based on such a conception.

For, is it true, as Swinburne claims, that our understanding of an agent being good would be gravely deficient unless we thought that he would stop pain and other suffering if he could do so? Normally, is every pain and suffering a cause of complaint from us? I think that this initial concession which he makes to the atheist is really at the root of all the problems of his theodicy. It leads him to formulate

conditions that need to be fulfilled in order for God to permit any bad state and these lead to the logical and philosophical problems that I have earmarked. This procedure undermines God's attributes.

III. THE CONCEPT OF GOOD

In the previous chapter, I have highlighted some difficulties that Swinburne's theodicy presents. I have discussed all but one of these difficulties in the detail that I consider opportune for the present work. I have not dealt with what I have suggested to be the main shortcoming of his theodicy in the necessary detail. This is the concept of the good that he uses, which leads him to affirm that the evil that occurs in the world is necessary if God is to give various goods of great value. I have also noted that most authors consider this to be the main characteristic of Swinburne's theodicy.¹ This whole chapter is thus the response to Swinburne's theodicy. It is my proposal of a better concept of the good (goodness) that would help to provide a more adequate theodicy than the one provided by Swinburne. I intend to rely mainly on views from St. Thomas Aquinas, Aristotle and some of their commentators. I believe that, by considering ordinary experiences and practical situations, and by using simple language, these views will easily be welcome and understood in the analytical context.

An adequate concept should, on one hand, help to understand better the nature of evil since "one opposite is known through the other."² And on the other hand, it should

¹ Cf. pp. 182-183.

² St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, q.48, a.1, co.

help throw some light on our consideration of God's goodness. Unveiling these two realities is the aim of the present chapter. In his theodicy, Swinburne claims that God's goodness cannot be understood other than as moral goodness. I shall however suggest that it is the modern conception of moral goodness that makes him think that God's goodness consists in his being 'morally good.' This conception of morality evaluates the quality of actions mainly according to their consequences. Since God acts in the world, it is suggested that we should equally evaluate his goodness according to the consequences of his actions.

For, modern philosophy finds great difficulty in going beyond the consequences in the consideration of the moral goodness of actions since the scientific method, which it adapts, can only go this far. It looks for something that can be measured or verified.³ Hence, it gets rid of the concept of finality and the link that the good has with the will or any kind of appetite, since these escape the method of the positive sciences. It will become clear that this is the case when I focus on the prevalent debate on freedom and moral responsibility in the analytical context. This will bring to light the difficulties that arise from the lack of a proper concept of good but it will also show the intuitions that some authors (e.g. Harry Frankfurt) have had in the right direction.

On my part, I shall argue that a conception of morality that leaves the will or appetition on the side line is greatly limited. A question that may arise from this discussion is whether Anscombe's assertion⁴ that consequentialism marks

³ Cf. MacIntyre, A., *After Virtue*, 3 ed. London: Duckworth, 2007, 119; Cruz Prados, A., *Ethos y Polis*, 154.

⁴ Cf. Anscombe, G. E. M., «Modern Moral Philosophy», in *The Collected Philosophical Papers of G. E. M. Anscombe*, III: *Ethics, Religion and Politics*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell Publisher, 1981, 36.

every English academic moral philosopher since Henry Sidgwick can be justifiably made today and whether it may apply to Swinburne. I shall thus defend the classical view that: firstly, only something considered by a subject as an object of his will or desire can move him to act and not a simple rational judgement; secondly, that a subject becomes morally bad if he wants or desires something that he should not (i.e. something that is opposed to his ultimate good). The aim of these arguments shall be to show that moral goodness or badness is in the will and not in the consequences of what a subject does.

I shall begin by presenting Swinburne's concept of good (in Section 1). I shall then go on to examine what it is that moves us to action (in Section 2). The aim will be to make clear that only a good (an end) wanted or desired by a subject moves him to act. Next, I shall consider (in Section 3) a teleological concept of nature (i.e. that each nature has a proper good). From this concept of nature, I shall be able to deal with the two issues that I have mentioned above that concern this chapter: firstly (in Section 4), the ontological status of evil or bad states (i.e. what we mean when we say that evil exists); and secondly (in Section 5), the relation of God's goodness to moral goodness.

1. Swinburne's Concept of Good

I have suggested during the discussion of Swinburne's concept of divine providence (which consists principally in his response to the problem of evil), that the concept of good that he uses is not adequate. I have also noted that this concept is not proper to him but is the same one used by most

of his interlocutors. I would like, in this section, to have a closer look at this concept and make manifest why it is necessary to search for an alternative. Moreover, the concept of good goes hand in hand with the concept of evil. But, do good and evil have the same ontological status?

Let me note once again that the problem of evil presents itself to Swinburne during the defence of theism. It seems to be an obstacle to rationally believing in the existence of God. The problem is that: the atheist states that if there were a God, who was good and provident, he would seek to prevent the evil that there is. And if there were a God, who was omnipotent, he could prevent all the evil. Swinburne agrees that if God existed and were provident, he would prepare and avail many good things to his creatures and no bad things. His explanation as to why there is evil (bad states) is that there are goods that not even an omnipotent Being could provide without simultaneously or previously causing some evil.

His procedure for defending this claim, first of all, includes making a list of goods (dozens of them) that we should all value. Part II of *Providence and the Problem of Evil* is concerned with giving a list of the goods that an all-good God would provide. After this, he makes a list of evils (in Part III) and endeavours to show which goods would not be possible without these evils. For example, in his efforts to show that some goods are well worth the evils that they necessitate, he argues that thrills of pleasure are not the only goods and stabs of pain are not the only bad things in the world. He claims that:

the good of individual humans (and in so far as they are capable thereof, the good of animals) consists (as well as in their having thrills of pleasure) in their having free will to choose between good and evil, the ability to develop their own characters and those of their fellows, to show courage

and loyalty, to love, to be of use, to contemplate beauty and discover truth – and if there is a God it consists above all in voluntary service and adoration of him in the company of one's fellows, for ever and ever.⁵

The above is a summary of the great goods that Swinburne proposes in Part II of *Providence and the Problem of Evil* as those that a good God would seek to provide. He however stresses the great value of free will and above all the value (for us) of our lives being of use to others.⁶ He believes that the latter has not played a central enough role in theodicies of the Christian tradition as it ought to have.

Furthermore, Swinburne considers that if we affirm that something is good in certain 'natural' circumstances, then this will hold whenever those circumstances are given in any logically possible world. For example, the judgement 'it is good to give money to Oxfam' is a moral judgement because it is about what is good/ bad. Its truth however depends on 'natural' states such as that Oxfam feeds the starving in Africa but does not have enough money for this purpose. This truth will necessarily hold in whichever world whenever these 'natural' circumstances are given. In addition, there are moral truths that do not depend on circumstances but rather always hold (e.g. 'it is bad to torture children for fun'). Thus, true moral judgements are necessary truths.⁷ Such truths are known a priori by us and definitely an omniscient being knows them.⁸

Hence, God, being omniscient, will unfailingly know what is good and will seek to bring it about. And since moral truths (i.e. statements like '*x* is good') are necessary, we

⁵ Swinburne, R., *Providence and the Problem of Evil*, xii.

⁶ Cf. *Ibid.*, 44.

⁷ Cf. *Ibid.*, 18.

⁸ Cf. Swinburne, R., *Is there a God?*, 13.

humans also know them a priori. That is why Swinburne sets out to make a list of goods that a God would seek to provide to human beings and animals. In his works, statements like “is it not obvious that a good God would seek to bring about...?”⁹ or “One would expect a good God to create individuals who have...”¹⁰ are common.

A first point that needs to be noted about Swinburne’s concept of good is that he makes a list of goods and a list of evils. He then goes on to argue that the goods outweigh the evils. They are for him at the same ontological level. They are simply either good states of affairs or bad states of affairs. That evil may be the absence of some good does not enter into his consideration as I have already reported. The more interesting point to note, however, is that he does not refer the goods to any end or appetite. They are, for Swinburne, simply good and we all know them and consider them as such. We should therefore expect a good agent to want to bring them about.

Indeed, I believe, many will agree that the goods listed by Swinburne (e.g. the list above) are goods they would want to attain. And indeed, I agree with him that “it is more important what an agent does (the choices he makes, the changes he produces in the world and the effects of his life on others) than what happens to him (the sensations and disappointments he experiences).”¹¹ However, it will also be noted that there are occasions when one or the other of these goods has to give way to another good (it has to be considered not to be good). What criterion is followed? That is, why do I consider a thing to be good at one moment and not to be at another moment? Isn’t it also the case that one

⁹ Cf. Swinburne, R., *Providence and the Problem of Evil*, 51.

¹⁰ Cf. *Ibid.*, 79.

¹¹ Swinburne, R., *The Existence of God*, 267.

thing that is considered good by one person is not considered so by another? Isn't it also that a tool is not simply good but good for its purpose? At this point, we may also return to the main question that arises from Swinburne's claim that evils are necessary if God is to give us goods: given that absence of good is not evil, as he notes in his argument against the doctrine of *privatio boni*, why would God be bent on realising a good that necessarily implies an evil? These questions cannot be answered satisfactorily without reference to some end.

Like I have suggested earlier, two great difficulties for Swinburne's theodicy arise from considering the good without reference to any end. The first concerns the above questions: we are not in position to tell why something is good at one moment and not at another and why the absence of one good is evil and that of another is not. This can be told only if we consider evil in its true nature, that is, as *privatio boni*, which is not the absence of any good but of one that is due. Moreover, since it is generally agreed that no one chooses the evil but all choose what appears to them to be good, it is not reasonable to consider that evil must exist (just like good) in order for us to be able to exercise free will. The other difficulty also follows from considering evil as simply a bad state (and not in reference to a due good) combined with a moral perspective in which the goodness of an agent is judged according to the states (consequences) that he causes or allows. This makes God's goodness depend on the states that he is believed to have caused or allowed. Again, it is not reasonable that we should be arguing about what is permitted to God or what he has a right to do if we cannot bring him to task for it.

These, I believe, are serious handicaps for the theodicies that presuppose or include them. This is the case with Swinburne's theodicy for which they form the basis.

There is therefore need for a solution and this is what I propose in the next sections. I propose to examine the true nature of evil and of action from the analysis of ordinary situations that we are normally faced with. The discussion may at times seem long and too elaborate but it will be in order not to presume familiarity with the concepts but rather, in a way, develop them from first principles. I consider this proposal to be just one among many possible ones from the classical-metaphysical tradition.

2. The End: The Principle in the Practical Field

Providence is about what is practical since it pertains to that knowledge which is concerned with ordering means towards ends.¹² In Swinburne's terms, divine providence is about God having good purposes for his creatures and acting to bring them to accomplishment either immediately or in the future. A central theme of the present work is whether God exists given that the world he is said to have made and to continually guide has a lot of evil. In other words, according to Swinburne, we need to examine the actions of God (i.e. what he has done or permitted to be done), since these make him either good or bad. If he does or has done only good actions, then he is a perfectly good being. If, on the other hand, he has done any bad action, then he is not perfectly good. However, before we examine God's actions and consider whether we can subject them to the moral test, I need to examine what it is that moves us to act and how this happens. In other words, how do we become practical?

¹² Cf. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Quaestiones Disputatae De Veritate*, q.5, a.1, co.

Classically, it has been said that in what pertains to the practical, the end is the principle.¹³ It is what an agent sees as a worthwhile goal that moves him to act. Only what an agent considers as good for him or for those that he cares about can move him to action. This seems to be intuitively obvious. Like Aristotle notes in the opening words of *Nicomachean Ethics*, every science, art and action aims at some good. Therefore, there are as many goods or ends as there are sciences, arts and actions. However, since the advent of modern philosophy, the idea of the end as the object of the appetite, which moves a subject to act, was rejected. The method acquired tends to get rid of what cannot be subjected to measurement and rigorous logical analysis. This seems to be the case with all that has to do with finality or any human appetitive power. Thus, Ernst Tugendhat criticises the classical concept of happiness for providing “no objective, generally valid rules for attaining happiness.”¹⁴

I shall discuss in this section some notions that I believe could throw more light on Swinburne’s conception of human action. This is necessary because I believe that Swinburne rightly uses the analogy of human action in trying to understand divine action. It can however only be analogy since it is necessary to maintain the difference that there is between an infinite and a finite agent. I shall begin by considering the aspect under which we say or know that things are good. I shall then go on to discuss the interaction between reason and the will that is necessary for us to become practical (to perform an action). By highlighting the indispensable role of desires (above all the rational desire, i.e.

¹³ Cf. Aristotle, *Physics*, II, 9, 200a 19-26; St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I,II, q.1, a.1, co.

¹⁴ Tugendhat, E., «Antike und moderne Ethik», in Tugendhat, E., *Probleme der Ethik*, Stuttgart: Reclam, 1984, 46. Cited in Rhonheimer, M., *The Perspective of Morality*, 64.

the will) in the pursuit of the human good, it will become clear that the rationality of actions cannot be derived from their consequences but from their object (what it is that the will strives for). This will put consequentialism in doubt as an adequate moral perspective. The correct moral perspective will however fully become patent after the consideration of the teleological concept of nature in Section 3. It is necessary to reach a correct moral perspective in order to consider whether God's goodness can be moral goodness.

2.1 The Aspect of Desirableness

There are many things that we consider to be good. And there are things that are good some times and other times are not. But, what is common to them? What characterises good or goodness? Good is said to be a transcendental. That is, it cannot fit in any of the Aristotelian categories but rather can be applied to all. St. Thomas argues that being and good "are really the same, and differ only in idea."¹⁵ He says that good presents the aspect of desirableness which being does not. In other words, the idea of good introduces a reference to another. When I say that something is good (i.e. when I predicate good of something), nothing is added to the thing except a relation to some subject that desires or wants the thing that *is*. Hence, Aristotle says that the good is that which all things desire.¹⁶ This same point can explain why all that exists is good: there is nothing that exists that God does not want that it should exist. Nevertheless, we understand,

¹⁵ Cf. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, q.5, a.1, co.

¹⁶ Cf. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, I, 1, 1094a 2.

whether in nature, art or morals, that to *be* simply is not the same as to *be good*.¹⁷ This means that, besides the transcendental good (wanted at least by God), things are good because they are desired or wanted by a specific subject (appetite). So, they are not good simply but are good to that subject. This leads to the pursuit of or inclination to that good by the said subject. The reference to an appetite as a mover to action is absent from Swinburne's conception of good. The only reference is to the desires, which he considers in a negative way (i.e. as a hindrance to free will).

Here, I need to make a clarification with reference to a point Swinburne makes while discussing beauty. He says: "It may be objected that there is nothing good in a work of art if no one observes it. This objection, which is of a type which we shall meet several times in this book, seems to me mistaken."¹⁸ He explains that when people admire a beautiful work of art, they do not admire the effect that the work has on their own consciousness. Rather, they believe that the work has some beautiful features that they have been fortunate to notice. This explanation is indeed correct because it is not the observer's feelings or consciousness which make the work good or beautiful. Rather, the goodness or beauty is inherent in the thing itself. I think however that St. Thomas' position that good and other transcendentals are really the same as being serves to show why the work of art has to be observed by someone for it to be beautiful and good. If no one observes it, it *is* only. Moreover, for it to be said to be good, the observer must not stop at contemplating and appreciating it (which is the case for beauty) but must also desire to have it.

¹⁷ Cf. González, A.M., *Claves de Ley Natural*, Madrid: Rialp, 2006, 75.

¹⁸ Swinburne, R., *Providence and the Problem of Evil*, 52.

To emphasise the point above that goodness is inherent in the thing itself and not imparted by the desiring appetite, I need to dwell a little more on the relation between good and desirableness. Ana Marta González explains that the notion of good is relative to an appetite from an epistemological point of view. “We know the meaning of good from the experience of desire. Hence, beings which do not desire anything cannot have the notion of good. This however does not mean that there is nothing that is good for them.”¹⁹ In fact, for example, we say that water and sunlight are good for plants because they are truly convenient to them. The mediaeval philosophers used the notion of natural appetite to refer to this.²⁰ Since however we attribute neither sensible nor intellectual knowledge to plants, we do not say that they desire the water or sunlight. She goes on to explain that although it is the experience of tending or desiring that leads us to recognise the notion of good, the latter cannot be reduced to the desire itself. Rather, “the desire points to a good which is none other than the perfection of the desiring subject.”²¹ The perfection is in the thing desired and indicates a natural openness or potentiality of the subject to the perfection. These ideas are well highlighted in the passage in which St. Thomas explains that good and being are really the same. I shall reproduce it here below:

Goodness and being are really the same, and differ only in idea; which is clear from the following argument. The essence of goodness consists in this, that it is in some way desirable. Hence the Philosopher says (Ethic. i): “Goodness is what all desire.” Now it is clear that a thing is desirable only in so far as it is perfect; for all desire their own perfection. But everything is perfect so far as it is actual. Therefore it is

¹⁹ González, A.M., *El Bien y el Sumo Bien*, manuscript, 2011, 3. The translation is mine.

²⁰ Cf. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I.II, q.1, a.2, co.

²¹ González, A.M., *El Bien y el Sumo Bien*, 4.

clear that a thing is perfect so far as it exists; for it is existence that makes all things actual, as is clear from the foregoing. Hence it is clear that goodness and being are the same really. But goodness presents the aspect of desirableness, which being does not present.²²

2.2 Reason in the Practical Field

I mentioned earlier that modern philosophy rejected any kind of finality and appetition. These were thought not to pass the test of scientific rigour. It was considered that to have correct rational judgements about what is good would make a subject to seek that good. The subject of moral science would thus not be ends (goods) and the relation of the will to these but a group of propositions about the good or bad which can be subjected to rigorous logical analysis. Human beings would be moved to act well or perform morally good actions purely by reason. On the other hand, they would perform bad actions when moved by non-rational forces. I shall deal with moral goodness in greater detail later on. In this sub-section, I shall argue that only the good that is the object of the will or some appetite moves any being to act. The sub-section will also deal with the interaction between reason and appetite that are involved in human action. The objective of this is to highlight the relation of the good with desire (especially the will) and to show that actions receive their rationality from the object of the will rather than from their consequences.

²² St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, q.5, a.1, co.

a) The Intentionality of Human Actions

To say that actions are intentional means that any action or group of actions we do aims at something we consider to be good. That is, we are moved to act by some good (end). I have hinted on the tendency of modern philosophy to ignore the finality and appetition involved in action. Swinburne on the other hand considers that human action is intentional.²³ This view would set him apart from the typical modern philosophical position because it admits some kind of finality and appetition on the part of the rational agent. Swinburne explains that “[in] any situation to form a purpose to achieve some goal, to try to achieve some goal involves regarding the goal as in some way a good thing. To try to go to London, I must regard my being in London as in some way a good thing...”²⁴

He adds that: “To regard some aspect of being in London as good is to have a reason for going to London.”²⁵ He explains that to “have the belief that there is a reason for doing an action is to acknowledge that, thus far, it would be sensible, appropriate, rational, to do the action, that it is the thing to do.”²⁶ It may be noted that Swinburne has made a U-turn at this point: he has crossed over to the typical modern philosophical position. That is, he has moved from the consideration that an object that we consider to be good, something that we want or desire moves us to act, to considering that a belief about something being good moves us to act. What happens here is that when Swinburne says

²³ Cf. Swinburne, R., *Is there a God?*, 12; 100; *Providence and the Problem of Evil*, 134.

²⁴ Swinburne, R., *Is there a God?*, 13.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ Swinburne, R., *Providence and the Problem of Evil*, 85.

that “to regard some aspect of being in London as good is to have a reason for going to London,” he fails to recognise that he is using ‘reason’ here not as referring to the intellect (or a thinking process) but in the sense that we use it to mean a ‘cause’ and that the cause in this case is the final cause. From this equivocal use of the term ‘reason’, he makes a direct jump to considering that it is reason (a rational judgement) that moves us to act. He goes on to argue:

Really to believe that some action would be sensible, appropriate, etc. to do is to acknowledge, to put the point dramatically, the summons of the action to me to do it; and thereby to have the inclination to do the action, other things being equal.²⁷

Here however, he makes a connection that I suggest is not legitimate. For, to acknowledge the summons to do an action is one thing and to have the inclination to do the action is another. The former is an act of a cognitive faculty (power), while the latter is an act of an appetitive faculty. The good is related to the will (to desire) in a way that it is not to reason (the intellect). Like I have argued above, the notion of good or goodness adds to a thing the aspect of desirableness (i.e. a relation to an appetite). The good is the object of the will or an appetitive power.²⁸ Since every action is directed towards some good (what we consider to be good) and it is the appetitive powers that are moved by the good, it is clear that without the will or some appetite no one moves to act. To consider going to London really as good, i.e. as a practical good, is to want to go to London. If I say that to go to London is good but do not want to go to London, then it is only a theoretical judgement. “The concept of good is therefore *identical* with the concept of ‘the goal of

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Cf. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I.II, q.1, a.1, co.

striving.”²⁹ Unless going to London is something that I want or I see the need to do now or in the future (i.e. unless it becomes a practical good), I shall never go to London. Martin Rhonheimer explains the concept of practical good as follows:

A car or a computer are ‘things’. And as things they are ‘good’ in several respects. But only to the extent that appetite or striving meets with these objects in a *practical* way (to want to get one, to want to steal one) does a car or a computer become a *practical* good. This kind of goodness is not founded in the thing-ness of these objects, but rather in their relationship toward a willing. The practical good in this case is no longer the car or the computer as such but rather their *possession*. The practical good is not ‘car’ but ‘having a car’.³⁰

Only when something we believe to be good becomes practical, do we do something about it. “Human action is a phenomenon of appetite (i.e. of ‘seeking’ or ‘striving’, *Streben*): action is *willing* activity, or activity *insofar as* it is willing.”³¹ We are moved to act not by principles or judgements but by goods. The goods may be material (e.g. a cake) or immaterial (e.g. pleasure, virtue). “It is not judgement as such that sets us in motion; but our judgement on how to get or do something we *want*.”³² Here Aristotle’s ‘incontinent man’ may come to mind. Unlike the vicious man, the incontinent man’s reasoning process is upright and he knows what is good and thinks that he should do precisely that. His will however is not strong enough because it is not perfected by the virtues. He still desires or is inclined to other

²⁹ Rhonheimer, M., *The Perspective of Morality: Philosophical Foundations of Thomistic Virtue Ethics*, Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2011, 46. The italics are in the text.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid., 115. The italics, like in the next quotation, are in the texts.

³² Anscombe, G. E. M., «Modern Moral Philosophy», 31.

goods more than the goods of reason (i.e. the ends of the virtues). “[The self-indulgent] is led on in accordance with his own choice, thinking that he ought always to pursue the present pleasure; while the [incontinent] does not think so, yet pursues it.”³³ My view is that Aristotle’s incontinent man is not only a theoretical case but is one of which we all have experience, be it one who is habitually so or occasionally.

The view I am defending here is that in order to carry out any action, one must want or desire some good. Inasmuch as Swinburne says that actions are intentional, he agrees with this. But like I have pointed out, he makes the jump that stops the good from being the object of the will or desire to becoming an object of reason. He tends to attribute the good actions to reason alone while he grants only a negative role to desire(s). I shall discuss this while I consider the role that Swinburne gives them in the exercise of free will.

From what has been argued above, it is clear that in order to do the action that I believe to be the best one, I also need some influence or inclination to move me to it. In the same way that ‘non-rational forces’ may impede me from doing what I have judged to be the best action and move me to a bad or less good action, I also need some ‘rational forces’ to move or incline me to do the action I have judged to be the best. It is clear therefore that human action involves both reason and desire: “The human being only acts on the basis of an appetite or striving (*Streben*) that follows the judgment of reason. This also is a primordial experience. This appetite we call the ‘will’.”³⁴ The will is that desire in human beings which commands the other desires and which, although it follows reason, seems to command reason as

³³ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, VII, 3, 1146b 21-23.

³⁴ Rhonheimer, M., *The Perspective of Morality*, 52.

well.³⁵ It is the principle of human actions. Hence, Aristotle affirms that man is a kind of principle that is intelligent desire or desirous intelligence.³⁶

In conclusion, I have emphasised the point that the good is what moves the will. In other words, the object of voluntary acts (acts of the *voluntas*) is the good. The importance of this emphasis will become more pertinent when I discuss Swinburne's concept of freedom and consider the contemporary debate on freedom. The debate is centred on whether to understand freedom in the libertarian or compatibilist sense. Along with this is the debate between incompatibilism and compatibilism. I shall suggest that this debate, which took a new turn when Harry Frankfurt denied that the Principle of Alternate Possibilities (PAP) was true,³⁷ misses the nucleus of the question. Given that the object of the will is what it considers to be good, the main question concerning freedom should therefore be whether the will tends to its object freely and not whether it can do otherwise or not. Although Frankfurt does not focus on what I suggest is the nucleus, I shall – contrary to Swinburne – defend his view that the will may not have alternatives to choose from and yet act freely. Furthermore, the question about morality (moral responsibility), which is subsequent to the question about freedom, should also be formulated in terms of the good: whether it is right for the will to tend to a good or not. Finally, since we only act when our will is moved by some good, then the will should have a central place in the evaluation of the nature of actions and their goodness.

³⁵ Cf. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I,II, q.9, a.1, co.

³⁶ Cf. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, VI, 2, 1139b 4.

³⁷ Cf. Frankfurt, H. G., «Alternate Possibilities and Moral Responsibility», *Journal of Philosophy* 66 (1969) 829-839.

b) Human Action as Rational Striving

I have considered above what Swinburne understands by human action being intentional. I have gone on to suggest that the understanding is not adequate if we do not incorporate the will or some appetite. However, Swinburne and I agree that it is what we conceive to be good that moves us to act. I wish however to go further and consider that it is not enough that an activity aim at some good for it to be intentional. It needs to be guided by reason.

Intentionality characterizes that kind of appetite or striving that involves a twofold work of reason: knowledge of a goal and knowledge of the connection between ‘that which one does’ (in a purely physical sense, e.g., ‘opening a car door’ or ‘collecting twigs’) and the goal of this, the ‘what for’ (‘stealing a car’ or ‘building a nest’).³⁸

Hence, the activity of plants and animals, which we may observe to be directed to some good but is not guided by reason, is not said to be intentional. Under the previous heading, I have emphasised the point that reason (rational judgement) alone is not enough to move us to act but that there is need to be a good that is object of some appetite. Here, I wish to dwell more on the reasoning that guides the will (i.e. the interaction between reason and the will) in human action.

Since the will is guided by reason (and so it is called the rational appetite³⁹), “[it] has the openness and many-sidedness of the reason.”⁴⁰ It is open *ad opposita* and so can

³⁸ Rhonheimer, M., *The Perspective of Morality*, 55.

³⁹ Cf. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I,II, q.1, a.2, co.

⁴⁰ Rhonheimer, M., *The Perspective of Morality*, 52.

choose one or the contrary action.⁴¹ “‘To will’ means to strive on the basis of reason, on the basis of reasoning that springs from judgments of reason.”⁴² The reasoning that accompanies human action has been classically expressed in a ‘practical syllogism’ in a way similar to a theoretical syllogism.⁴³ Rhonheimer notes that this does not imply that we think like this before we perform an action. Rather, he says, the practical syllogism is the thinking involved in doing. “The practical syllogism is itself a component of praxis, and belongs with the phenomena of ‘striving’ and ‘acting.’”⁴⁴ I shall highlight here the difference between practical and theoretical syllogisms. The former is an interaction between reason and the will and ends in action, while the latter comprises of rational judgements of the kind that I discussed above that do not lead to action. I shall follow Rhonheimer’s exposition:

- (1) For all living creatures it is true that they stay alive by taking in nourishment.
- (2) I am a living creature.
- (3) I stay alive by taking in nourishment.⁴⁵

It is clear that the above reasoning does not result in “an action of the kind ‘to take in nourishment’ but only a (theoretical) statement about myself.”⁴⁶ Now, if we were to consider the good not to have a reference to the will, like most modern philosophers do, this syllogism could be restated as follows:

- (1) It is good for all living creatures to take in nourishment

⁴¹ Cf. Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, IX, 5, 1048a 8-10.

⁴² Rhonheimer, M., *The Perspective of Morality*, 115.

⁴³ Cf. Aristotle, *Movement of animals*, 7, 701a 7-15.

⁴⁴ Rhonheimer, M., *The Perspective of Morality*, 118.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 117.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

(2) I am a living creature

(3) It is good that I take in nourishment

Like it has been noted, this reasoning is not practical and so does not culminate in an action. Similarly, believing that ‘It is good to give money to Oxfam’ would not by itself lead to doing something about it. “Only theoretical conclusions can come from theoretical judgments. But practical judgments are ones whose final conclusion is *practical*, and that means they are judgments that cause a ‘movement’, since action is a form of ‘movement.’”⁴⁷

Rhonheimer continues:

In order for an action to follow from the reasoning, a practical premise is needed, such as:

(1a) I want to stay alive (I am striving for it, I move toward it)

This premise is not a theoretical judgment, but a judged, considered act of appetite, which we can formulate as follows:

(1a) It is good (for me) to keep myself alive

A second premise could then be:

(2a) Taking in nourishment keeps me alive

The conclusion would then be:

(3a) I want to take in nourishment

The second premise (2a) is a statement based on experience and as such is not a practical judgment, but only a statement about a practically relevant state of affairs (i.e. a theoretical judgment or a simple sense perception); it mediates between the practical premise (1a) and the conclusion, which is also practical.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Ibid., 116.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

This latter syllogism is indeed practical since its conclusion points to wanting a given good, which would move me to some action. In this case, 'good' is used in its proper sense, which like I have argued earlier normally implies an aspect of desirableness. However, even in this case, it will not result in action, since like Aristotle notes, only what is particular can be practical.⁴⁹ The conclusion at this point, while referring to a good that inclines to action, is still not concrete enough.

'To nourish oneself' is still not a performable action. The process of practical reason will go further, so that the conclusion (3a) will now become the first premise of a new 'syllogism' in something like the following way:

(1b) I want to nourish myself

Or

(1b) It is good (for me) to nourish myself

(2b) This piece of bread is a suitable means of nourishment

(3b) It is good for me to eat this bread

The conclusion (3b) is now in fact the choice of an action or its actual accomplishment. The result of the syllogism is a concrete action: the eating of this piece of bread, or more precisely, a last practical judgment that immediately triggers action, which we could also formulate like this:

(3b) What I have to do now is eat this piece of bread⁵⁰

The fact that what is practical is always particular (one of the premises of a practical syllogism that ends in action must be particular) is what makes practical reasoning never necessary and why if it were not for the will, it could go on forever. Unlike a valid theoretical syllogism, from which the conclusion follows necessarily, a practical

⁴⁹ Cf. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, VII, 2, 1147a 2-3.

⁵⁰ Rhonheimer, M., *The Perspective of Morality*, 119.

syllogism never necessitates that an action that is its conclusion follow. Aristotle notes that it is because action is contingent and about the particular that we are able to deliberate about what to do. For, “no one deliberates about things that cannot be otherwise nor about things that it is impossible for him to do.”⁵¹ The deliberation about which action to take can go on indefinitely since the conclusion is never necessary. To every conclusion, a new premise may be added and a new syllogism begun. The process is interrupted only by an act of the will. Here, we may recall the case of the ‘incontinent man.’ He formulates a well-reasoned syllogism in his conscience but does not terminate at this. He continues the deliberation with further syllogisms until his will commands him to stop. On what does the will depend to determine in one way or another? It depends on the inclinations which it has. Classical philosophy has held that the role of ethics is to teach men (the wills of men) to be inclined towards the ends of the virtues.⁵² Once this is achieved, they will have the inclination to do what is good for them *simpliciter* (as human beings).

Earlier, I noted that intentional action involves a twofold work of reason: knowledge of a goal and knowledge of the connection between ‘that which one does’ and the goal. I have also noted that in practical affairs, the end is the principle. These two ideas can be appreciated in the relation between the first practical syllogism (*series a*) and the second (*series b*). The second practical syllogism starts from an end (an intention) which has to be realised by making a concrete choice. A higher good moves the agent to choose a concrete good (the means) through which he attains the higher good. Here, we notice the role of practical reason which is to

⁵¹ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, VI, 5, 1140a 31.

⁵² Cf. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, II, 2, 1103b 26-28.

choose (and carry out) the means of bringing to reality a given good (an intention). I shall shortly be considering the gradation of goods that there is in our lives.

For now, it should be noted that it is the end that is first in the intention and which sets us in action.⁵³ The end is a higher good which has to be attained through one or more lower (intermediate) goods. The lower good is that which is sought or done for the sake of another. The goodness of a lower good therefore has to be judged according to its relation to the higher good. This is the case in whichever activity that one is involved, including the activity as man *simpliciter* (i.e. moral goodness). Hence, in a football game, a free-kick is good if it results in a goal and the one who takes it is praised or blamed according to the way he takes it. He is considered to be a good footballer inasmuch as he takes it in such a way as to achieve its end (which is to score). This structure of means and ends is always present in practical reasoning. Every human action is intentional and like it has been said above, this means a movement of the will towards a good through the means that reason decides to be the appropriate ones. In other words, even at the most basic level, each human action is imbued with intentionality. It is this intentionality that makes the action rational and enables us to make a rational description of each human action. Hence, Rhonheimer notes that “the ‘why someone does something’ is actually the ‘what someone does’.”⁵⁴ One of the examples he uses to illustrate this is taken from Anscombe’s *Intention*⁵⁵:

⁵³ Cf. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I.II, q.1, a.1, ad 1.

⁵⁴ Rhonheimer, M., *The Perspective of Morality*, 54.

⁵⁵ Cf. Anscombe, G. E. M., *Intention*, 2 ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963, 35.

If we see someone lying on a bed in the middle of the day and ask him, 'what are you doing?' and he answers us, 'I'm lying on my bed,' we would probably consider his answer evasive. What we really meant when we posed the question was, 'why are you lying on your bed?' The answer should then be something like, 'I'm just resting' or 'I'm doing yoga'... This answer is a clarification of intention, or the expression of an intention. That is exactly what the questioner wanted when he asked his question.⁵⁶

So, no human action consists in just physical deed or movement. When we ask someone what he is doing, we expect an answer that can have a rational description. We do not expect to hear 'I'm placing this wire in the door-lock of this car.' Rather, the action that he is carrying out is 'stealing a car' or 'trying to enter my car', the latter case being probably because he has lost the keys. Hence, human actions are intentional even at their most basic level. This intentional content is conferred upon the actions by what is in the will (i.e. by the object of the will). Actions, therefore, cannot be judged from mere physical movements or results. Anscombe explains that:

human actions are always *chosen, willed* actions. For an action to be willed or chosen at all, it requires a fundamental or primary intentional structuring. 'To lie on a bed' cannot be 'willed' or carried out at all in this rudimentary (nonintentional) form. If someone *chooses* to lie on a bed, he does so 'under a description,' which is the description of a basic intention; for example, 'to get some rest.' We are speaking here of *basic intentional actions*, whose intentional content is identical with what is referred to as the 'object' of an action.⁵⁷

It may be good at this point to take note of the mediaeval distinction between human actions and acts of man.

⁵⁶ Rhonheimer, M., *The Perspective of Morality*, 55.

⁵⁷ Anscombe, G. E. M., *Intention*, 66.

Actions over which we have mastery and carry out voluntarily are called human actions (*actus humanus*), while those activities of human subjects that do not originate from reason and the will are called acts of man (*actus hominis*).⁵⁸ Rhonheimer notes that “analytical philosophers do not as a rule make any distinction between *actus humanus* and *actus hominis*, since this distinction presupposes a ‘strong’ concept of action that includes will.”⁵⁹ I shall be considering later on the result of not making this distinction. However, it is clear that if we do not make it, then we cannot be able to distinguish between those activities that we have in common with plants and animals from those that can be said to be proper to human beings, given their rational origin.

Therefore, given that every human action is a striving (willing) according to reason, we can make a rational description of it. Like I have noted above, this is possible if we know its object (i.e. its intentionality at the basic level). It is this that Anscombe says that we should be able to do before we can carry out any moral evaluation of actions.

[It] cannot even be begun until we are equipped with a sound philosophy of psychology... For this we certainly need an account at least of what a human action is at all, and how its description as ‘doing such-and-such’ is affected by its motive and by the intention or intentions in it; and for this an account of such concepts is required.⁶⁰

Anscombe was of the view that it made no sense to do moral philosophy in the contemporary philosophical context since the dominant current (according to her, the only one in English philosophy) did not have the tools by which actions could be described (i.e. said what they were).⁶¹ She claimed

⁵⁸ Cf. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I,II, q.1, a.1, co.

⁵⁹ Rhonheimer, M., *The Perspective of Morality*, 53.

⁶⁰ Anscombe, G. E. M., «Modern Moral Philosophy», 29.

⁶¹ Cf. *Ibid.*, 29; 38.

that all contemporary English philosophers considered that the moral quality of actions depended on their consequences.⁶² But consequences cannot tell us which action it is that someone has done since the same consequences can result from various kinds of actions or even from natural events. The fact that James Grant is lying dead at my feet could have been the result of different actions by me, namely: murder, legitimate defence, an accidental shooting, etc. Only the disposition of my will can point to what action it is. In order to say which action it is, it is necessary to establish or ask for the good to which the will was directed. Consequentialist ethics is not in position to do this. I shall deal with the issue of morality later on. For now, I only wish to take note of the fact that from a consequentialist perspective, it is not possible to identify an action.

The need for the description of actions according to their objects becomes pertinent once again in the debate between compatibilism and incompatibilism. One of the main issues has been the precise formulation of the PAP so as to explain why we hold people morally responsible for some actions and excuse them for others.⁶³ An example of a detailed discussion is that of James Lamb.⁶⁴ He considers various formulations (starting with the one that Harry Frankfurt claimed to be false and which Lamb calls the '*strong* PAP') and shows that counterexamples could be found. He considers that they were not formulated with the required precision and so provides his own formulation which he calls the '*weak* PAP' and believes this would stand the test. For now, the merits and demerits of Lamb's and of the other formulations are not relevant. I wish however to

⁶² Cf. *Ibid.*, 36.

⁶³ Cf. p. 232.

⁶⁴ Cf. Lamb, J. W., «Evaluative Compatibilism and the Principle of Alternative Possibilities», *Journal of Philosophy* 90 (1993) 517-527.

suggest that the solution to this problem of the continuous search for a precise formulation lies in being able to establish the object of each action (i.e. the good that is sought in each action). This would then be followed by the question of whether it was a good that the subject was right to want. He would then be held morally responsible (blamed or praised) on account of the answer to this question.⁶⁵ I present here below one of the counterexamples discussed by Lamb to illustrate this. Lamb takes it from A. S. Kaufman⁶⁶:

Suppose that a lifeguard who has lied about her qualifications is unable to swim. Assume now that a child drowns whose life it was the lifeguard's duty to save. We would certainly hold the lifeguard responsible and yet, being unable to swim, she could not have saved the child's life. Thus, the lifeguard is responsible for failing to rescue the child, even though unable to do so, because of something else she had done from which she could have refrained, namely, lying about her qualifications.

Our intuitions are that the lifeguard would be morally responsible for the drowning of the child. Hardly anyone could deny she was responsible. Now, the main question that presents itself is about what action she is blamed for. Is she blamed for not saving the child yet she could not? Lamb notes that some claims are that she is not blamed for this but for "lying about her qualifications or, perhaps better, the conjunctive action of becoming a lifeguard under false pretenses and failing to save the child."⁶⁷ However, Lamb

⁶⁵ A person who does something good is praised while one who does something bad is blamed. We need however to be careful not to fall into the 'third person' perspective, which I shall later on claim not to be the proper moral perspective.

⁶⁶ Cf. Kaufman, A. S., «Ability», *Journal of Philosophy* 60 (1963) 537-551.

⁶⁷ Lamb, J. W., «Evaluative Compatibilism and the Principle of Alternative Possibilities», 526.

believes that these views are not convincing since it does not follow from the fact that she is morally responsible for these that she cannot also be morally responsible for failing to save the child. Lamb does not provide arguments to show that the lifeguard is held accountable in this latter case but insists that it certainly seems that she should. I think however that her moral responsibility for failure to save the child cannot be taken for granted, since, of course, there are cases in which she would have failed to save the child and not be blamed. In this case she failed to save the child because she could not swim. But she could have failed for other motives, for example, that she was attending to another emergency or that there was continuous shooting and so she could not approach the swimming pool. I believe that in these cases she would not have been morally responsible for failing to save the child. This may suggest that it is not the failure to save the child in itself that is the cause of her blameworthiness but something else. On my part however, I need not press this question further since I believe that the solution to the problem is way before reaching this point.

Like I have suggested, the solution is in being able to establish the kind of action that a person has done (i.e. the object of the action). It is after establishing this that it can be said whether it was a good action or not, and hence, whether the subject should be praised or blamed. I suggest that the moral responsibility of the lifeguard does not change because of the actual drowning of the child. From the moment she decided to lie about her swimming capabilities she acquired this responsibility and it does not matter whether anyone ever drowned. Does this mean that what she is blamed for is lying about her qualifications? My view is that it is not. When she utters the words by which she misrepresents her swimming capabilities in the job interview, the action she does is not lying. She does much more than this! What is at stake is

much more than the truth about her swimming capabilities. The object of her will (the rational action that she chooses) is not simply 'to tell a lie' or 'not to tell the truth.' Rather, it is 'to gravely put the lives of the swimming pool users at risk.' She considers the good of 'securing a job for herself' to be superior to the good of 'the lives of the swimming pool users.' This is the disorder in her will for which she is morally responsible and for which she is a morally bad person. It follows therefore that although all agree that she could not do otherwise (had no choice between saving the child or not), it is something that is quite irrelevant since what made her morally bad was the object of her will at the time of her job interview. I shall return to this issue when I come to consider consequentialism and again while dealing with the topic of freedom.

In summary, I have considered under this head the interaction that is necessary between the will and reason in human action. Without the will, no movement towards a good is possible (and this is what action is).⁶⁸ And without reason, it would not be human but an act common to animals since it would lack the twofold knowledge of a goal and the connection between what one does and the goal. I have also considered how the goodness of the means (the lower good) is judged according to its adequateness to the end (higher good). I have gone on to suggest that this has to be the case in all human activity including the activity of man simply as man. And finally, I have presented a case from James Lamb's discussion of compatibilism/ incompatibilism in order to show that the prevalent contemporary debate about human action is being carried out completely oblivious of the fact that it is the will's movement towards the good that leads to

⁶⁸ Cf. Aristotle, *Eudemian Ethics*, II, 6, 1222b 28-29.

action. I believe that I have manifested the problems that would be avoided if this were not the case.

c) The Ultimate Good

Like I have considered before, every action that we do is aimed at something that we have comprehended to be good. I have also considered that every human action is imbued with basic intentionality which constitutes it as rational. We normally seek the good to which our concrete action is directed for the sake of some other good and this for the sake of another and so on. This gives rise to a gradation of goods. The good that is the first in the intention, for the sake of which the other goods are sought, is the highest good, while the one which is only wanted for the sake of another or other goods is the lowest good. This however does not mean that only the highest is a good while the others are not to be considered as goods. The lower goods are properly speaking goods because they are also objects of the will. They are not to be considered as means that are dispensable. The will tends to them and moves us to act to acquire them only under the aspect of good. Hence Alfredo Cruz notes that:

[It] is usually said in the Aristotelian tradition that virtue is... the appetite of the end, while choice, which is the fruit of deliberation, is the appetite of the means... Despite this way of saying, the relationship between the end and the means is not an instrumental and external relationship but an internal one, one of concretion and actualisation. This is what makes virtue ethics, being a teleological kind of ethics, not to be utilitarian or consequentialist ethics.⁶⁹

⁶⁹ Cruz Prados, A., *Ethos y Polis*, 162. The translation is mine.

So, the choice of an action is not a completely different voluntary act from the appetite of the end. Rather, the appetite of the end consists here and now in the choice of this action. This applies not only in the area of ethics but in all theory of action. The desire for the end is concretised in the desire for the adequate means.

The intention ‘I want to nourish myself,’ in the second of the practical syllogisms that I considered earlier, was fulfilled in only one step (in one action).⁷⁰ This may sometimes not be the case and often is not the case. Sometimes, it requires a series of actions aimed at different goods necessary as means for reaching this intention. This activity of finding and carrying out the means in order to achieve the given end is the work of practical reason. Thus, the intention ‘I want to nourish myself’ may entail the following reasoning and actions: I need a hoe but my hoe is broken; I need to borrow one from my neighbour; Now that I have got the hoe, I need to walk down to my cassava garden; I have to find a mature plant; I have to remove carefully the soil; I have to uproot enough tubers to nourish me for the next few days and leave the rest; I replace the soil. I take the cassava and cook it.

It can be seen that I may need to carry out a series of actions each of which is aimed at a good useful for attaining the higher good of nourishing myself. Each of these is a rational action since it is constituted by basic intentionality. And so, if someone sees me removing the soil from around the cassava plant, he will not think that I am just carrying out some physical movements but that I am doing some rational action: ‘I am uprooting some tubers for feeding myself.’ And if he sees me replacing the soil and asks me what I am doing, my answer will be: ‘I am conserving the rest of the cassava

⁷⁰ Cf. p. 234.

tubers for future consumption.’ This should sound a reasonable answer to him since he understands that the intention ‘I want to nourish myself’ is a long-term one. Furthermore, apart from the basic intentionality which constitutes each of these actions as a human action, the actions that I carry out here have further intentions all of which are rationally explained by the first intention which was ‘to nourish myself’. The action ‘borrowing a hoe,’ which is complete and intentional in itself, is geared towards the intention of ‘uprooting cassava,’ which is eventually for the sake of ‘nourishing myself.’ Likewise, we notice that there are some arts or activities that fall under other arts or activities. For example, “bridle-making and the other arts concerned with the equipment of horses fall under the art of riding, and this and every military action under strategy...”⁷¹ Aristotle adds that it is clear that the ends of the master arts are greater than those of the subordinate arts since the latter are only pursued for the sake of the former. And such are all human activities.

However, we do not choose or desire everything for the sake of something else “for at that rate the process would go on to infinity, so that our desire would be empty and vain.”⁷² That is, we desire something for the sake of something else and this for another. But the series cannot go on infinitely for in that case there would not be a first desired and so the rest would not be desired. There must be therefore an ultimate good, which is not desired for the sake of another. This is the first cause of our desiring anything since we desire all the subordinate ends for its sake. Hence, it would make no sense to ask someone why he wants to be happy since happiness is considered to be man’s ultimate end. Aristotle

⁷¹ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, I, 1, 1094a 10-13.

⁷² *Ibid.*, I, 2, 1094a 20.

notes that all people agree that happiness is the ultimate good but in what this consists, there are differing views.⁷³

We find that in each man's life there is a gradation of goods or ends which move one to carry out the different activities that one's life is comprised of. Clearly, the ultimate good can only be one since if there were two (or more), having both of them would be a higher good than just one of them. Besides, my wanting or striving would not be settled since one of them could have some good not contained in the other. The ultimate good then must contain all the good that it is possible to want or long for. Now, although it is agreed that happiness is the ultimate good, it is clear that in this world there is no single concrete good, in whose possession happiness could be said to consist. It is also clear that no single action can be said to be capable of attaining the ultimate good. I should recall here the earlier discussion in which all pointers appeared to indicate that man's end is supernatural.⁷⁴ At this point however, I would like to suggest that those ends that seem to be higher in the hierarchy of each man's activity have the nature of the ultimate good. If these may not be said to be self-sufficient and complete, they at least have the aspect of being the first movers (i.e. of not being wanted for the sake of anything else). Aristotle says that we indeed choose honour, pleasure, reason and virtue for themselves. He explains that although we also choose them for the sake of happiness, we would still choose each of them if nothing resulted from them. He notes however that only happiness is always wanted for itself and never for the sake of something else.⁷⁵

⁷³ Cf. *Ibid.*, 1095a 16-20.

⁷⁴ Cf. pp. 153-156.

⁷⁵ Cf. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, I, 7, 1097a 15 – 1097b 20.

Apart from the above examples of goods that seem to be wanted and pursued for their sake by many, there are also other goods like health, family life and friendship that Aristotle mentions in other parts and which most people seek as complete goods (as goals in life) and not for the sake of something else. There may also be other goods specific to someone but which guide the series of choices that one makes in one's life. All these are the ends that each one has rationally determined as the ones that lead to the ultimate end (i.e. happiness). And each person pursues them according to his own scale of values. Although Harry Frankfurt may not consider it this way, these 'high level goods' may be what he calls 'what we care about'. He thus says that "what [a person] cares about is far more germane to the character of his will than the decisions or choices he makes."⁷⁶ I suggest that what I have presented above is what Frankfurt says in the language proper to the analytical tradition: that we have some ends in life which are the principles of our activity. We do not choose them but they are already given and are the principles of our actions. In other words, they are the starting point of our practical deliberation and of the choices that we make in life.

And what is the source of these high level goods, of these goals of our life? Where do we learn them from? They must be first of all from our natural inclinations, then from the influence of the society in which we have grown or live and from the education that we have received. These high level goods which each one has taken up as the necessary connection (i.e. as the goods prior) to the ultimate good may of course be mistaken. The rational process by which someone acquired them as ends (i.e. came to develop an inclination to them and to know them as ends) may have been

⁷⁶ Frankfurt, H. G., «The Importance of What We Care About», *Synthese* 53 (1982) 261.

defective. Hence, “[the] fact that what a person cares about is a personal matter does not entail that anything goes. It may still be possible to distinguish between things that are worth caring about to one degree or another and things that are not.”⁷⁷ I shall shortly characterise further man’s ultimate end when I argue that there must be a good (an end) proper to human beings. It is according to this that the goodness of these ‘high level goods’ or ‘things that we care about’ is to be judged, since like I have argued, the goodness or rightness of the means is measured according to their relation to the end.

I have mentioned above an important characteristic of the ultimate good, which follows from the fact that “[we] deliberate not about ends but about what contributes to ends. For a doctor does not deliberate whether he shall heal... nor does any one deliberate about his end.”⁷⁸ The ultimate good is not subject to choice. We cannot not choose it since it is the cause of our wanting all the other goods that we want. Secondly, since it contains all good that we may ever want, the good in any possible alternative would already be contained in it. To the extent that the ‘high level goods’ are not subject to choice, the more like the ultimate good they will be. However, like I have noted, the ultimate good can only be one and so the high level ends of our lives are ‘ultimate goods’ only to some extent.

In summary, I have under this head considered the gradation of goods that there must be in the life of a rational agent, which necessarily includes the ultimate good as the first mover. The Ultimate Good, which I have noted can only be one, is not apprehended by us. However, I have argued that everyone has high level goods, which have the nature of ultimate goods insofar as they have the nature of a first

⁷⁷ Ibid., 269.

⁷⁸ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, III, 3, 1112b 12-15.

mover. This consideration has been the culmination of all the points that I have developed till now in this chapter, which include mainly that: the end is the principle in the practical field; action is the result of the movement of the will attracted by some good; and practical reason relates the lower goods with the higher goods. I shall now go on to present some of the difficulties that arise in Swinburne's philosophy due to the lack of a concept of the ultimate good. I should however begin by noting that Swinburne often speaks of 'greater goods' but does not dwell on what is their point of reference. Certainly, he does not situate them in a hierarchy that is related to an ultimate end.

The first of the difficulties is one that I have discussed at length in this chapter and mentioned frequently in Chapter II. He considers that things are good a priori. I have on the other hand argued here that the goodness of a lower good is judged according to its relation to a higher good, and this to a higher good, and so on until the ultimate good. Things are not good simply, but are 'good for something.' I need to clarify here that indeed we can say that something is good simply. This however is only because we already know the proper end (good) of the subject or the activity. In other words, we implicitly refer to what it is 'good for.' I shall elaborate this further in the next section. Nevertheless, it is clear that a housewife, who wants to make a cake and goes to a supermarket to acquire the ingredients, does not go picking all the goods in the supermarket but only those that are necessary for the cake. That is, insofar as they are not 'good for making a cake,' they are not good. Moreover, if her budget is limited, she may be forced to forego an ingredient that could give a better flavour to the cake but is not a necessary. Similarly, anyone who provides for his subjects (e.g. God, the head of a household) does not simply give

them any goods but only those that are good for the end that he has in mind for them.

In addition, Swinburne believes that if we know that 'it is good to give money to Oxfam' in certain natural circumstances, then this will necessarily be true whenever these circumstances are given.⁷⁹ I am of the view however that the statement 'it is good to give money to Oxfam' is not necessarily true. Rather, like all goods, it is subject to a hierarchy of goods. It will be true only when 'giving money to Oxfam' is not opposed to a high level good of the subject who makes the affirmation. If, for example, the subject has not catered for the needs of his family (and he takes family life to be a high level good), then it is not good that he give money to Oxfam. I believe moreover that a factor like this one does not belong to the circumstances but to the essence of practical reason (i.e. to the essence of action and choice). There is a hierarchy of goods, not only for all human beings but also for each individual person since God's providence is not only general but also particular. With respect to the human nature, I believe that many people will find reasonable what was held classically: spiritual goods come first, then bodily goods and finally external goods.⁸⁰

Furthermore, Swinburne considers that from the belief that 'it is good to give money to Oxfam', we are moved to do this unless influenced by some non-rational forces. I have however argued that having a belief about something being good is not enough to move me to act but that there is need for it to be the object of my will. Only goods that we want or desire move us to act. Normally, some high level good is object of my will and this moves me to want some other intermediate goods that are necessary for achieving it. We

⁷⁹ Cf. Swinburne, R., *Providence and the Problem of Evil*, 18.

⁸⁰ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, I, 8, 1098 b11-1099b 7.

choose goods that lead to our high level goods. Sometimes however, we may have to forego some goods that are not necessary for the attainment of our high level goods, if there is a conflict. Without a gradation of goods that is referred to an ultimate good (a high level good), there does not seem to be a rational criterion that guides choice. It would not be clear why some goods have to give way to others when there is a conflict if all are goods a priori.

Finally, when Swinburne considers the life after death, he thinks that the blessed in heaven lack some goods. He claims that unlike us here in this life, they do not have for example the good of the choice to reject God. Furthermore, he believes that there is nothing bad in that those who have never had a desire for the good (i.e. the morally good) and those who have totally lost their desire for the good (those who have formed an unalterably bad character) do not go to heaven. Thus, the so-called *poena damni* is not a bad state.⁸¹ He on the other hand believes that there is something bad with the *poena sensus* (i.e. the punishment of the senses) that those that do not go to heaven are said to undergo.⁸² This is a theological question but it is clear that if someone held that there is an ultimate good and that God is the ultimate good, he could not hold this position. Indeed, both Christianity and classical Greek philosophy hold that God is the ultimate good. Besides, since all goods we seek and all choices we make are for the sake of a higher good and eventually for the ultimate good, how can someone who already possesses the ultimate good be at a disadvantage in comparison to someone who has the possibility to choose but from lower goods? It is evident that Swinburne's concept of the good has serious

⁸¹ Swinburne, R., *Providence and the Problem of Evil*, 121.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 122.

implications for his theology and evaluation of Christian doctrine. On this account, Eleonore Stump notes that:

Swinburne's attempted [theodicy] seems incompatible with traditional Christian beliefs about heaven. On Swinburne's account, we are more like pets than humans unless we have significant exercise of our free will, and natural evil is necessary for such a significant exercise. But there is no natural evil in heaven and so, according to Swinburne's position, no significant exercise of free will either. Hence on Swinburne's account, persons in heaven are not perfected in virtue of their translation to heaven, as Christian doctrine has traditionally claimed, but rather diminished in status. Thoughtful Christians troubled by the problem of evil, then, are not likely to be reassured by Swinburne's solution.⁸³

3. The Teleological Concept of Nature

From the brief discussion of the theory of action and practical reason in the previous section, I have concluded that a lower good (the means) has to be evaluated according to its aptness to a higher good (the end). The choice of the means is right or good if it is adequate for attaining the end. From this conclusion, it begins to get clear that things (including actions) are evil only in relation to some good (end). This will get fully clear in this and the next section. I shall argue in the present section that man, like every nature, has a proper end. From this, it should follow that the goodness of every action or choice must be judged according to its relation with man's proper end. In other words, the activity of man *simpliciter* would be good or bad according to its relation with his proper end. This section is the central piece of the

⁸³ Stump, E., «The Problem of Evil», 230.

task that I have set myself in the present chapter: to propose a concept of good that would form basis for an adequate theodicy. I shall begin by considering the teleological concept of nature in general and then proceed to consider man's proper end.

3.1 Nature: Inclination to a Given Perfection

When we speak of the nature or essence of a thing, we mean that that thing has a specific way of being that distinguishes it from things with other natures. It is a different nature because it has different properties, is capable of specific activities and has specific inclinations or desires. 'Nature' is therefore a limiting or identifying concept. Every nature seems to point to specific goods and activities. Hence the saying of Heraclitus reported by Aristotle that "asses would prefer sweepings to gold."⁸⁴ And again, from a mango seed, only a mango tree can come and not a palm tree or a goat. I shall consider in this sub-section the teleological concept of nature in general which, together with all kinds of finality, is rejected by modern philosophy.

Fascinated by the success of natural science, modern philosophers left aside what classical philosophy said about nature and limited its concept to what natural science could say about it. This limitation consisted mainly in getting rid of the teleological character of nature.⁸⁵

While discussing the aspect of desirableness that belongs to the concept of good, I noted that it is the

⁸⁴ Cf. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, X, 5, 1176a 7.

⁸⁵ González, A.M., *En busca de la naturaleza perdida: Estudios de bioética fundamental*, Pamplona: EUNSA, 2000, 41. The translation is mine.

experience of tending or desiring that leads us to recognise the notion of good. I explained that the good could not however be reduced to the desire itself. The latter points to a perfection (i.e. a good) sought by the subject and to which the subject has a natural openness. Every subject has a specific nature which tends to and can only achieve a certain end (perfection). “The specific good of each being is already preannounced or inchoate in its ontological structure.”⁸⁶ From what things tend to, we are able to recognise what is their good.

Earlier, I cited the example of plants which do not have knowledge and so we cannot say that they desire and yet we also recognise what is good or convenient for them. Anscombe proposes this as a starting point of a response to Hume’s famous rejection of the transition from the ‘is’ to the ‘ought’.⁸⁷ This transition is similar to that from ‘is’ to ‘needs’ and it is one that we make often, not only with respect to rational beings but also to plants and even to artificial things. She is of the view that if the transition with respect to human beings were suspected to be dubious, it should at least not be the case for a plant. “To say that it needs that environment is not to say, e.g., that you want it to have that environment, but that it won’t flourish unless it has it.”⁸⁸ This is an argument from the characteristics of an organism to the environment it needs; from what it ‘is’ to what it ‘ought’ to have.

We are therefore able to know the specific good or perfection of each thing (nature) in its inclinations and activities. But we may at this point ask: who or what is it that decides which perfection a thing (a nature) seeks or is inclined to? An answer that arises immediately (and

⁸⁶ González, A.M., *Claves de Ley Natural*, 75.

⁸⁷ Cf. Anscombe, G. E. M., «Modern Moral Philosophy», 31.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

reasonably) is that: since the specific good of the thing is already inchoate in its ontological structure, then it is its maker that has decided its proper good or end. St. Thomas Aquinas explains that this is the case from the consideration of the intentionality of action:

Every agent, of necessity, acts for an end. For if, in a number of causes ordained to one another, the first be removed, the others must, of necessity, be removed also. Now the first of all causes is the final cause. The reason of which is that matter does not receive form, save in so far as it is moved by an agent; for nothing reduces itself from potentiality to act. But an agent does not move except out of intention for an end. For if the agent were not determinate to some particular effect, it would not do one thing rather than another: consequently in order that it produce a determinate effect, it must, of necessity, be determined to some certain one, which has the nature of an end. And just as this determination is effected, in rational nature, by the 'rational appetite,' which is called the will; so, in other things, it is caused by their natural inclination, which is called the 'natural appetite.'⁸⁹

So, if an agent gives a form (a nature) to matter, he must do so with an end in mind.⁹⁰ Otherwise, there would not be an explanation why he gives one and not another form, unless he did so by chance or accidentally. Hence, the term 'agent' must be understood here in its strict sense, which is that of one who acts intentionally. It follows therefore that each nature is directed towards an end given by its maker. Thus, when God creates (i.e. gives being to) anything, he does so with an end in view and gives the nature that can

⁸⁹ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I.II, q.1, a.2, co.

⁹⁰ Some of the views in this and the next few paragraphs about giving an end in making or creating a thing are also proposed in Affolter, J., «Human Nature as God's Purpose », *Religious Studies* 43 (2007) 443-455. It is clear however that Affolter operates with somewhat different metaphysical presuppositions from the ones in the present work.

attain it. Hence the nature of all creatures is directed towards a given end. The rational nature freely moves itself to its end while the irrational nature is determined to its end by a natural inclination. This is what is meant when nature is said to be teleological.

To affirm that nature is ‘teleological’ (from *telos*, end) means, above all, that the authentic reality of any natural being, its essence, is revealed precisely at the end of its natural development, for, it is then that this being appears in the splendour of its activity, showing with the greatest clarity what distinguishes it from the rest. This natural end or *telos* of each being constitutes its proper good, which intrinsically accounts for each and every prior step in its development. The *telos* of each being therefore appears as the principle that explains the dynamism of each natural being.⁹¹

It is when a natural being has reached its complete development that we say that it has attained its perfection. In the same vein, St. Thomas comments that “a thing is perfect in proportion to its state of actuality, because we call that perfect which lacks nothing of the mode of its perfection.”⁹² A being is perfect when it has attained all its properties, which, from its nature, we already knew that it was capable of. Herbert McCabe explains it this way:

a perfect *X* is an *X* that has all its properties; an imperfect *X* lacks one or more of its properties... The properties of a dog are those characteristics that make for the perfection of dogness in the dog. Of course, there is a fundamental sense in which a thing simply is a dog or is not; its essence is not susceptible to more and less. But there is also this other sense in which one dog can be more doggy than another.⁹³

⁹¹ González, A. M., *En busca de la naturaleza perdida*, 41. The translation is mine.

⁹² St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, q.4, a.1, co.

⁹³ McCabe, H., *God and Evil*, 39.

So, there cannot be a more or less with regard to the essence. With regard to the accidents (including its properties) however, a thing is susceptible to more or less. Thus, if to a given person or in a given country, a perfect dog has properties *r, s, t, ... z*, then a dog that has actual more of these properties is a more perfect dog (a better dog) than one that does not. When St. Thomas claims that being and good are the same, he goes on to say that they differ in thought. Therefore, they are predicated of things differently:

Hence by its substantial being, everything is said to have being simply; but by any further actuality it is said to have being relatively. Thus to be white implies relative being, for to be white does not take a thing out of simply potential being; because only a thing that actually has being can receive this mode of being. But goodness signifies perfection which is desirable; and consequently of ultimate perfection. Hence that which has ultimate perfection is said to be simply good; but that which has not the ultimate perfection it ought to have (although, in so far as it is at all actual, it has some perfection), is not said to be perfect simply nor good simply but only relatively.⁹⁴

Therefore, a thing attains its perfection (goodness) the more it attains its properties (i.e. accidents), while its being is there from the start. McCabe goes on to explain that although a good *X* is an *X* with all its properties, and a good *Y* is a *Y* with all its properties, it clearly does not mean that there is some property that good *X*s have in common with good *Y*s.⁹⁵ That is, goodness is not a property that good *X*s and good *Y*s have.

Rather since its goodness consists in its having its own properties, to attribute goodness to a thing is to announce the presence of these properties. Thus to say that people are good

⁹⁴ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, q.5, a.1, ad 1.

⁹⁵ Cf. McCabe, H., *God and Evil*, 54.

is not to say that they possess the characteristic of goodness; it is to say that they possess certain virtues.⁹⁶

Similarly, to say that a man is bad or evil is to announce that he lacks some virtues. To say that a thing is bad or evil is to say that it lacks one or more of its properties. It does not mean that evil is one of the properties that things have (i.e. that evil positively exists in them). Nor does it mean that evil Xs have anything in common with evil Ys. Furthermore, although Swinburne and some contemporary philosophers consider pain to be the paradigm case of a bad state (evil),⁹⁷ it does not mean that if there is no pain in a subject, that that subject suffers no evil. Hence, Eleonore Stump notes that:

In fact, some of the evils that human beings suffer bring with them little or no pain, either physical or psychological. What seems to be sudden instantaneous death is an example. And so is the peculiar phenomenon of Anton's Syndrome... it would obviously be a mistake to suppose that, because there is no associated pain, Anton's Syndrome is not an evil human beings suffer.⁹⁸

It is therefore clear that evil is a deprivation of good that is due. A further indication of this is that evil is never found to exist on its own but only in some subject. Only the subject exists and insofar as it exists, it is good.⁹⁹ It is this same subject that is said to be evil insofar as it lacks some perfection. I shall continue with this topic later when I discuss the ontological status of evil.

I have noted above that the "*telos* of each being therefore appears as the principle that explains the dynamism

⁹⁶ Ibid., 60.

⁹⁷ Cf. Swinburne, R., *Responsibility and Atonement*, 17.

⁹⁸ Stump, E., *Wandering in Darkness*, 5.

⁹⁹ Cf. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, q.48, a.3, co; q.17, a.4, ad 2.

of each natural being.”¹⁰⁰ From this point of view of nature as the principle of dynamism of any being, we can also recognise the end of each nature. Everything that a subject can do or attain is already present and recognisable in its nature. In *The Republic*, Socrates says that the end of a horse or an eye is that which could not be accomplished, or not so well accomplished, by any other thing.¹⁰¹ Earlier, I gave the example of the fact that from a mango seed, we expect a mango tree and not a palm tree or a goat. It can then be seen that the proper good or end of a subject is that which it is capable of attaining. I highlighted earlier while commenting on a passage by St. Thomas that God gives a thing a form (nature) according to the end he has in mind for it. We notice the same in the case of man’s artefacts: in manufacturing an object, he incorporates only those characteristics he considers necessary for it to achieve its purpose. Of course, the artefact may, in addition to its principal purpose, have secondary purposes. From what it can do, we know its purpose or end.

If a nature is composed, then its faculties or capacities will be directed towards various ends. It will however have an end that is proper to it as a whole according to what is proper to the nature. St. Thomas says that the determination by which a natural thing is restricted to one course of action and to bringing about specific effects is a proof of the providence of God, who it is that establishes it.¹⁰² God’s providence however does not stop at the natural level but goes farther. While discussing the themes of providence in Christian theodicy, I referred to the Christian doctrine that God not only bestows on man a natural principle at creation,

¹⁰⁰ González, A. M., *En busca de la naturaleza perdida*, 42.

¹⁰¹ Cf. Plato, *The Republic*, I, 352, New York: The Modern Library. The translation is by Jowett, B.

¹⁰² Cf. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Quaestiones Disputatae De Veritate*, q.5, a.2, ad 5.

but also a supernatural principle in Baptism and other Sacraments.¹⁰³ This would be another principle by which man can attain another kind of specific effects.

It is within this context, whereby nature is considered as directed towards an end or good, that the notion of *privatio boni* can have a role. I have already presented Richard Swinburne's rejection of this concept. Now, according to the doctrine of *privatio boni*, "evil is the absence of the good, which is natural and due to a thing,"¹⁰⁴ This means that if we are to speak of a thing as being evil or bad, we must know its nature (i.e. the properties that belong to it) and therefore its perfection. "Since evil is a deprivation of good, in order to understand what an evil is, we need to know of what good it is a deprivation; and this means that we must know the nature of the thing that is said to be evil."¹⁰⁵ It is logical that Swinburne, who follows the general trend of modern philosophy that ignores or rejects the teleological concept of nature, should likewise reject the concept of *privatio boni*.

Yet without this notion of *privatio boni*, it is not clear what makes the absence of a good an evil given that not all absence of good is an evil. Neither is it clear what would make one good greater than another. It should be noted that Swinburne normally has recourse to the greater good defence in order to explain why God would permit an evil.¹⁰⁶ He nevertheless does not mention any ultimate or first good which would be the basis of a hierarchy of goods. Rather, he considers that we know a priori what is good and which good is greater. From this, he simply suggests that we should weigh the different combinations of goods and evils and

¹⁰³ Cf. pp. 142-145.

¹⁰⁴ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, q.49, a.1, co.

¹⁰⁵ McCabe, H., *God and Evil*, 66.

¹⁰⁶ Cf. Swinburne, R., *Providence and the Problem of Evil*, 13; 29; 147.

decide whether the result is positive or negative. But how could this be possible if we have no reference point (like the proper good of man) for weighing? As he admits, views will differ greatly and he has no simple algorithm to work out the right balance.¹⁰⁷ On the other hand the proponents of *privatio boni* are able to explain that the loss of a good that is proper to a nature is an evil while the loss of other goods is not. Again, they are able to say which good is greater according to how important a good is for the attainment of the proper end or perfection of that nature.

3.2 The Proper Good of Man

Now, after arguing that every nature has a proper good or end, we need to ask ourselves: what is the proper end or, as Aristotle calls it, function (*ergon*) of man? Aristotle wonders whether it could be that all things have a proper function or activity and man has none:

Have the carpenter, then, and the tanner certain functions or activities, and has man none? Is he naturally functionless? Or as eye, hand, foot, and in general each of the parts evidently has a function, may one lay it down that man similarly has a function apart from all these? What then can this be?¹⁰⁸

Aristotle argues that the proper function of man cannot be simply to live, feed or grow, for this is common even to the plants; nor can it be simply to perceive, for this is common to the animals. Therefore, the life that is proper to man is not the one of nutrition, growth or perception but that

¹⁰⁷ Cf. *Ibid.*, 87.

¹⁰⁸ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, I, 7, 1097b 28-32.

of rationality. Thus, the proper human good is the activity of the soul in conformity with virtue (i.e. the good of reason).¹⁰⁹

However, as can be noted in the above arguments, Aristotle does not lose sight of the fact that man has a composed nature (he has vegetative and sensitive dimensions). This means that his perfection will comprise of multiple perfections or goods. Ana Marta González notes that while Aristotle follows Plato in the view that rational activity is the good of man, he takes more into account the composed nature of man. She suggests that such a consideration enables Aristotle to affirm that to commit and to suffer injustice are both evils as compared to Plato who claims in *Gorgias* that it is better to suffer an injustice than to commit it.¹¹⁰

So, what is the good of man or what are the goods of man; and how can we know it (them)? Like I have highlighted already, man, the same as all beings, does not choose his end but it is already contained in his nature. According to St. Thomas Aquinas, we have a natural knowledge of our end both intellectually and in our desires.¹¹¹ He goes ahead to suggest that we have a natural habit of practical principles, called *synderesis*, in the same way we have a natural habit of speculative principles, called the *noûs* or intellect.¹¹² The proper way of man however, even when he knows his proper good(s) intellectually, is to seek and approach them discursively (rationally).¹¹³ The goods known intellectually will act as ends (principles) that guide man in setting his 'high level goods', which in turn will guide his rational choices. This way, there will be a hierarchy

¹⁰⁹ Cf. *Ibid.*, 1098a 1-4.

¹¹⁰ Cf. González, A.M., *El Bien y el Sumo Bien*, 1.

¹¹¹ Cf. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Quaestiones Disputatae De Veritate*, q.5, a.1, co.

¹¹² Cf. *Ibid.*, q.16, a.1, co.

¹¹³ Cf. *Ibid.*

established by reason among the multiple ends possible to the human nature. Some goods will from time to time give way to others or will have to be enjoyed only to the extent that they do not infringe on the goods necessary for the attainment of the ultimate good. But like I suggested earlier, this is a dynamic process in which the hierarchy of ends may change and in which there may even be frequent errors and rectifications. According to Aristotle, there is need for a right measure and this will be attained through the interplay of the virtue of prudence and the moral virtues.

In conclusion, I have presented arguments that show that each nature has a proper end (i.e. nature is teleological). This point has deep implications for the understanding of divine providence. Like St. Thomas Aquinas says, “the very fact that natural things exist to attain an end is the most powerful argument for showing that the world is ruled by divine providence.”¹¹⁴ I have argued that normally we can recognise the end of a nature in both the perfections that it seeks or is inclined to and the activities that it is able to carry out. It follows from this that man also has a proper end. I have presented some views from classical philosophy about what is the proper good of man and how we know it. I have not tried to prove these views or discuss them in great detail since it is neither necessary nor possible within the scope of this study. I believe that the only necessary task for the present study was to show that we recognise all natures (and so the human nature) to have proper ends. I have finally noted that in the context of the teleological concept of nature, the view of evil as *privatio boni* is easily conceivable.

¹¹⁴ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Expositio super Iob*, cap. 5.

4. The Ontological Status of Evil

Benedicto Po Tao observes that:

When atheists and theists discussing the argument from evil jointly suppose the truth of the proposition ‘evil exists’ or ‘evils exist,’ –

- 1) They *do not mean* that evil is, formally, an entity, or that evil has a positive ontological reality...
- 2) They *do not mean* evil is, formally, a being in act...¹¹⁵

Unfortunately however, like I have reported in Chapter II, Swinburne’s views and those of the other authors that I have presented do not seem to reflect Po Tao’s positive analysis. Rather, they seem to forget that evil having propositional being is not the same as it having real being. That is, they seem to consider evil as having the same ontological status as good. I have taken note of Swinburne’s rejection of the notion of *privatio boni* but also suggested that it may have resulted from its misrepresentation. For, classically, *privatio boni* has not been understood as a mere absence of good, like Swinburne considers it, but as the absence of a *due* good. From the consideration, in the previous section, that each nature has a proper good(s) necessary for its ‘flourishing’, it would follow immediately that the absence of such good(s) is evil to the said nature.

I wish now to present some more details of Swinburne’s position on the existence of evil. I shall then go on to defend the view that evil has no positive existence. This represents the traditional philosophical position, which also

¹¹⁵ Po Tao, B., *Evil and Abounding Love: Peter van Inwagen’s Response to the Problem of Evil*, Pamplona: University of Navarra, Ecclesiastical Faculty of Philosophy, 2008, 41.

seems to be the most intuitive in the majority of the cases, especially in the case of physical evil. It seems quite natural to consider that darkness is the absence of light or blindness of sight rather than considering them as having positive existence. Nor do we think of light as the absence of darkness, or sight of blindness. It is true however that in some cases, like pain or moral evil, it may not be the most intuitive view.

4.1 *The Existence of Evil: Swinburne's Concept*

In his discussion of *privatio boni*, Swinburne objects to Aquinas' affirmation that "no being can be spoken of as evil, formally as being, but only so far as it lacks being."¹¹⁶ Aquinas completes this with the examples that a man is said to be evil because he lacks some virtue, and an eye is said to be evil because it lacks the power to see well. Swinburne thinks that this position considers evil as mere absence of good, for which reason he rightly claims it would be logically impossible for there not to be evil. But like I have pointed out, evil understood as *privatio boni* refers not to the absence of any good but of the due good. "It is no evil if the goodness of a tree is lacking from my room but it is an evil if it is lacking from a tree."¹¹⁷ Swinburne on the other hand believes that evil has positive existence. He does not try to show its positive existence but takes it for granted. Rather, he appeals to the court of common sense. He says: "it does, however, seem very implausible to claim that pain and other suffering, bad desires, wicked acts are just an absence of some good."¹¹⁸

¹¹⁶ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, q.5, a.3, ad 2.

¹¹⁷ McCabe, H., *God and Evil*, 60.

¹¹⁸ Swinburne, R., *Providence and the Problem of Evil*, 32.

Swinburne's conception of freedom makes it necessary that evil have a positive existence in the same way as the good. Freedom, for him, implies a choice between at least two alternatives. And if these do not include a choice between the good and the bad, then it is very unserious free will.¹¹⁹ He goes as far as to claim that natural evil exists in order to make free will possible.¹²⁰ Thus, some of the criticism he has received has been on his attempts to extend the free-will defence, which has previously been limited to justifying moral evil, to natural evil.¹²¹ Hence, he believes that Adam could not have committed the first sin if evil did not already exist. Similarly, he claims that "since angels could only choose the bad if they were tempted so to do, being already subject to bad desires, the bad must have pre-existed any bad choice by the angels."¹²²

With respect to moral evil, Swinburne says that he understands it as including all bad states caused deliberately or negligently by humans. This, first and foremost, refers to pain and suffering although he admits cases in which humans do what they believe to be bad but no suffering results (e.g. telling a lie).¹²³ An agent causing pain or suffering or allowing them when he could prevent them is a bad or evil agent except under specified conditions.¹²⁴ So, "[our] understanding of an agent being good would be gravely deficient unless we thought that, other things being equal, a good agent will stop pain and other suffering, if he can do so easily."¹²⁵ In the same vein, he argues that God's goodness

¹¹⁹ Cf. *Ibid.*, 84.

¹²⁰ Cf. Swinburne, R., *Is there a God?*, 109.

¹²¹ Cf. Moser, P. K., «Natural Evil and the Free Will Defense», 49-56.

¹²² Swinburne, R., *Providence and the Problem of Evil*, 108.

¹²³ Cf. *Ibid.*, 4; *Is there a God?*, 97.

¹²⁴ Cf. Swinburne, R., *Providence and the Problem of Evil*, 4.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 23.

must refer to moral goodness or else, “it might be no objection to his existence that there is pain and other suffering.”¹²⁶ It seems therefore that, for Swinburne, moral evil comprises principally of free agents causing or allowing pain. And Swinburne insists that “pain is not just an absence of pleasure, and wicked acts are not just the non-occurrence of good acts.”¹²⁷

4.2 Evil: The Absence of the Due Good

I have given some arguments to show that evil is an absence of a due good while discussing the teleological concept of nature. I have also suggested above that most times, especially in the case of physical evil, understanding evil this way seems quite intuitive. However, there are some cases which are more difficult to conceive in this way. It is quite difficult to consider the murder of someone as simply the absence of some good. Similarly, the feeling of pain seems to be something that positively exists in my body and not the absence of some good. Hence, Swinburne doubts the plausibility of the claim that pain is the absence of pleasure and that wicked acts are just the non-occurrence of good acts. Moreover, even the cases on which we seem to agree that they are the absence of some perfection (e.g. blindness), we still speak of them as existing. I shall consider below the ontological status of evil in general and some particular cases.

¹²⁶ Ibid. 7.

¹²⁷ Ibid. 32.

a) The Existence of Bad States in General

Swinburne says that although the ‘problem’ which *Providence and the Problem of Evil* deals with “is called ‘the problem of evil’... it is really the problem of bad states of affairs...”¹²⁸ Thus, the question we are faced with is that of the existence of bad states of affairs. I noted earlier what Swinburne considers as an event or phenomenon or state of affairs: a substance having a property or relation, changing its properties or relations, coming into existence or ceasing to exist is an *event*.¹²⁹ Thus, like I have presented, ‘God exists’ is a phenomenon that could account for the existence of the other phenomena. And ‘evil exists’ is another phenomenon that puts in doubt the former phenomenon. I have noted, in Chapter I, that he considers that by inductive logic, which involves taking into consideration all the evidence that we have, we can reach an explanation of this difficulty. It may however be seen that these two are simply phenomena or states of affairs: They are at the same ontological level.

Under this heading, I shall strive to bring to light the sense of being (existence) that is being applied when we say ‘evil exists.’ Is it the same as when we say ‘God exists’ or ‘my computer exists’? The different senses in which the verb ‘to be’ is used have been subject of long and thorough study since Aristotle up to the analytical tradition, in which it has taken prime position. Among the many texts in which Aristotle deals with the issue, is the following:

But since the unqualified term ‘being’ has several meanings, of which one was seen to be the accidental, and another the true (non-being being the false), while besides these there are

¹²⁸ Ibid., 4.

¹²⁹ Cf. Swinburne, R., *Is there a God?*, 20; *The Existence of God*, 23.

the figures of predication, e.g. the ‘what’, quality, quantity, place, time, and any similar meanings which ‘being’ may have; and again besides all these there is that which is potentially or actually.¹³⁰

Accidental being includes negations, privations, coincidences, fortuitous encounters and the like.¹³¹ St. Thomas Aquinas says that “in all these, to be means nothing other than to happen.”¹³² ‘Happening’ implies a degree of reality but it does not refer to a concrete existence. Thus, when I pick up a stone from the ground, something happens but I do not give being to anything new.¹³³ Alejandro Llano explains:

[The *ens per accidens*] does have a certain reality; not in the proper sense that beings do, but in the ontologically improper sense that simple happenings, mere facts, do. These can be treated *as* beings but they do not have a consistency, an internal unity, of their own; in themselves they lack a limit. Their unity is the result of a consideration, a relation established from without (from the mind). It is in the corresponding judgmental synthesis, expressed in a proposition, that the *per accidens*, which is really only a coincidence, comes to be taken as a being.¹³⁴

Llano goes on to explain, following Aristotle, that the *ens per accidens* does not have a consistency or internal unity of its own because it does not exist by its essence (since it does not have one). It exists by something extrinsic to its essence. “[Since] *ens per accidens* does not have its own

¹³⁰ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, VI, 2, 1026a 33-1026b 2.

¹³¹ Cf. Llano, A., *Metaphysics and Language*, 148.

¹³² St. Thomas Aquinas, *Sententia Libri Metaphysicae Aristotelis*, L.5, 1.9, n.3, in Alarcón, E., (ed), <http://www.corpusthomicum.org/cmp05.html#82450>. The translation is mine.

¹³³ Cf. McCabe, H., *God and Evil*, 44.

¹³⁴ Llano, A., *Metaphysics and Language*, 148.

nature, it is not engendered nor does it perish as an *ens per se*.”¹³⁵ The *ens per accidens* neither has its own nature nor its own being. It therefore has no proper cause. Hence evil and all privations have no proper cause.

Aquinas asserts that evil has not got a cause *per se* but only *per accidens*. If the bell that you heard ringing was blue, you can say that ‘it was the blue one I heard’. It is *per accidens* that blueness was audible... When we ask for the cause of an evil, we reply by giving the cause of some good things that happen to be evil for this other thing. Thus, just as the thing we hear *happens* to be blue, so the good thing that is caused *happens* to be evil for some subject, and it is this sense that we can speak of a cause of evil. It is a perfection and a good of a fire to heat, but if what it is heating is an animal, this very heat may be an evil for the animal.¹³⁶

Phenomena (states of affairs) are complex objects of knowledge that are possible only on the logical plane. The ‘complex’ is formed by and in the mind. This is what is called veridical being. The veridical ‘being’ and ‘is’ “signify the composition of a proposition, which the intellect makes in uniting and separating.”¹³⁷

Nevertheless there is not always a being in reality that directly corresponds to the veridical being that is established in the mind. For the mind can consider as a certain being something which is not in itself a being. Such is the case of negations and privations. If I say ‘blindness exists’, I state a *true proposition* but blindness itself is not a *true being* in the nature of things, for in reality it is only a privation... It happens (*accidit*) to a thing that something is truly affirmed of it in thought or in language.¹³⁸

¹³⁵ Ibid., 147.

¹³⁶ McCabe, H., *God and Evil*, 113-114.

¹³⁷ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Sententia Libri Metaphysicae Aristotelis*, L.5, 1.9, n.11.

¹³⁸ Llano, A., *Metaphysics and Language*, 167.

So, when we say that privations or other accidental beings *are* or exist, it is only veridical or propositional being that we attribute to them. When I say that ‘Bartimaeus is blind’ or that ‘there is darkness the dining room’, I say the truth about Bartimaeus and the dining room but by this, do not mean that darkness or blindness positively or physically exist in them. It is clear that darkness is simply a lack of light and that a mere introduction of a source of light in the dining room would imply a simultaneous end of the darkness. On the other hand, when the dining room is full of light, I do not bring about darkness in it by introducing a ‘source of darkness’. The only way of causing darkness in the room is by removing the source of light. Similar considerations may be made about blindness and all other physical ‘evils’. It is manifest therefore that these are an absence of ‘being’ and *bonum convertitur cum ente*.¹³⁹

In summary, evil is a privation of the goodness that is proper to a subject. When a subject has all its perfections (properties), it is good. But if it lacks one or some of its perfections, it is said to be evil. These were also the conclusions from the earlier discussion of the teleological concept of nature. The being (existence) of evil therefore is not its own but that of the subject. Hence, it is *ens per accidens*. And when we speak of evil as existing, that is, when we form propositions about evil, we grant it another sense of being, that of propositional being (*ens ut verum*). It is in this case a ‘state of affairs’ or phenomenon. Both of these are senses of being but not ontological (real) being. Hence, Aristotle excludes both of them from the object of metaphysics.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁹ Cf. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, q.17, a.4 ad 2.

¹⁴⁰ Cf. Llano, A., *Metaphysics and Language*, 160; 168.

At this point, I wish to recall the itinerary that I have followed up to here. First, during the discussion of theodicy in the Christian tradition in Chapter II, I clarified the notion of *privatio boni* in face of its misrepresentation by Swinburne. I underlined the fact that it referred to the absence of the *due* good and not simply of any good. Then, I went on to consider, while I discussed the teleological concept of nature in Section 3 of this chapter, how it is possible to speak of a ‘due good’ (hence the absence of some goods is evil while of others is not). Finally, I have under this heading shown that evil has no real existence but is just the absence of good. I believe that, along this itinerary, I have been able to show that Swinburne’s claim that evil has to exist as a positive reality if we are to be able to exercise free will (by choosing between good and evil) is not founded.

b) The Existence of Pain

Having argued above that evil is a deprivation and therefore has only coincidental and propositional being, I need to consider now some of the cases that I noted are more difficult to conceive this way. I have recorded Swinburne’s view that it is implausible that pain is just the absence of some good. Pain is not, he says, just the absence of pleasure. I agree with Swinburne that pain is not the absence of pleasure. I shall argue here however, following Aristotle’s considerations about pleasure, that pain is an absence of some good, or more precisely, its result. I shall endeavour to present Aristotle’s views sequentially in plain language such that, I believe, there will not be any need to justify or explain them.

Aristotle argues in *Nicomachean Ethics* that pleasure is a state of the soul that accompanies activities liked by the subject.¹⁴¹ Since all actions and activities are aimed at some good, is pleasure the good that we seek in our activities? Using several arguments, Aristotle shows that pleasure is neither the ultimate good nor the good we seek in a great number of our actions and activities.¹⁴² Swinburne holds the same idea¹⁴³ and I believe that most people also do. The case of the vicious or self-indulgent man, who seeks pleasure for its own sake and does not care from which activity he obtains it, is an exception rather than the rule. Normally, pleasure is only a state that accompanies our doing activities that we love or our obtaining the goods that we have been striving for. This may be seen from the fact that “there are many things we should be keen about even if they brought no pleasure, e.g. seeing, remembering, knowing, possessing the excellences...”¹⁴⁴ St. Thomas considers delight as one of the acts of the will, whereby it rests in enjoyment of the end.¹⁴⁵

In the same way that pleasure accompanies activities that we love or the attainment of the goods that we strive for, so does pain accompany the impediment of the goods we would want to attain. Again just like pleasure, the activities that pain accompanies may be corporeal or spiritual. Like I considered earlier, man being of a complex nature, each faculty or power of his is directed towards a given good. The impediment of the attainment of the good of any power will be accompanied by pain. However, like I also argued, man has a proper good, as man, and this is the good according to reason. Man therefore ought to seek the good of reason even

¹⁴¹ Cf. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, I, 8, 1099a 5.

¹⁴² Cf. *Ibid.*, X, 1172a 20 - 1176a 29.

¹⁴³ Cf. Swinburne, R., *Providence and the Problem of Evil*, xii.

¹⁴⁴ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, X, 3, 1174a 4-6.

¹⁴⁵ Cf. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I.II, q.12, a.1, ad 4.

if it often involves the pain resulting from missing some of his relative goods. I shall continue this argument later on when I present a theodicy according to the notion of the ultimate good. For now however, I wish to note that from the above, it is clear that pain is a result of the absence of some good proper to some faculty of man.

Pain accompanies the failure of one or more faculties of man to attain its good. And this is normally caused coincidentally in the same way that I quoted Herbert McCabe explaining Aquinas' doctrine: "the good thing that is caused happens to be evil for some subject, and it is this sense that we can speak of a cause of evil."¹⁴⁶ The failure of one faculty to obtain its good is caused by another subject or even another faculty of the same subject obtaining its own good.

c) The Existence of Moral Evil

Swinburne also thinks that wicked acts are not just the non-occurrence of good acts. Indeed it is not intuitive to think of the murder of innocent children or torture as simply an absence of good. It is therefore necessary to consider the ontological status of bad acts (i.e. moral evil). Is moral evil an absence of good just like the cases I have considered above or is it something that positively exists? Swinburne's objection is his usual challenge to some explanations of why God's causing or allowing evil does not make him bad. Brian Davies, for example, explains:

There is a fairly traditional theistic response to these observations. According to this, human moral failure cannot be thought of as something for which God is responsible

¹⁴⁶ McCabe, H., *God and Evil*, 114.

because it is, in a sense, nothing at all. The idea here is that, in being the maker and sustainer of the universe, God can only be responsible for what is real and that human moral failure is somehow unreal.¹⁴⁷

This position follows from another traditional theistic view, whereby God is the cause of all things that exist, including their activity. Thus, St. Thomas Aquinas argues:

[Just] as God has not only given being to things when they first began to exist, and also causes being in them as long as they exist, conserving things in being, as we have shown, so also has He not merely granted operative powers to them when they were originally created, but He always causes these powers in things. Hence, if this divine influence were to cease, every operation would cease. Therefore, every operation of a thing is traced back to Him as to its cause.¹⁴⁸

It follows from this position that God is the cause of even the free actions of human beings. Davies defends this view even in face of its rejection by Swinburne and others that defend a libertarian understanding of freedom. These believe that if God were the cause of free human actions, it would follow that he is also the cause of the bad (evil) free actions. Davies believes however that this does not have to be the case.¹⁴⁹ He suggests that we should ask ourselves what kind of reality is involved in there being human moral failures. His view is that they are not things that we can intelligibly take to be created or sustained by God. They are not substances, but rather, what we have when people fail to aim for a good for which they should aim. He goes on to suggest that if this is the case, then “it actually does make

¹⁴⁷ Davies, B., *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion*, 1993, 44.

¹⁴⁸ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra Gentiles*, III, 67, 3.

¹⁴⁹ Cf. Davies, B., *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion*, 1993, 41-43.

sense to say that they are, in a way, nothing at all.”¹⁵⁰ And if moral evil is not ‘anything’, it cannot be caused by God.

Whereas, I agree with Davies’ position, I would like to emphasise a point that he does not give much importance in his explanation. It is a step that he jumps even though he somehow acknowledges it later on. This is that bad actions are real and therefore have existence. From his defending the view that God is the cause of even our free actions, he goes directly to arguing that human moral failure is an absence of the good that is due in human actions.¹⁵¹ I think however that before reaching this point, we need to ask ourselves if morally bad actions are real and have existence. My view, following St. Thomas, and which I believe Davies agrees with, is that they have real existence. It is here then that we need to ask ourselves how it is that they are an absence of good.

In suggesting an answer to this question, I should begin by noting that all acts insofar as they are real, they exist and so are good. It should moreover be recalled that all actions aim at some good. Even bad actions aim at some good and, inasmuch as they exist, are good. However, from the considerations in the previous sections, it should be recalled that the goodness of actions is judged from none other than their relation with the end. The goodness comes not from the action itself but from the relation that it has with the end. So, actions are judged in the context of the acting subject. If I am playing football, I ask myself if this particular action I am doing is good for achieving the goal or end of football. Similarly, I have argued above that the activity of man has a proper end and so the actions of man as man are judged according to their relation with his end. The proper

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 44.

¹⁵¹ Cf. Ibid., 44-45.

end of man is the good of reason. That is, human reason establishes a hierarchy among the multiple goods that are proper to the human faculties. A man ought to strive and act according to the order of reason.

My desire for riches is a positive thing, and a perfectly good positive thing, created by God – the only thing is that it is a *minor* thing. I should desire other things more than this. My failure to seek my true happiness and fulfilment, of course, [...] is a failure, an absence, a non-being...¹⁵²

Therefore, human acts are good insofar as they have the due order to the end of man and bad insofar as it is lacking. And so it can be seen that moral evil is also an absence of good.

Moral evil is a defect in a characteristically human act, i.e. it is a defect in an act when that act is considered with a view to the *bonum universale*; it is the defect of not acting in accordance with reason. Any act is evil if it is unnatural; it is morally evil if it is unnatural to the kind of creature whose purpose is purposiveness itself.¹⁵³

So, all actions aim at some good and their badness results only from the relation of the chosen good to higher goods and eventually to the ultimate good. Therefore, Swinburne's view that evil must exist positively before man or the angels commit evil does not seem to be correct. The good chosen exists and so does the action once it is done. Like it has been said however, these in themselves are good. What is evil is the relation and relations have no substantial existence. It is then clear, firstly, that evil has no existence and that, in choosing, we do not make a choice between a good and an evil. "The will wants only what appears to be

¹⁵² McCabe, H., *God Matters*, 36.

¹⁵³ McCabe, H., *God and Evil*, 86.

good; at least from a certain point of view. For the same reason, choice is made only among goods.”¹⁵⁴

Secondly, evil action is not a result of a choice between good and evil (as two existing objects) since one always chooses an action under its aspect of goodness. This, like I noted while discussing the intentionality of action, is also Swinburne’s position. So, when one chooses to do some action, it is because one considers it to be good at this moment in these circumstances. The practical judgement that moves the person to tell a lie is that ‘to tell a lie in this case is good’ or ‘to tell a lie in order to escape punishment is good’ or ‘to tell lies is always good’. From the intentionality of actions, it is clear that no one makes the judgement ‘to tell a lie in this case is bad’ and then goes ahead to do it. In no case at all does anyone choose the ‘evil’. Evil therefore is never one of the choices.

In conclusion, it has been shown here that evil is a deprivation of a due good, not only in general but also in the particular cases in which it was initially less obvious that it is the case. Understanding evil as *privatio boni* is indispensable. Without it, we cannot see that by causing evil, God is only causing an absence of a good. Neither can we see that no one causes evil *directly* but only a good that leads to the absence of another good. Besides, only by understanding evil as *privatio boni*, can we explain why some goods are not necessary (i.e. are not due). We do not therefore need to explain why God would allow such an absence of good, since in the first place that good was not necessary.

¹⁵⁴ Alarcón, E., «Libertad y Necesidad», 33. The translation is mine.

5. Moral Goodness and God's Goodness

I have considered in the previous sections that we are always moved to act by something we believe to be good. Nevertheless, we always ask ourselves if this thing is truly good for us. Thus, the doctor, farmer and footballer ask themselves in the exercise of their arts (i.e. before, during and after their actions) whether their actions are good in the context of their arts. Similarly, they and every man ask themselves whether their actions are good, simply. That is, we ask ourselves: is this action (that I have done or are about to do) good for *me*? What actions are good for me to do as a man and what kind of life should I live? This shows that there is a proper human good. It is this conclusion at which I have arrived on considering the teleological concept of nature. It is these things that are good for a man *as man* that constitute the moral good. It is now (in the present section) necessary to consider under which perspective the goodness of the actions and life of a man should be judged. It is also necessary to examine whether the goodness of God can be considered under the same perspective. Richard Swinburne claims that God's goodness has to be moral goodness. In other words, he believes that when we talk about God's goodness, we are talking about whether God acts morally well or not.

5.1 The Perspective of Morality

I shall present here what I consider to be the correct conception of moral goodness. Such a conception should take into account the nature of human action and should be able to act as a guide for making choices that would constitute a

good life. The conception that I shall present follows the classical view. I shall however try to present it following the discussion that has been carried out in the previous sections. I shall then present the principal characteristics of consequentialism and especially its shortcomings. In spite of its shortcomings, it seems clear – as I shall show – that Swinburne and many contemporary philosophers operate with consequentialist categories. Finally, I shall present some important points of Swinburne's moral concept.

a) The Goodness of Actions according to their Intentionality

From what has been discussed in the previous sections, it should now be possible to present what can be considered as the correct moral perspective. The question that needs an answer and which I believe that it is now possible to answer is: By what criteria can we say that a given human action is good or bad? Which choice of action can we say is good or bad for a man, simply as a man? I began this chapter by considering that the good or end is the principle in the practical field. A good that is desired or an end to be achieved is the starting point of all practical considerations. In other words, it is what we consider to be good that moves us to act. This refers to the intentionality of action. However, I also noted that it was not enough to be moved by a good for action to be considered as intentional. Rather, there is a need to know the good at which one aims and the connection between what one actually does and the good (the goal). And only rational agents are capable of this.

I have also noted that practical reason has this role of choosing the means (what I actually do) that are adequate for the end (what I want). In any activity or context the lower goods (i.e. the means) that are chosen are evaluated according to their adequateness to the end. The end is the first in the intention and therefore the higher good and it is attained through a choice of one or more lower goods. None of the lower goods is chosen unless it leads to the attainment of the higher good. That is, **the means are not chosen for themselves but only for the sake of the end**. Then, an agent that chooses a good or goods that are adequate for the end in the given context acts well, while one who does not acts badly. Hence, St. Thomas notes that “[a] fault is never attributed to an agent, if the failure is related to something that is not the agent’s end. Thus, the fault of failing to heal is imputed to the physician, but not to the builder or the grammarian.”¹⁵⁵ It may in addition be recalled that no one ever chooses what one considers to be bad or evil. Only goods move us to act. So, if we say that a choice or an action is bad, it is because in the given context or for the given goal, it is not the adequate one. Moreover, I have also argued that all evil (including moral evil) has no existence. Evil is not a being that is an alternative to the good but rather only the good exists.

However, let me return to the point that the goods that are chosen in any given context are really good if they are apt for the end. I have argued earlier that human nature, like all nature, has a proper end or good. Therefore human activity or life has a proper end. The goods that are chosen by men have to be evaluated according to their aptness to this end. Human actions are good or bad according to whether the goods at which they aim are in line with the human ultimate good. And since, like I have argued, any action is done because of

¹⁵⁵ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra Gentiles*, III, 2, 7.

the will that is drawn by the good, a will that is directed towards a good that is adequate for the human ultimate good is a good will, while the one that is directed towards a good that is inadequate is a bad will.

What, then, does 'evil action' mean? It means an action which implies a will that is not upright; the action in question is *this sort* of action precisely because of the will which shapes its intentional content... A human action springs from the rational appetite, and it determines this appetite as a good or an evil one. So it determines whether the person becomes a good or a bad person. The acting subject changes while acting. By choosing determinate actions, he or she shapes himself or herself. He or she becomes good or evil precisely by choosing this or that action. Let me specify: to become a good person, not only the choice involved in action but also the further intentions need to be good; to become an evil person, a single deficiency in the will is sufficient. *Bonum ex integra causa, malum ex quocumque defectu*, says the classical principle.¹⁵⁶

Hence, a man who chooses a good that is adequate for his last end becomes good, while the one that chooses one that is inadequate becomes a bad man. In the same vein, Aristotle comments: "There are three objects of choice... about all these the good man tends to go right and the bad man to go wrong..."¹⁵⁷

This touches directly on the issue with which morality is concerned and which has given rise to moral science in the course of history. For, moral science has historically arisen as a help in answering questions that all men have had about what kind of life is a good life. That is, men have asked themselves about what they should do or not do in order to be

¹⁵⁶ Rhonheimer, M., *The Perspective of the Acting Person: Essays in the Renewal of Thomistic Moral Philosophy*, Washington, D. C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2008, 29.

¹⁵⁷ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, II, 3, 1104b 30.

good men and to live a good life. This is why the moral perspective has to be a 'first person' perspective. What is important in morality is not whether I shall be held morally responsible by others but what kind of person I become by this action that I am about to do and by this life that I live. The goods that I decide to pursue in my life determine my will and make it either a good or bad will, and hence, make me a good or bad man. When I set my will on grabbing my neighbour's land, I am no longer the same person as the one before. When I decide to give up gambling because I realise that it is a danger to my family, I make a choice after which I become a different person. The goods that are objects of my will make me a different person. This is the 'first person' perspective of morality and this is perspective proper to morality.

On the other hand, observers (the 'third person' perspective) have no access to what a subject becomes through his action.¹⁵⁸ It is true that there are objective criteria of what is good or bad for me (since the ultimate end of man is objective) and so others can say something about the moral goodness of my acting. Nevertheless, only I have got access to the change that takes place inside me as a result of my acting. Only I know the goods to which my will has been drawn. The change that takes place within me is the subject of morality, while whatever else that results from my acting (e.g. its consequences) can be the subject of other fields of inquiry like the law, sociology, etc. Like I shall be claiming, an ethical view based on the consequences of an action that are observed does not tell us what kind of person the subject becomes, for, it considers the changes in the physical world

¹⁵⁸ For the difference between 'first person' and 'third person' ethics, cf. Finnis, J., *Fundamentals of Ethics*, Washington D. C.: Georgetown University Press, 1983.

and not in the agent. Thus, “the perspective of praxis is a perspective that is concerned with the realization of the good within the acting subject.”¹⁵⁹

Therefore, in human action it is the goods to which the will is directed that configure me into a different man. These include the good that grants an action its basic intentionality and any further goods that are intended. The former is what makes the concrete action done what it is (e.g. self-defence, murder, etc.) and is classically called the *object*, while the further goods are the *intentions*, which are the motives for which a concrete action is chosen. These determine the will and so the human agent. It is for this reason that the object and intention together with the circumstances have been considered in traditional ethics to be the sources of morality (moral goodness) of the actions. The circumstances do not determine whether an action is good or bad but can intensify or attenuate its goodness or badness.

b) Consequentialism

G. E. M. Anscombe asserts in *Modern Moral Philosophy* that all contemporary scholars in English philosophy since Henry Sidgwick have a consequentialist perspective of morality. She says that all the differences among them are minor in comparison to their common characteristic: that all believe that it is not possible to say that an action is intrinsically bad but that this depends on its consequences.¹⁶⁰ Is this still true today and can it be applied to Richard Swinburne? I shall begin by highlighting some of

¹⁵⁹ Rhonheimer, M., *The Perspective of Morality*, 60.

¹⁶⁰ Cf. Anscombe, G. E. M., «Modern Moral Philosophy», 33.

the shortcomings of consequentialism and then go on to show the frequent use of its categories in contemporary philosophy. I shall not try to show that contemporary philosophers are consequentialists in essence but only that they operate within its limits. Consequentialism is a perspective that judges the goodness of actions and of agents according to the results (consequences) in the world and not in the agent. I have on the other hand, under the previous heading, argued that morality concerns the subject who acts, who is interested in knowing which kind of person he becomes through his actions. Morality is concerned with the quality of the agent's will, which is the source of all action. The will becomes good or bad according to its choices.

Consequentialists willy-nilly are compelled to say [...] that 'action' as such has nothing to do with 'will.' But this is precisely their erroneous presupposition. In reality every human action – precisely if it really *is* what we call a 'human action' – implies a will whose intentional content forms part of what we traditionally call the *object* of this act.¹⁶¹

This is in line with Anscombe's assertion that "human actions are always *chosen, willed* actions."¹⁶² Rhonheimer goes on to emphasise the need of the 'first person' view point in order to grasp the meaning of the 'object' of a human act. Like I have argued above, the 'third person' view point has no access to the object or to any other kind of intentionality.

Consequentialism is an ethics of the 'third person'. The judgment of action is carried out from the perspective of an impartial observer of a structure of events... But on closer inspection one sees immediately that such an ethics excludes precisely that which is the very point of morality: the identity

¹⁶¹ Rhonheimer, M., *The Perspective of the Acting Person*, 29.

¹⁶² Anscombe, G. E. M., *Intention*, 66.

of the acting subject as a being that strives toward the good and that transforms itself toward good or bad ...¹⁶³

So, consequentialism leaves out what I have argued above to be the concern of morality. It is thus an amoral viewpoint. This situation results from modern philosophy's wish to apply the scientific method in ethics. It eliminates the will, finality and other concepts which it considers not susceptible to being treated with scientific rigour from its theory of action. It wants to use scientific criteria and so needs categories or parameters that can be measured or experimentally verified. Hence, instead of describing human actions according to their objects (the good to which they are directed), modern philosophy prefers to do so according to their consequences. But like I argued earlier, consequences cannot tell us which human action has been carried out nor can they tell us whether it was a human action at all. A man lying dead before me could have died from a heart attack or by manslaughter or by murder. Here, we have the same event (consequence) that could have resulted either from a natural event or from two different human actions. Only from the object of the action can we know which action it is.

Earlier, I quoted Martin Rhonheimer as claiming that analytical philosophers as a rule do not make any distinction between 'human acts' and 'acts of man'. He notes that such a distinction presupposes a strong concept of action that includes the will. He adds that "this nondistinction then often leads to unnecessary complications... as in the case of Donald Davidson – in the reduction of actions to corporeal movements."¹⁶⁴ This is to be expected when the fact that human actions are constituted by the object of the will from which they result is ignored. It is intentionality, like I have

¹⁶³ Rhonheimer, M., *The Perspective of Morality*, 402.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 53.

argued, that makes actions capable of being described as rational (human) actions. This however cannot be captured from a third person perspective since intentionality is not observable. “From the perspective of an *observer*, of course, there is no recognisable difference between the action of a bird building a nest and an intentional human action.”¹⁶⁵ By ignoring the intentionality, the actions cease being rational.

[Consequentialist theories] do not treat actions as intentional actions. Of course, they say much about ‘intentions’ and ‘intentionality,’ understood however as an element simply added to the action ‘as such,’ which, precisely ‘as such,’ is not understood as intentional action. So they fail to consider the intentionality necessarily *involved* in any choice of what one immediately does. Consequently, they speak instead about actions as events which produce more or less desirable states of affairs, where the criteria for the desirability of such outcomes are also the criteria for the rightness of an action which causes this outcome.¹⁶⁶

The result of eliminating intentionality from actions is that they end up being considered as mere natural or physical events. Rhonheimer objects that this is the way of speaking that applies to earthquakes and such like events. With reference to these, we consider it to be better (more desirable) that an earthquake kill only one person rather than a hundred. In the case of human action however, like Anscombe notes,¹⁶⁷ if it is clear that ‘killing an innocent person’ is intrinsically bad, then it cannot be that to kill one innocent person is better than letting a hundred innocent people die. Furthermore, by eliminating intentionality, Sidgwick and other modern philosophers claim that there is no difference between intended and foreseen consequences. Anscombe

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 56.

¹⁶⁶ Rhonheimer, M., *The Perspective of the Acting Person*, 25.

¹⁶⁷ Cf. Anscombe, G. E. M., «Modern Moral Philosophy», 38-39.

notes that this is obviously incorrect since often our actions may have foreseen consequences that are unwanted (unintended).¹⁶⁸ Only (and all) those consequences that are directly wanted affect the quality of our actions.

In addition, by limiting itself to the observer's perspective, consequentialism tends to evaluate actions from a legal standpoint. Hence, it takes up the legal role while abandoning the moral one. Like the law, it limits itself to what takes place in the world and to states of affairs that can be verified and demonstrated. Morality on the other hand, like I suggested earlier, is not about what takes place in the world but in the agent. A consequentialist perspective thus puts limits to morality. It limits morality to the events that can be observed and verified. Contrary to this, all human acts – both those that are manifested in the world (in society) and those that are not – are subject of morality. Harry Frankfurt seems to be operating within these limits when he claims that the branch of inquiry concerned about the things 'we care about' is the third philosophical branch in addition to ethics and epistemology. He says that this branch is different from ethics because the latter "focusses on the problem of ordering our relations with *other people*."¹⁶⁹ According to this, ethics is about social relations and our obligations to other people. I wish however to reiterate my position that ethics (morality) is about what we want or strive for and whether it is good to do so or not.

Finally, consequentialism has no standard by which it can say that actions are good or not. While classical moral philosophy appealed to the inclinations that we naturally have and in which reason intervenes to find the right measure,

¹⁶⁸ Cf. *Ibid.*, 34-36.

¹⁶⁹ Frankfurt, H. G., «The Importance of What We Care About», 257.

consequentialism has no basis. Anscombe asserts that this makes consequentialism a shallow philosophy.

Now the consequentialist has no footing on which to say 'This would be permissible, this not'... Where then does he get the standard from? In practice the answer invariably is: from the standards current in his society or his circle. And it has in fact been the mark of all these philosophers that they have been extremely conventional; they have nothing in them by which to revolt against the conventional standards of their sort of people; it is impossible that they should be profound.¹⁷⁰

According to Anscombe, at the time that she made this claim, the standards that important philosophers were using were the remains of the influence that Christianity had had on society. Since most of these thinkers did not grant any role to God in their philosophy, she says that these tried to retain a divine law conception of ethics, while at the same time they rejected the notion of a divine legislator.¹⁷¹ Rhonheimer on the other hand notes that currently:

This view... is a last elaboration of a moral theory centered in moral norms. The only difference is that moral norms are no longer considered as given, but rather as made according to a moral reasoning which could be precisely a proportionalist one.¹⁷²

I shall now consider the influence that consequentialism has had on the contemporary philosophical debate. For this, I shall return to James Lamb's discussion of the PAP.¹⁷³ I have chosen this because it has to do with the topic of freedom which is of special interest to Swinburne. I also think it to be the adequate example because it is a

¹⁷⁰ Anscombe, G. E. M., «Modern Moral Philosophy», 36.

¹⁷¹ Cf. *Ibid.*, 37.

¹⁷² Rhonheimer, M., *The Perspective of the Acting Person*, 23.

¹⁷³ Cf. pp. 241-244.

continuation of the debate started by Harry Frankfurt, which debate has continued to be of great interest.¹⁷⁴ I focused my attention on Lamb's discussion earlier in order to show that an indispensable point was being ignored: actions are given their rational content by the object of the will from which they result. I concluded that ignoring this point was responsible for the difficulties that were being faced. This point is ignored because modern philosophy prefers to analyse actions according to their consequences rather than their intentionality.

The case that I presented from Lamb's discussion was of someone who was contracted as a lifeguard after lying about her swimming capabilities. She could not swim and so when the need to save a drowning child presents itself she cannot act. The *strong* PAP states that a person is morally responsible for doing something only if at *the time* she could have done otherwise. And the *moderate* PAP states that a person is morally responsible for doing something only if at *some time* – past, present, or future – she could have avoided doing it.¹⁷⁵ This case seems to be a counterexample against the above formulations of the PAP. Since the lifeguard could not save the child, could it be that she is not morally responsible? Our intuitions, like I noted, are that she ought to be. Lamb's solution was to propose a more precise formulation of the PAP, one that he calls the *weak* PAP. I have on the other hand proposed that there should be a shift from the evaluation of actions according to their

¹⁷⁴ Cf. Nelkin, D. K. & Rickless, S. C., «Warfield's New Argument for Incompatibilism», *Analysis* 62 (2002) 104-107; Mele, A. R., «A Critique of Pereboom's 'Four-Case Argument' for Incompatibilism», *Analysis* 65 (2005) 75-80; Pawl, T. & Timpe, K., «Incompatibilism, Sin and Free Will in Heaven», *Faith and Philosophy* 26 (2009) 398-419.

¹⁷⁵ Cf. Lamb, J. W., «Evaluative Compatibilism and the Principle of Alternative Possibilities», 518.

consequences to considering them according to their objects. It can however be noticed how this discussion is affected by the consequentialist perspective. Accordingly, we must wait for the child to drown in order for the lifeguard to become morally responsible. If there are no consequences, then there is no moral change in the person. If the child had not drowned, the lifeguard would have only been morally responsible for lying. But like I argued, this cannot be the case, since the action she did during her job interview was not just 'to lie' but much more.

Let me present another example from Lamb's discussion, which he says is a variation of Roderick Chisholm's example of 'inadvertent success'¹⁷⁶:

Consider, for example, a would-be assassin on his way to Times Square where he plans to run over his intended victim. He loses his way and, unaware that he has reached Times Square, runs over the victim accidentally. We do not hold him morally responsible (assuming no negligence) even though he still would have killed had he not got lost. The reason is that we hold people responsible only for what they do – in this case killing someone accidentally – and not for what they would have done had things been different.¹⁷⁷

It can be seen again that what matters according to the moral perspective employed here is not what a person has wanted but the event that actually takes place. It may also be seen that it is a legalist approach that is employed. Lamb claims that we do not hold this man morally responsible for murder. Yet, not only has he wanted to kill someone but has gone as far as putting the means for realising the action (i.e. he directs himself to the intended victim's location with the

¹⁷⁶ Cf. Chisholm, R., *Person and Object*, La Salle IL: Open Court, 1976, 83.

¹⁷⁷ Lamb, J. W., «Evaluative Compatibilism and the Principle of Alternative Possibilities», 520.

clear intention of killing him). He may not be held responsible for murder in a court of law but I suggest that from a moral point of view, it is a different matter. While it can be proved that the subject in question killed his victim accidentally, we know in addition that he had the *intention* of killing him. The object of his will was 'to murder' his victim. Therefore, from a legal perspective, he may be responsible for manslaughter, but from a moral one, he is responsible for murder. This is what the classical view that some actions are intrinsically evil, defended by Anscombe, means. It means that their evilness does not depend on their consequences but on their object such that the mere wanting to do this (wanting the said object) is evil. From the above, it becomes clear once again that the moral perspective has to be a 'first person' and not 'third person' perspective.

Finally, let me note that even Thomists sometimes fall into the consequentialist trap. It may however be because of the need to respond to their interlocutors in the same terms employed by the latter. I mentioned earlier, for example, the explanation that is given as to why God cannot be said to be morally bad for allowing or bringing about evil. Both Herbert McCabe and Brian Davies dedicate ample space to arguing that even if evil is a result of God's action, God's goodness is not affected by it.¹⁷⁸ This, they argue, is because evil is a non-being (i.e. it does not exist). Although this is true, it is nevertheless a moral perspective that argues from consequences to the quality of the agent. The question to which they respond is: is there anything bad in the world that is a result of God's action? And their answer is that there is nothing since evil is no-thing. It is true however that both McCabe and Davies give responses about God's goodness in

¹⁷⁸ Cf. Davies, B., *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion*, 1993, 44-46; McCabe, H., *God and Evil*, 112-118.

other contexts from a moral perspective that is not consequentialist. I shall highlight some of these later on when discussing the goodness of God.

c) Swinburne's Concept of Morality

Main ideas that constitute Swinburne's conception of morality have already appeared while I presented his theodicy. I shall here try to provide a synthesis. Moral goodness, according to Swinburne, consists in doing morally good acts and avoiding morally bad acts. Among morally good acts are obligations (e.g. to keep promises, not to wound anyone). There are also morally good acts that go beyond obligation (supererogatory acts). And among morally bad acts are those that are wrong (i.e. obligatory not to do). Briefly then, moral goodness consists in at least fulfilling one's obligations. It consists in doing what one is obliged to do and not doing what is wrong to do. Hence, an agent who fulfils his obligations is a good agent, while one who fails to fulfil them is not so good. Swinburne thus thinks that if we say that God is perfectly good, we mean that he fulfils all his obligations.¹⁷⁹

According to Swinburne, moral goodness is a function of knowledge and freedom. The truer one's beliefs about the good are, the better person one is likely to be. Hence an agent who is not very knowledgeable may be subjectively a good agent – because he believes his acts to be good – and yet be an objectively bad agent. In the same way, the freer one is, the better person one is likely to be. Someone who is not influenced by non-rational forces will always do what he

¹⁷⁹ Cf. Swinburne, R., *Providence and the Problem of Evil*, 4-5.

believes to be the best action. Human beings are often influenced by desires or inclinations and so do not always do what they believe to be good. God, on the other hand, is perfectly free and so always does what he believes to be good. And since he is omniscient, his beliefs are always true. It follows from this that he is perfectly good.¹⁸⁰

Now, since moral goodness depends on our knowing (having true beliefs about) what is good, how do we know what is good? Swinburne considers that what is good is good a priori and we know it a priori. “Most of us, at any rate in our non-philosophical moments, clearly have moral beliefs... that it matters that certain actions be done or not...”¹⁸¹ He further says:

Despite the doubts of the occasional hardened sceptic, we do almost all of us think almost all the time that there are some acts which are morally good (and among them some which are morally obligatory), and some which are morally bad (and among them some of which are morally wrong).¹⁸²

Thus, Swinburne usually lists several things or facts which he considers to be good for God, for men and for animals. His usual formulation is: ‘*x* is good, therefore we should expect God to do it; or ‘we would all want *x*’. He neither refers the goods to any particular appetite nor to an ultimate good. Hence for example, in explaining what he considers to be the maximum good, he says that to be of use is a great good. He does not consider for example that there may be some who do not want this. Nor does he consider that I may want it today but not tomorrow. However, like I argued before, the concept of the good includes the aspect of desirableness to a subject. In addition, I have argued that

¹⁸⁰ Cf. *Ibid.*, 5-6; *Is there a God?*, 12-14.

¹⁸¹ Swinburne, R., *Responsibility and Atonement*, 17.

¹⁸² Swinburne, R., *Is there a God?*, 13.

knowing a priori that something is good is not sufficient to move someone to act. Rather, “reason is only practical by being embedded in the natural inclinations of the human person, which by being there have, in turn, the peculiarity of being an unavoidable natural presupposition for the knowledge of objects, or of the ‘good.’”¹⁸³

So, according to Swinburne, there are things that are good and others that are bad. In other words, there are true moral judgements. Some moral judgements are always true (i.e. in whichever possible world) while others are true in certain natural circumstances. He considers that moral judgements (of both kinds), if true, are necessary.¹⁸⁴ That is, propositions of the form ‘*x* is good’ are necessary if true. These, then, are true whether or not God exists: “it is surely wrong to torture children for fun whether or not there is a God.”¹⁸⁵ God knows these a priori moral truths and so do we. God, since he is omniscient, knows them perfectly while we know them imperfectly. And like I have noted above, according to Swinburne, moral goodness consists in knowing the true moral judgements and doing them, when not impeded by desires. Hence, God is perfectly good.

I have argued above to show that consequentialism is not an adequate moral view point. I have also shown that consequentialist categories inform the contemporary debate, more especially analytical philosophy. I wish now to suggest that, in general, Swinburne also uses a consequentialist conception of moral goodness. Although he says that he sides with the anti-consequentialist in holding that other considerations are also important in determining the goodness

¹⁸³ Rhonheimer, M., *The Perspective of Morality*, 118.

¹⁸⁴ Cf. Swinburne, R., *Providence and the Problem of Evil*, 18.

¹⁸⁵ Swinburne, R., *Is there a God?*, 14.

or badness of actions,¹⁸⁶ it is manifest from great part of his considerations that his moral conception is a consequentialist one. In his definitions, which I presented earlier, he says that an act is “good (bad) if it is good (bad) in its nature or consequences.” However, whenever he explains this he only limits himself to the part that has to do with the consequences. He in fact says explicitly that whether an action is good or bad “typically [...] will be a matter of its consequences.”¹⁸⁷

That this is Swinburne’s principal consideration may be seen from his theodicy, whereby he proposes that we weigh between the bad and good states in the world. His proposal is that by showing that the good states outweigh the bad states, we show that God, who is responsible, is good. David McNaughton, who defends a ‘duty-based ethics,’ makes the same observation. He notes that the moral structure of the greater-good theodicy used by Swinburne is typical of a consequentialist view.¹⁸⁸ He further suggests that “despite the deontological framework in which Swinburne’s moral philosophy is placed,”¹⁸⁹ Swinburne evaluates God’s actions like a consequentialist.

I have mentioned that consequentialists normally ignore the intentionality of action. This may at first sight seem to distance Swinburne from them since he states that action is intentional. However, I also presented his views which showed that he does not accept all the implications involved in this position.¹⁹⁰ This then may include him

¹⁸⁶ Cf. Swinburne, R., *Providence and the Problem of Evil*, 254, additional note 2.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 83.

¹⁸⁸ Cf. McNaughton, D., «Is God (Almost) a Consequentialist? Swinburne’s Moral Theory», *Religious Studies* 38 (2002) 267.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 270.

¹⁹⁰ Cf. pp. 228-232.

among those consequentialists about whom Rhonheimer says that they say much about intentionality but not as something that is constitutive of every choice or action.¹⁹¹ Rhonheimer further comments about the weighing of goods:

The point of consequentialist or ‘teleological’ ethics... does not place its balance of goods on the level of intentional actions, but only on the level of the total context of external circumstances caused by these actions. In reality, then, consequentialism is merely a restricted or one-sidedly teleological ethical position.¹⁹²

Besides, I mentioned earlier that for Swinburne moral evil refers first and foremost to pain and suffering which are deliberately or negligently caused by humans. This again is an evaluation of morality according to the consequences of actions and not according to their intentionality (object). Furthermore, while it is also clear from above that Swinburne’s moral concept is largely obligation-based (i.e. a deontological view), this does not distance it from a consequentialist conception. I have noted that consequentialist ethics is often norm-based.

In conclusion, in this sub-section, I have argued that the perspective from which the moral goodness of human actions should be judged is the same one applied in the entire practical field. Accordingly, all lower goods that are chosen are evaluated basing on their adequateness to the end. This is so because, in action, we always aim at goods and these are said to be real or apparent goods basing on their relation to the end. Therefore, since there is a proper human end, the

¹⁹¹ Cf. p. 289.

¹⁹² Rhonheimer, M., *The Perspective of Morality*, 399. It is worth noting that the term ‘teleological ethics’ is not used here in the same sense that I considered the teleological concept of nature. Rather, it is often employed in current ethics as the opposite of ‘deontological ethics’ and refers to utilitarianism, consequentialism and other ethical currents of this kind.

goodness of human actions has to be judged according to this end. I have also argued that the consequentialist view lacks this perspective and so is not the proper moral view. In other words, the ‘moral goodness’ that is considered under a consequentialist view does not have much to do with morality. I have besides argued that Swinburne’s moral concept is in its general facets a consequentialist one. The main question of the next sub-section and of this whole chapter is: if we use the correct moral perspective, can God’s goodness still be considered in moral terms?

5.2 God’s Goodness

I shall begin this sub-section with an outline of Richard Swinburne’s ideas about the goodness of God. These are centred on his intention to show that God, in spite of the bad states in the world, is perfectly good. I shall then go on to argue, from the perspective of morality that I have defended, that God’s goodness is not moral goodness but prior to and more fundamental than moral goodness. I shall finally outline some ideas that would constitute a theodicy based on the concept of good that I have defended here.

a) Swinburne’s Concept of God’s Goodness

I have noted that according to Swinburne, moral goodness is a function of knowledge and freedom. Now, God being “[a] perfectly free person will inevitably do what he believes to be (overall) the best action and never do what he

believes to be an (overall) bad action.”¹⁹³ And since he is omniscient, his beliefs are always true. It follows from this that he is perfectly good. God’s perfect goodness means that God does many good actions and no bad action. It means that God fulfils all his obligations. Swinburne claims that God’s obligations are ones into which he has entered freely.¹⁹⁴ It is from the claim that God is perfectly good that the problem of evil rises: if this is the case, why does God cause or permit bad states? I have presented Swinburne’s theodicy, in which he states the conditions that would justify God permitting evil (bad states) without compromising his perfect goodness. It is clear however that, for him, God’s goodness depends on God not causing or allowing certain bad states.

Although Swinburne says that God’s obligations are ones that he has assumed freely, I also mentioned that he believes that there are some a priori moral truths that hold in any possible world whether there is a God or not. God knows these and, since he is perfectly good, always respects them. So, God could never command us not to obey these moral truths. It follows from his perfect goodness that God will not command us to do what he knows to be wrong. That is, he cannot make things which are our duty not to be our duty anymore. In short, “there are moral truths independent of the will of God.”¹⁹⁵ Swinburne claims that in this he follows both Thomas Aquinas and Duns Scotus. This however, I believe, is not wholly the case. Whereas, Aquinas could claim that there are moral truths that are necessary, in his concept of God, there is nothing that could be independent of God’s will. All things that *are*, for Aquinas, have received their being from God. Likewise, they receive either their necessity

¹⁹³ Swinburne, R., *Is there a God?*, 12.

¹⁹⁴ Cf. *Ibid.*, 12-13; *Providence and the Problem of Evil*, 9.

¹⁹⁵ Swinburne, R., *Is there a God?*, 15.

or contingency from God himself. A position like the above is a consequence of not recognising God as the principle of all being like I noted during the discussion of God's attributes. The same is the case when he considers that God must submit to the logical straitjacket: it means that the rules of logic are independent of God.¹⁹⁶

Here, we find one of the reasons for Swinburne's view that the goodness of God cannot be other than moral goodness. Indeed, this view follows logically from the affirmation that there are some moral truths that are 'pre-God' or independent of God. It follows that God's action must be measured by these moral truths that are necessary and independent of him. In this concept of good, God is not considered as the ultimate good and measure of all good. He is not the perfect goodness from whom all goodness comes. Perhaps the question that should be pondered at this juncture, given the discussion carried out in this chapter, is: if there is no ultimate good, would there be any good? That is, if God did not exist, isn't it possible that there would be no good at all and therefore no moral truths?

The second reason that might explain why Swinburne believes that God's goodness has to be moral goodness is his use of a consequentialist perspective of moral goodness. It is clear that if we accept the consequentialist perspective, we must consequently subject God to the moral test. That is, we would have to judge God's goodness from the states of affairs that he causes or allows to occur. Just like many other contemporary theodicies, examples of which I have presented in Chapter II, Swinburne's theodicy submits God to the moral test. It tries to prove that although God permits morally bad states, he is nevertheless a perfectly good agent. I have however argued that this perspective is not the one proper to

¹⁹⁶ Cf. Swinburne, R., *Providence and the Problem of Evil*, 3 and passim.

morality. Likewise, Peter Forrest suggests that God's goodness can be moral goodness only analogically and only in a consequentialist way:

I have argued that considerations of both information-theoretic and ontological simplicity support the thesis that literally God is neither morally good nor morally bad. Theists may then appeal to axiarchism to explain why God is by analogy morally good – in a consequentialist way.¹⁹⁷

b) The Priority of God's Goodness over Moral Goodness

If we followed the perspective proper to morality, as proposed above, and wanted to ask about God's moral goodness, we would ask: Is this action that God has done, caused or permitted adequate for the end? Is it adequate to the end that is proper to his nature and proper to the context in which he is acting? Now, if we accept that God is the ultimate end and therefore the First Mover, it would follow that he has no end outside himself and therefore no end by which to evaluate his actions. God himself is the ultimate measure of the goodness of all actions. This shows that God is not subject to morality. It is not possible to ask whether his actions are morally good or bad. St. Thomas says that moral acts properly speaking receive their species from the end.¹⁹⁸ If God is not moved to act by any end other than him, then his acts cannot receive their species from anything other than

¹⁹⁷ Forrest, P., «Replying to the Anti-God Challenge: a God Without Moral Character Acts Well», *Religious Studies* 48 (2012) 42.

¹⁹⁸ Cf. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I.II, q.1, a.3, co.

himself. Thus, Aquinas quotes St. Ambrose as saying that morality is said properly of man.¹⁹⁹

Moral good and evil belong to rational beings that achieve or fail to achieve perfection. And we saw that this perfection could be nothing other than the possession of God, the universal good. It follows that there can be no sense in which God can be said to achieve or fail to achieve this perfection, and hence no sense in which he can be said to be morally good or bad.²⁰⁰

Brian Davies suggests that the argument of those who believe that God's existence is impossible or unlikely because of the reality of evil is usually as follows: 'Given the reality of evil, it is impossible or unlikely that there is a God who is morally good.' He notes that many of those who defend belief in God work on the same assumption. Yet, he suggests, the theist is not bound to regard God as morally good. He notes that "theologians have taught that God is good without holding that his goodness is that of a morally good agent."²⁰¹ He says that, for example, theologians have understood God's goodness to mean that "he somehow contains in himself the perfections of his creatures, all of which reflect him somehow."²⁰² Davies further suggests that it is implausible to hold that moral goodness is the only goodness there is. He also contends that the claim that moral goodness is the highest form of goodness cannot be taken for granted but must be proved. He argues that if we can know that God exists and that God's goodness is not moral goodness, then moral goodness would not be the highest form

¹⁹⁹ Cf. *Ibid.*

²⁰⁰ McCabe, H., *God and Evil*, 106.

²⁰¹ Davies, B., *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion*, 1993, 48.

²⁰² *Ibid.*

of goodness we know. There would be the goodness of God to be reckoned with.²⁰³

Davies notes that one of the common arguments in favour of God's goodness being moral goodness is the kind that Swinburne provides in *The Coherence of Theism*.²⁰⁴ According to this argument, God must be thought of as morally good since God is a person and persons are good insofar as they are morally good. The argument goes further: "God is at least as good as I am when I am good... [He] is actually a lot better. I am sometimes morally bad, but, so many have urged, God always gets it right. He is perfectly morally good person."²⁰⁵ Davies thinks however that there is something odd in the suggestion that the maker and sustainer of creatures should be morally good. He thinks that whether we were to consider moral goodness according to Aristotle's concept, which is his preferred view, or according to the moral duty view, which he notes is used by many, it would still not be applicable to God.

To deem an agent to be morally good, we need positive grounds for attributing to that agent virtue or obedience to duty or obligation. And this, of course, means that if something is such that virtue or obedience to duty or obligation cannot intelligibly be attributed to it, we have no reason to think of it as either morally good or bad.²⁰⁶

Davies notes that, according Aristotle's concept of morality, a morally good agent is someone who exemplifies the cardinal virtues of prudence, justice, temperance and courage. He suggests that if we understand prudence, temperance and courage the way Aristotle did, then they cannot be intelligibly ascribed to God. He notes that

²⁰³ Cf. *Ibid.*

²⁰⁴ Cf. Swinburne, R., *The Coherence of Theism*, Ch. 11.

²⁰⁵ Davies, B., *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion*, 1993, 49.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

Christians normally do not find a problem in ascribing justice to God but still it is not in the sense that Aristotle did or that we do outside the religious realm. The justice that Christians attribute to God is neither commutative justice (i.e. he gives others what he owes them) nor distributive justice (e.g. he gives the same to all his creatures). Therefore, according to Aristotle's concept of morality, God cannot be morally good or bad. Neither can God be morally good or bad according to obligation concept since, like I argued in Chapter III, it makes no sense to say that he has obligations. Thus, Kenny notes:

Morality presupposes a moral community... God can no more be part of a moral community with them than he can be part of a political community with them. As Aristotle said, we cannot attribute moral virtues to divinity: the praise would be vulgar. Equally, moral blame would be laughable.²⁰⁷

Therefore, moral goodness is the goodness that is proper to man. Whereas I began this chapter by noting that it was right that Swinburne tried to understand and explain God's action through the analogy of human action, the implications of the difference must not be ignored. The difference is that the end which moves human beings to action is outside them, while God is the end of his own actions. The implications are quite serious since the end is the principle in the practical field. We cannot therefore judge God's goodness according to what we think him to have done, caused or permitted in the world. His actions (i.e. the 'lower goods' that he 'chooses') would have to be judged in relation to an end but God has no end other than himself. This means that the evil or bad states that he causes or

²⁰⁷ Kenny, A., *What is Faith?*, Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1992, 87.

permits must be evaluated or explained under another perspective and not the moral perspective.

c) A Theodicy according to the Notion of the Ultimate Good

I concluded Chapter II, in which I presented Swinburne's theodicy, asking whether it was true, as Swinburne claims, that our understanding of an agent being good would be gravely deficient unless we thought that he would stop pain and other suffering if he could do so. I suggested that this initial concession that he makes to the atheist was the root of the problems of his theodicy as I highlighted them. Swinburne usually excuses himself and explains that he is not being insensitive when he admits that a good God would allow some bad states. He writes for example: "It is, or ought to be, painful to analyse the morality of allowing evils to occur; for it involves holding in temporary check the compassion which it is natural (and good) to feel for those who suffer."²⁰⁸ He normally defends the view that God would allow such states under certain conditions. I argued in Chapter II that these conditions or criteria formulated by Swinburne were not acceptable. I shall propose here, without placing any restrictions on God, a view that is not any less painful than Swinburne's, which explains why God would allow evil. I shall propose an account of evil which I believe is normally the guide in our day to day lives.

In other words, one cannot give an adequate answer to the problem of evil unless one has an adequate conception of

²⁰⁸ Swinburne, R., «Reply to Richard Gale» *Religious Studies* 36 (2000) 225.

evil. It is for this reason, that I have dedicated ample space to the ontological status of evil. Having reached some conclusions about this and taking them into consideration, I believe that we are in a position to offer a better theodicy.

It is an account that begins by recognising the nature of man: he is a limited being that cannot attain all the goods possible to his composed nature. As Aristotle suggests, “there is no one thing that is always pleasant, because our nature is not simple.”²⁰⁹ What Aristotle says about our limited nature can be found in popular wisdom as is, for example, beautifully expressed by the Ugandan musician, Maddox Sematimba, in his song *Okabiraki?*:

*Why do you cry my dear?
That's the way of earthly things
The problems you say to be too many
were not created for you alone,
Self-pity won't help, pray to yo' God
If you had wings, you would fly away
But you don't, take heart, it'll be alright*²¹⁰

Normally, we all acknowledge this (our limited nature) and not every pain or suffering is a cause of complaint. Certainly, there are some cases of suffering that are difficult to bear and to accept (e.g. those called ‘horrendous evils’ by Marilyn M. Adams). It is with respect to these that a theodicy is normally needed. The adequate theodicy must follow the same logic (i.e. the same concept of good and evil) that we implicitly apply when we accept the most common sufferings. Thus, Aristotle suggests:

²⁰⁹ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, VII, 1154b 21.

²¹⁰ Sematimba, M., «Okabiraki?», in *Namagembe* album. The translation is mine.

[Small] pieces of good fortune or of its opposite clearly do not weigh down the scales of life one way or the other, but a multitude of great events if they turn out well will make life more blessed (for not only are they themselves such as to add beauty to life, but the way a man deals with them may be noble and good), while if they turn out ill they crush and maim blessedness; for they both bring pain with them and hinder many activities. Yet even in these nobility shines through, when a man bears with resignation many great misfortunes, not through insensibility to pain but through nobility and greatness of soul.²¹¹

While speaking about necessity, St. Thomas says that there are some goods that have no necessary connection to the ultimate good and others that do. He compares this to the speculative field:

Now there are some things intelligible which have not a necessary connection with the first principles... But there are some propositions which have a necessary connection with the first principles: such as demonstrable conclusions, a denial of which involves a denial of the first principles. And to these the intellect assents of necessity, when once it is aware of the necessary connection of these conclusions with the principles... It is the same with the will. For there are certain goods which have not a necessary connection with happiness, because without them a man can be happy: and to such the will does not adhere of necessity. But there are some things which have a necessary connection with happiness by means of which things man adheres to God, in Whom alone true happiness consists. Nevertheless, until through the certitude of Divine Vision the necessity of such connection be shown, the will does not adhere to God of necessity, nor to those things which are of God.²¹²

This leads back to the idea that the experience of desiring and tending helps us to recognise the good but the

²¹¹ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, I, 1100b 22-32.

²¹² St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, q.82, a.2, co.

good is not this desire or tendency.²¹³ Thus, the desirableness or tendency will not indicate if, for a rational being, it is a true good or an apparent good. The latter refers to a good or perfection of some aspect of the human nature but not the good of reason, which is the human good (i.e. the good of the whole human being). Given that man (the nature of man) is composite, each aspect or faculty has its own good and so when this is missed, man as a whole may be pained. St. Thomas notes that “reason does not take away what is proper to sensible nature. It is natural to rejoice about fitting things and to grieve about pain. But reason moderates this.”²¹⁴ Hence, a man tries to obtain the goods proper to each of his faculties but always according to the hierarchy established by reason.

Sometimes however, the good of some faculty is opposed to the good of reason. In this case, this good is not a true good but only an apparent one. Now, the absence of an apparent good will seem to be an evil, but it is only an apparent evil. A theodicy for this kind of evil will be geared towards showing that what was lost was not a true good for the subject. Fortunately, most complaints about evils of this kind are usually momentary such that when the subject considers them at a distance, with the whole project of his life in view, he quickly notices that it was a delusion.

Again, like Aquinas notes in the above passage, some good may be a true good but not necessary for the attainment of happiness (i.e. the ultimate good). The absence of such a good is indeed an evil, but only a relative evil. As I have noted, many evils of this kind are insignificant and most people in their day to day life normally brush them aside without any complaint. However, some of these evils are

²¹³ Cf. p. 226.

²¹⁴ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Expositio super Iob*, cap. 3.

really difficult to accept and need an explanation as to why God would permit them. Such an explanation has to refer to the ultimate good of man and to God who has set the ultimate good. It will have to show that God, who is all wise and all good, has set for us an ultimate end to which he guides us in his great wisdom and power. Hence, he allows these relative evils because they do not prevent us from reaching the ultimate good, which even if we do not perceive directly, is the first cause of our desiring or willing any good. The possession of the ultimate good, to which the will adheres with necessity, is what Christians call the beatific vision or heaven. The only act of our will in heaven is to delight or to rest in the possession of the supreme good, which contains all the good that can be desired. I shall discuss this with more detail while dealing with freedom.

Aristotle thinks that the principal purpose of ethical inquiry is for the sake of helping men learn how to evaluate the different instances of pleasure and pain, “for to feel delight and pain rightly or wrongly has no small effect on our actions.”²¹⁵ In this, he follows Plato who says that the virtue of courage, which is exemplified by the guardians of the State, consists in “[preserving] under all circumstances that opinion about the nature of things to be feared and not to be feared in which our legislator educated them.”²¹⁶ Socrates, who is the subject of the dialogue, goes ahead to explain that by ‘under all circumstances,’ he means that “in pleasure or in pain, or under the influence of desire or fear, a man preserves, and does not lose this opinion.”²¹⁷ Similarly, Harry Frankfurt says that “[the] formation of a person’s will is most fundamentally a matter of his coming to care about certain

²¹⁵ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, II, 3, 1105a 6.

²¹⁶ Plato, *The Republic*, IV, 429.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*

things, and of his coming to care about some of them more than about others.”²¹⁸

An argument by Eleonore Stump in which she combines both Anscombe’s and Frankfurt’s terminology may still throw more light on this: She asserts that the pain or suffering involved in activities in which we obtain what we care about normally needs no justification. The things we care about include the things important for human flourishing (the objective scale of values) and the things that are of value for a particular person (the subjective scale of values).²¹⁹ She uses the example of many women who choose to undergo childbirth without anaesthetics:

The connection between suffering and what we care about helps explain why the pains of childbirth do not count as suffering in need of justification. In ordinary cases of normal birth, the pains of childbirth do not undermine the mother’s flourishing; and, if she chooses voluntarily, of her own accord, to have these pains, enduring them does not take away from her what she cares about in this respect either.²²⁰

I highlighted earlier Aristotle’s view that pleasure is a state that accompanies an activity that we enjoy. Likewise, pain is a state that accompanies an activity that we do not enjoy or an activity in which a good that we desire is impeded. Both pleasure and pain are judged according to the goodness of the activities that they accompany. In the same way that “[the] pleasure proper to a worthy activity is good and that proper to an unworthy activity bad,”²²¹ pain proper to worthy activity is worthwhile (good), while the one proper to an unworthy activity is bad. We ought to delight in both good pleasure and pain, and be pained by both bad pleasure

²¹⁸ Frankfurt, H. G., «The Importance of What We Care About», 268.

²¹⁹ Stump, E., *Wandering in Darkness*, 10.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*, 11.

²²¹ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, X, 5, 1175b 26-27.

and pain. Since the pain that accompanies the attainment of what we care about (including when it is acute as happens in childbirth) normally does not require justification, like Stump notes, ethical training can and should help us to come to care more about the goods of reason. We should therefore not fail to seek our proper good because of fear of relative evils. For example, the fatigue and other difficulties that may accompany one's work (on which the livelihood of one's family depends) normally do not and should not prevent one from doing it. Training in virtue can help one to learn to react to pleasure and pain correctly.

[Moral] excellence is concerned with pleasures and pains; it is on account of pleasure that we do bad things, and on account of pain that we abstain from noble ones. Hence we ought to have been brought up in a particular way from our very youth, as Plato says, so as both to delight in and to be pained by the things that we ought; for this is the right education.²²²

Furthermore, St. Thomas' passage above states that there are goods that are necessary for the attainment of the ultimate good, whose necessity however is not evident but needs to be shown. Such may be the ends of the virtues. The absence of such goods is an absolute evil. Why, then, does God allow such a kind of evils? He does so because without freedom, man cannot obtain his proper good. The proper good of man, which is attained according to reason, can also only be missed according to reason. That is, man can only attain or lose his ultimate good through the exercise of his freedom. By the same freedom, he can choose goods that lead to the ultimate good and goods that are opposed to the ultimate good. The choice of goods that are opposed to the goods that have a necessary connection with the ultimate good results in the said absolute evils.

²²² *Ibid.*, II, 1104b 9-12.

It may however also be explained that, while such evils are in themselves singly absolute evils, they are nevertheless not absolute insofar as they can be reversed (i.e. in relation to a complete life). Man is always capable of making another election in this life that redirects him towards the ultimate good. Thus, although the concept of freedom does not in itself entail a choice of evil, it points to the possibility of its occurrence. The doctrine of original sin, which I discussed earlier, refers to this. It brings to the fore the fact that while Adam could have lived his whole life without sin, he exercised his freedom wrongly and chose a good that was contrary to his ultimate good.

By the exercise of freedom, man is a master of his actions and provident for himself. However, even man's free acts (whether good or evil) come under the providence of God. Thus, according to the biblical story of Adam, after the *Fall*, God intervened in such a manner as to remedy the situation. Hence, Adam and his descendants could still, through their freedom, make new choices that directed them towards the ultimate good. Each man, then, should strive through his freedom and intelligence so that his own providence remains under God's providence. St. Thomas puts it in the following manner:

[If men] keep the right order in their own providence, God's providence in their regard will keep an ordering that is congruent with their human dignity; that is, nothing will happen to them that is not for their own good... However, if in their own providence men do not keep that order which is congruent with their dignity as rational creatures, but provide after the manner of brute animals, then God's providence will dispose of them according to the order that belongs to brutes, so that their good and evil acts will not be directed to their own profit but to the profit of others...²²³

²²³ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Quaestiones Disputatae De Veritate*, q.5, a.7, co.

Therefore, when men provide after the manner of brute animals, that is, not in the manner of the rational animal, God will not care for them in the way he has planned for all human beings. But if they do, he deals with them in a manner congruent with their human dignity. To act in a rational manner involves respecting the hierarchy that exists among goods with reference to the ultimate good.

Apart from the above arguments, in which I have tried to show that God allows the different evils because they do not hinder our attainment of the ultimate good, I need also, albeit briefly, to mention that God may allow such evils because they in fact help us in our progress towards the ultimate good. They help us especially in acquiring virtues like patience, fortitude, friendship and love. Such is a common explanation of St. Thomas Aquinas and other early Christian writers which Richard Swinburne also follows. Besides, they help us to recognise the imperfection or contingency of the present world (and of all its goods) and to set our hearts on the ultimate good, which will be attained in heaven. This of course implies seeking actively those goods of this world that have a necessary connection to the ultimate good. Finally, the evils help us to recognise our own limited nature and powerlessness and move us to submit ourselves completely to God's providential care.

Above all, suffering manifests the virtue of love. Now this is not just any other good but one which is supremely valued by most people (and which, we might say, was universally valued until the advent of postmodernism). It can in fact be argued that without suffering or sacrifice, it is impossible to love or at least to know that someone loves you. What most people understand as true love is normally manifested by the lover having to miss some good for the sake of the loved one. The more one loves you, the more one is ready to give up goods (i.e. to suffer misfortunes) for your

sake. The proof of your love for me is not that you tell me that you love me, that you give me nice gifts or that you show that you enjoy my company, etc. All these may represent sentiments related to love but they do not amount to love. Normally, the good sentiments that we have for other people, if they do not include this readiness to sacrifice and to suffer on their behalf, do not amount to love.

This argument is used by Christians when they claim that God, in Jesus Christ, has manifested his maximum love for the human race by doing what we humans would understand as the height (culmination) of love: by dying for us. And so by allowing us to experience different degrees of suffering, God is inviting us to show our love for him up to these degrees. This, for Christians, is a key element of theodicy, in that by suffering, we follow the example of the master. I should however clarify that I do not say that the evil or suffering is necessary in order for God to give us the good of love or any of the other goods. Rather, the point here is one that St. Augustine and other authors in the Christian tradition have made: that God, in his infinite wisdom can draw good even out of evil. The evil or suffering occurs to us because of the absence of goods proper to the different faculties (I have suggested above what theodicy we could propose for the absence of each kind of goods); and from this, God makes it possible for us to put in practice our love and for it to be known.

d) Conclusion

I have presented a concept of good and of its opposite, evil, which I believe could form a firm basis for an adequate theodicy. I have argued that evil is the absence of due good

and that, whether in nature or in morals, things are said to be evil because of their relation to the due end or perfection. Evil has no positive ontological status and is not one of the alternatives involved in choice. Rather, all who act are moved by something they consider to be good. In other words, the concept of good is the same as the goal of our striving. We judge a good that is the subject of our choice as a true good or only apparent according to its relation with the end. And since the good is the object of the will, every action of ours is by the command of the will. A will that directs itself towards a good that is not adequate for the end (of the art, activity) becomes a bad will and its owner a bad agent in that context. The same applies in the activity of man as man. Since man, like I have argued, has a proper end, any of his actions that may be opposed to this end are bad or evil. This, I have suggested to be the correct moral perspective. I have however claimed that this perspective cannot be applied to God and so God's goodness cannot be moral goodness. Rather, God's goodness is fundamental and prior to moral goodness.

In addition, I have suggested that a teleological concept of nature and the reference of all goods to the ultimate good are necessary for an adequate understanding of good and evil. These concepts highlight the fact that it is the good that moves us to action. At the same time, they help us to recognise which is a true good or evil and which is an apparent good or evil. Indeed, a claim that a nature has an end logically points to an intelligence that has set the end. And a claim that the world and all that exists therein has an end is a direct reference to God, who is omnipotent and omniscient. In his wisdom and power, God can set an end for each one of his creatures and guide them in the way that he wills through different intermediate goods towards it.

Any theodicy – a rational explanation of why God allows evil – has to take into account (has to leave space for)

God's infinite freedom and wisdom. If it were a case of only 'weighing good states against the bad states', it would be better for God to create only goods that did not imply any evil (or even not to create at all). God's providential plan rather seems to follow a different 'law', the law of freedom and love, the love of a father. Swinburne often compares God to a parent but normally emphasises the rights and obligations that the parent has. Above all however, it is important to consider God as a father who lovingly provides to his family the means for obtaining the goods (ends) that he considers that they need. The following words of St. Thomas express how God has freely, with great power and wisdom, brought into being all that *is*:

About the principle, two points will be considered: the spirit and the hand. That is, the spirit of goodness or of his will and the hand of power. About this spirit, it is said in Ps. 103, 30: "send forth your spirit and they shall be recreated." According to Dionysius, just like the sun emits its rays for the illumination of bodies, so does the divine goodness diffuse its rays (i.e. its participations) for the creation of things. And so Augustine says that inasmuch as the good exists, we exist. It is this spirit that they denied those who claimed that God produced things from the necessity of nature and not from the freedom of the will... But about the hand of his power in Ps. 103, 28: "opening your hand, all will be filled with goodness." Indeed, in his hand were all the ends of the earth, for from eternity nothing existed except by his power. When the key of love opened his hand, creatures came out. This is the hand about which Is. 59, 1 says: "behold his hand is not shortened." For, through its infinite power, it brought the substance of all things into being. It is this hand that they wanted to shorten those who further claimed that nothing could be brought into being out of nothing by God.²²⁴

²²⁴ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Scriptum super Sententiis* 2, Prooemium, in Alarcon, E., (ed.), <http://www.corpusthomicum.org/snp2000.html>. The translation is mine.

IV. THE CONCEPT OF FREEDOM

Human Freedom has been a central issue in the theodicies that have been offered throughout history, especially those in the Christian tradition. It has been the set piece in accounting for the occurrence of moral evil. Swinburne also considers that it should be central to any theodicy. He believes that “[the] central core of any theodicy must... be the ‘free-will defence’, which deals – to start with – with moral evil, but can be extended to deal with much natural evil as well.”¹ However, he seldom speaks of ‘freedom’ in general. He frequently limits himself to ‘free will’.

Given the importance that Swinburne grants it in his theodicy and given its own metaphysical importance, I consider that freedom, among the goods that Swinburne lists, deserves special attention. I shall therefore discuss in this chapter his conception of freedom and its role in the occurrence of moral evil. The principal aim of this discussion will be to reinforce the proposal of the concept of good that I have proposed in the previous chapter. I shall likewise propose here that operating with this concept solves many difficulties that may arise while dealing with the topic of freedom. Whereas in the previous chapter, I insisted that we cannot consider the good while leaving the will aside, I shall

¹ Swinburne, R., *Is there a God?*, 98.

in this chapter insist that we cannot consider the free will while leaving the good aside. There is such an intimate relation between the two that one always implies the other. Swinburne defends the view that free will must be understood in the libertarian sense. I shall argue here that his concept of freedom, which follows from his concept of good (and evil) is not adequate. This evidently has serious implications for his theodicy.

1. Swinburne's Concept of Freedom

As I have already noted, his response to the atheist, which I have treated with detail in Chapter II, does not give a central place to moral evil since it is a response to the objection against the existence of principally pain and other suffering. It includes moral evil only inasmuch as the pain and suffering may be caused deliberately or negligently by human beings. Nevertheless, Swinburne gives much attention to free will in his theodicy especially when he reaches the part of accounting for each kind of bad state. Freedom (free will) is one good on the list of goods that Swinburne says that a good God would grant to his creatures. He considers it to be among the greatest goods that God gives to us but which logically entail much evil.

I shall begin by presenting Swinburne's position with respect to the dominant views in the contemporary debate on freedom and how he understands the main concepts employed. I shall then go on to present his understanding of free will, its basis and his defence that human beings actually have it. I shall then present a summary of his version of the free-will defence, in which he basically states that free will is

a great good that is worth the evil it necessitates. Finally, I shall present his considerations about the role of desires in freedom. Like I have argued in Chapter III, desires (especially the rational desire) play an important role in moving us to action. Since Swinburne normally considers their role while dealing with freedom, I shall deal with them under this chapter.

1.1 The Current Debate on Freedom: Compatibilism vs Incompatibilism

Under this heading, I would like to place Swinburne's views on freedom within the context of the contemporary debate. Subsequently, I shall consider more closely the different points of his conception of freedom. The dominant debate is divided into two main camps: compatibilism and incompatibilism.² Swinburne notes that compatibilism is the view that "agents would be morally responsible [...] even if they were causally necessitated to act as they do in every detail."³ In brief, the compatibilist holds that "moral responsibility is compatible with determinism."⁴ Determinism is the view "that every event is caused to occur

² Swinburne believes that another view, which is called incoherentism, is growing in popularity. This is the view that, while determinism rules out the possibility of freedom and therefore moral responsibility, it is illusory to suppose that any agent could be morally responsible for his actions. It claims that since we do not hold atoms for decaying (which decay is undetermined), neither should humans be responsible for their actions (which are undetermined). Cf. Swinburne, R., *Responsibility and Atonement*, 59-63.

³ Swinburne, R., *Responsibility and Atonement*, 52.

⁴ *Ibid.*

in all its detail by prior causes.”⁵ On the other hand, incompatibilism is the “doctrine that an agent being morally responsible for his choices is incompatible with those choices being caused and so with determinism.”⁶ Incompatibilists are divided into two groups: Firstly, there are those who believe that “every event does have a cause,”⁷ a view that is known as hard determinism. Secondly, there are those who believe that “a man does have free will (and so determinism is false),”⁸ a view that is often called libertarianism. Swinburne defends the libertarian view.

Swinburne notes that the most extreme form of compatibilism is exemplified by what J. L. Mackie called ‘the straight rule of responsibility.’⁹ The ‘straight rule’ claims that an agent is responsible for his actions even if he is caused to act as he does. That is, “an agent is responsible for *every* intentional act which he does or fails to do.”¹⁰ Swinburne says that according to the straight rule, a man is morally responsible insofar as he does what he chooses to do. It allows however that his choices may have causes which necessitate his choosing as he does. “His genetic inheritance and his upbringing may make it inevitable that a man do the intentional actions which he does; but on this view, so long as an action is intentional a man is doing it ‘freely.’”¹¹ He claims that compatibilism in the simple form of the straight rule was advocated by both Hobbes and Hume.¹² Let me

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid., 55.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Cf. Mackie, J. L., *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977, 208.

¹⁰ Swinburne, R., *Responsibility and Atonement*, 52. The italics are in the text.

¹¹ Ibid., 53.

¹² Cf. Ibid.

recall at this point, like I reported while discussing ‘free will’ in Christian theodicy, that Swinburne also claims that St. Augustine, St. Thomas Aquinas and generally all theologians in Western Christendom have understood free will in one form or another of compatibilism.

He notes that of course the straight rule does not hold an agent responsible for what someone physically forces him to do. Thus, he says, a compatibilist would admit that a bank clerk who hands over bank money to someone holding him at gun-point is not morally responsible. Swinburne notes however that the compatibilist argues that the bank clerk is not held responsible, not because he had lost his freedom but because we all believe that to hand over the money in these circumstances is the right thing to do. The compatibilist claims that the bank clerk is not blamed because he does what he believes to be the best action.

Swinburne does not think that this is an adequate explanation. He says that the bank clerk may believe that he has the duty not to hand over the money and yet not manage to overcome the fear. In this case, he says, the compatibilist would have to hold him responsible if he handed over the money. He on the other hand believes that the bank clerk may be overwhelmed by an irresistible desire to hand over the money. He claims that “[we] feel that men are not morally responsible for their intentional actions on those occasions when (to all appearances) they are caused so to act by irresistible desires.”¹³ He concludes that the difficulty with such a simple account of moral responsibility is evident.

He goes further to note that compatibilism has been defended in more subtle ways in recent years, while the straight rule has generally been abandoned. He says that these

¹³ *Ibid.*, 54.

more subtle forms of compatibilism stem from an article, *Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person*, published by Harry Frankfurt in 1971.¹⁴

Frankfurt claimed that persons, unlike animals, have second-order wants or desires. They have various first-order desires (for food and sex, fame, and company); and then as well second-order desires, which are desires for one of these desires to be their will, i.e. to be the desire which affects action. A man has 'free will' according to Frankfurt, if his second-order desire is efficacious... But if his second-order desire does not win, then the agent feels mastered by an alien force.¹⁵

Swinburne agrees that second-order desires exist and says that we must be grateful to Frankfurt for calling our attention to them. He thinks however that Frankfurt's main claim "does suffer from the deficiency of so much modern philosophy of mind, of confusing purposes and desires."¹⁶ He says that Frankfurt's account does not bring out the fact that desires are passive things (they happen to a man) and that which desire wins is a matter of which the agent allows to win.¹⁷

Swinburne observes that from his account, Frankfurt is able to distinguish between a heroin addict who wishes that he was not addicted (who desires that his desire not to take heroin defeat his desire for heroin) from the heroin addict who is glad to be addicted. Accordingly, only the latter has 'free will' and is thus culpable. Swinburne also takes note of Gary Watson's account, which account he says is less open to

¹⁴ Frankfurt, H. G., «Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person» in Watson, G. (ed.), *Free Will*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1982, 81-95.

¹⁵ Swinburne, R., *Responsibility and Atonement*, 56.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Cf. Ibid.

the above objection.¹⁸ Watson highlights the fact that some of our desires are for things we think worth doing and some not. According to Swinburne, Watson thinks that an agent should be pursuing what he values if he is to be acting freely. He notes that a somewhat similar view is put forward by Wright Neely.¹⁹ Swinburne says that all the above accounts basically define free will in terms of rationality. They claim that the “free man is the rational man, the man who pursues what he values and does what he sees reason for doing.”²⁰

On the other hand, Swinburne thinks that what we should ask ourselves is whether the desires which act on a man inducing him to act irrationally are resistible or irresistible.

If they are resistible, and still the agent caves in to them, surely he is to be held responsible for his resulting actions... If on the other hand the desires are irresistible, it may indeed be granted that a man is not morally responsible for acting on them...

Whether an agent has freedom cannot depend on how he chooses (which is what in effect rationality theories are claiming that it does), but whether he can help making the choice he does.²¹

He says that this leads us back to the natural definition of free will: “that an agent has free will if his intentional actions do not have necessitating causes.”²² He concludes that only if this is so can a man be praiseworthy or blameworthy for his actions. Above, he considers ‘irresistible desires’ as an

¹⁸ Watson, G., «Free Agency» in Watson, G. (ed.), *Free Will*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1982, 96-110.

¹⁹ Neely, W., «Freedom and Desire», *Philosophical Review* 83 (1974) 32-54.

²⁰ Swinburne, R., *Responsibility and Atonement*, 57.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid., 58.

example of necessitating causes. In his arguments here, he follows the detailed assessment of the theories of Frankfurt, Watson and Neely carried out by Michael A. Slote.²³

He goes on to say that “writers generally agree that an agent is morally responsible for some intentional action if he ‘could have done other than he did.’”²⁴ Here, Swinburne hints on the Principle of Alternative Possibilities (PAP), which Frankfurt rejected in his 1969 article.²⁵ It states that “a person is morally responsible for what he has done only if he could have done otherwise.”²⁶ In other words, an agent acts freely only if he has alternatives from which to choose. Frankfurt claimed then that although its exact meaning was a subject of controversy, most contemporary philosophers took the PAP for granted such that none was inclined to deny or even question it. It seemed so overwhelmingly plausible that “some philosophers have even characterized it as an a priori truth.”²⁷ Frankfurt provided arguments to prove that it was false.

A strong debate ensued after Frankfurt’s article that continues till today. The debate on freedom has since then been mainly concerned with the veracity and content of the PAP. Hence, Kadri Vihvelin thinks that Frankfurt, with this article, has revived the old compatibilist tradition that claims that an agent may act freely in the sense required for moral responsibility even if she could never have done otherwise.²⁸ In general, the compatibilists reject this principle while the

²³ Cf. Slote, M. A., «Understanding Free Will», *Journal of Philosophy* 77 (1980) 136-151.

²⁴ Swinburne, R., *Responsibility and Atonement*, 59.

²⁵ Cf. Frankfurt, H. G. «Alternate Possibilities and Moral Responsibility».

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 829.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ Cf. Vihvelin, K., «The Modal Argument for Incompatibilism», *Philosophical Studies* 53 (1988) 228.

incompatibilists defend it.²⁹ Thus, the former come up with counter-examples to show that it is not true, while the latter maintain a continuous effort of formulating it with greater precision in order to overcome the challenges. Swinburne on his part thinks that philosophers in general agree on the principle, only that the compatibilists interpret it in a different sense from that of the incompatibilists. He contends that the sense of the latter is the correct one.³⁰ Edward Wierenga on the other hand suggests that it has proved difficult to find an acceptable statement of the principle because its intuitive use shows that it contains the wrong antecedent conditions for free action.³¹ I shall, in this line, propose that the solution to the difficulties may lie in re-examining the role given to the will and its object (the good) in the discussion of human freedom.

1.2 The Basis of Human Free Will

Having highlighted the fact that Swinburne takes the incompatibilist posture, and specifically the libertarian conception of freedom, I shall now go on to take a closer look on how he understands and explains this. Since, the topic of free will is central to his philosophy, he deals with it in

²⁹ Some authors like Frankfurt himself and Thomas Talbott reject the PAP but do not accept the compatibilist label. Talbott, for example, tries to reconcile the two camps by proposing a principle which he thinks both can agree on. He thinks that a point of agreement can be reached if they start from the acknowledgement of the freedom of God. Cf. Talbott, T., «God, Freedom and Human agency», in *Faith and Philosophy* 26 (2009) 378-397.

³⁰ Cf. Swinburne, R., *Responsibility and Atonement*, 59.

³¹ Cf. Wierenga, E., «Perfect Goodness and Divine Freedom», *Philosophical Books* 48 (2007) 210.

almost all his works. I shall first of all, under this heading, present his views on what may be the source of free will and whether humans really have it.

He asserts in *Is there a God?* that there is more to humans than their bodies. He says that humans and higher animals are conscious: they have thoughts and feelings. He defends the idea that consciousness “cannot be a property of a mere body, a material object. It must be a property of something else connected to a body; and to that something else I shall give the traditional name of soul.”³² He goes on to claim that humans and higher animals are made of two parts: a body which is a material substance, and a soul which is an immaterial substance, and that the latter is the essential part of each one of us.³³ He says that this view that “humans consist of two connected substances – body and soul – is the view known as substance dualism.”³⁴ He adds that the alternative view would be to say that humans are just bodies, a view that may be called substance monism. Swinburne defends the former.

As I noted earlier, he says that the world consists of substances, each of which has some given properties. He adds that “anything is a substance if it can cause an event, or if something can cause a change in it.”³⁵ Now, properties and events may be physical or mental. A physical event is “one such that no one person is necessarily better placed to know that it has happened than is any other person.”³⁶ These include brain events because when a neurone in the brain fires at a particular time, it is something which could be

³² Swinburne, R., *Is there a God?*, 69.

³³ Cf. *Ibid.*, 70.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 73.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 70.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 71.

observed equally well by many different observers. “Mental events, by contrast, are ones which just one person has a special way of finding out about – by actually experiencing them.”³⁷ He adds that evidently, from our own experience, there are mental events. These include patterns of colour in one’s visual field, pains, thrills, beliefs, thoughts, feelings and purposes.

Humans, unlike inanimate things, have mental properties. He argues that they have a mental life, which is not just connected to the body but is the state of an immaterial substance that we call the soul. Swinburne is concerned about distinguishing between brain events and mental events. He says:

An event in my brain (itself caused by an event in my tooth) caused my toothache... [but] just as ignition of petrol is distinct from the explosion which it subsequently causes, so the brain event is distinct from the pain or whatever which it causes. And, of course, there is causation in the other direction too: my purposes cause (unintentionally) the brain events which in turn cause the motion of my limbs (which I intend).³⁸

Swinburne affirms that humans are not fully determined by brain events: they have free will.³⁹ His understanding of free will and its basis may be manifested by the explanations he proposes to an objection that he says a reader could raise. The reader may ask himself, he says:

Is not the brain an ordinary material object in which normal scientific laws operate? How, then, can a human freely choose to move his arm or not, or perform any piece of public behaviour, without violating scientific laws?... [If] humans

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid., 73.

³⁹ Cf. Ibid., 91.

have free will, would they not then be able to prevent normal scientific laws operating in the brain?⁴⁰

He believes that there could be two possible answers. One could be that “quite obviously the brain is not an ordinary material object, since – unlike ordinary material objects – it gives rise to souls and their mental lives.”⁴¹ He concludes that we should therefore not necessarily expect it to be governed totally by normal laws of physics. The second possible answer is that “even if the brain is governed by the same laws as govern other material objects, that could still be compatible with humans having free will.”⁴² He argues that Quantum Theory, one of the two great theories of modern physics, shows that the physical world on the small scale is not fully deterministic. It shows that an element of unpredictability governs the behaviour of atoms, electrons and other fundamental particles of which atoms are made.

[It] may well be like this: that the unpredictable small changes in the brain are the ones which cause our thought and observable behaviour. In that case, when humans form their purposes to think of this or that or behave in such and such a way, they thereby cause those small changes unpredictable by science which in turn cause the thought and behaviour.⁴³

He concludes that humans therefore can exercise free will without violating physical laws which govern the brain. It can however be seen from both explanations that for him free will is based on brain events (i.e. it has a material explanation).

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid., 92.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid., 93.

1.3 *The Free-Will Defence*

As earlier mentioned, Swinburne believes that the free-will defence must be the central core of any theodicy. This is an argument that explains why God would permit the occurrence of moral evil.

The free-will defence claims that it is a great good that humans have a certain sort of free will which I shall call free and responsible choice, but that, if they do, then necessarily there will be the natural possibility of moral evil... A God who gives humans such free will necessarily brings about the possibility, and puts outside his own control whether or not that evil occurs.⁴⁴

He explains that by ‘natural possibility’, he means that it will not be determined in advance whether or not the evil will occur. He adds that it would not be logically possible for God to give such free will and yet ensure that we always use it in the right way. He says that this kind of free will makes our actions count and influence the course of things in the world. It enables us to be responsible for others.

He says that although we value the spontaneous and fully desired pursuit of the good, we value the pursuit of the good even more if it results “from a free choice of the agent between equally good actions, that is, one resulting from the exercise of (libertarian) free will.”⁴⁵ Swinburne does not consider the pursuit of the good fully desired by an agent as an exercise of free will but only that which involves the choice between at least two goods. He however believes that even this kind of free will is almost of no value. He calls it ‘very unserious free will’. He says:

⁴⁴ Ibid., 98.

⁴⁵ Swinburne, R., *Providence and the Problem of Evil*, 84.

I shall call free will involving a choice between good and bad ‘serious free will’, and if wrong is also a possibility, ‘very serious free will’, to be contrasted with ‘unserious free will’, where the choice is only between alternative goods (and if the goods are equal goods, ‘very unserious free will’).⁴⁶

Therefore, an agent is a source of the direction of things in the world in a full way only if the choices open to him cover the whole moral range; from the very good to the very wrong. He believes that ‘very serious free will’ is a great good for the agent, whether or not he exercises it in favour of the good. However, “[the] more agents who have this freedom, the more such choices they have, the greater the temptation to wrongdoing, the more wrong choices there will probably be.”⁴⁷ He says that it would be logically impossible for God to give agents this freedom without the probability of them making some wrong choices.

1.4 The Role of Desires in Free Will

According to Swinburne, “human persons are influenced in forming their purposes by their desires, their in-built inclinations to make this choice and not that one.”⁴⁸ These include physiological desires (for food, drink, sleep and sex) and desires formed partly by our culture (fame, fortune). Because we have desires, we humans are not fully rational. “But a person free from desires who formed his purposes solely on the basis of rational considerations would inevitably do the action which he believed (overall) the best

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 127.

⁴⁸ Swinburne, R., *Is there a God?*, 6.

one to do...”⁴⁹ He clarifies that by calling desires non-rational, he does not wish to imply that there is something wrong with them. He believes however that we are “free to some extent to fight against our desires and do some action other than one which we are naturally inclined to do, but it requires effort.”⁵⁰ He says that this shows that humans have limited free will. On the other hand, God is “*perfectly free*, in that desires never exert causal influence on him at all.”⁵¹

At this point, I wish to return to Swinburne’s view that ‘serious free will’ is a great good for us. It is a great good because it makes us efficacious actors in the affairs of the world. Serious free will, he has said, involves a choice between good and bad. He goes on further to claim that if an agent is to have the option of doing what he regards as less good or bad actions, he must be subject to a strong desire to do this action. “With such desires, i.e. temptations, alone can he have a free choice of pursuing the best or not pursuing the best.”⁵² As I pointed out earlier, Swinburne does not think that the biblical Adam could have been as he is portrayed by St. Augustine and other early theologians. He could not have done evil, if he was not subject to bad desires.⁵³

Therefore, says Swinburne, there are only two possible situations of free choice:

One is where there is a choice between two actions which the agent regards as equal best and which the agent desires to do equally; which – on the assumption that his moral beliefs are true – is the situation of very unserious free will. The other is where there is a choice between two actions, one of which the

⁴⁹ Ibid., 13.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 6.

⁵¹ Ibid., 7. The italics are in the text.

⁵² Swinburne, R., *Providence and the Problem of Evil*, 86.

⁵³ Cf. pp. 158-159.

agent desires to do more and the other of which he believes it better to do. This latter is the situation of temptation.⁵⁴

Thus only in the latter situation of temptation is it possible to exercise serious free will. He goes on to explain that temptation can be in three forms: it may involve desiring either a less good action, or a bad action or a wrong action instead of the action believed to be the best. Each of these situations gives rise to different degrees of free will. He does not therefore consider it a situation of free will when an agent desires to do the action that he believes to be the best more than any other action. He believes that it is fairly clear that to do good out of very serious free will despite strong contrary temptation is the best exercise of choice.⁵⁵

In conclusion, in this section, I have highlighted the main points in Swinburne's conception of human freedom. First of all, he considers free will as consisting in choosing from alternatives but especially between good and evil. But as I have argued in the previous chapter, evil has no proper existence and no one ever chooses 'evil.' Secondly, I have indicated that his views about the role of desires imply some contradictions. These views, moreover, lead him to consider that a man who is subject to bad desires is freer than one who seeks the good spontaneously (i.e. not subject to bad desires). These are serious difficulties for which we need to find a solution. I shall propose in the next section a way of solving them, which above all, consists in applying the concept of good proposed in the previous chapter in the consideration of freedom.

⁵⁴ Swinburne, R., *Providence and the Problem of Evil*, 86.

⁵⁵ Cf. *Ibid.*, 87.

2. Freedom: Man's Self-Determination towards the Good

In this section, I shall propose an alternative understanding of freedom to that of Swinburne. Like I have mentioned in the previous section, my main objective shall be to bring to bear the concept of good that I have defended in the previous chapter on the current debate on freedom. I shall suggest that this concept of good that grants the prime place to the will and its object, which is what moves us to act, can solve many of the difficulties that have arisen in the prevalent debate on freedom. I shall elaborate this view by considering ordinary situations and by appealing to our intuitive conception of freedom. I shall along the way integrate into the discussion conceptions from the Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition which I believe form the basis for our intuitive conception of freedom.

I do not propose to discuss exhaustively the topic of freedom but only to the extent that it plays a role in Swinburne's theodicy. The main issue that concerns this section (and this chapter) is Swinburne's view that freedom requires that there be alternatives, and specifically between good and evil, both as positively existing realities. I have argued in the previous chapter, during the discussion of the ontological status of evil, that evil does not have any positive existence. I shall argue here, by following the debate between compatibilism and incompatibilism, that the concept of freedom does not necessarily include alternatives (in Sub-section 2.1). On the other hand, I shall illustrate, in the same sub-section, that conceiving freedom as our self-determination to the good sheds light on many shadows about this topic. I shall go on to focus the topic of freedom from the object and the acts of the will from the perspective of St.

Thomas Aquinas (in Sub-section 2.2). Finally, I shall consider the positive and rational role that desires have in human action (in Sub-section 2.3).

2.1 Free Will is for the Sake of the Good

I considered in Chapter III that every human action is commanded by the will which is moved by an object that is presented to it by reason as good. In this sub-section, I would like to show that recognising this role of the will provides a firmer basis for understanding human freedom. Now, whatever is presented to the will as good (as a practical good) moves the will either to immediate action or to finding the means for attaining it. Like I argued in Chapter III, practical reason is guided by the 'high level goods' which act as principles of all our actions or choices. Other times however, the will may simply want that something *be* and as long as this is the case, the will is satisfied. It does not have to make any choice or command any act but only perseveres in wanting that the status quo be maintained. This is the case, for example, when an end (a goal) is attained.

So, the object of the will is the good presented by reason. The good moves (or attracts) the will. If the will is not impeded by anything from attaining its object, it is free. If on the other hand someone or something impedes it, the will cannot obtain what it wants. In spite of being drawn to the said object, its movement towards it is curtailed by the interference. It cannot bring about its union with the desired object. This, in my view, is the situation of lack of freedom. Freedom, then, is the ability of the will to attain its object (the good). I believe that this is the fundamental concept of freedom even if we may go further and consider that when

the good is a true good, then it is true freedom. This is the view that I intend to elaborate and defend in this section.

It is for this reason that I suggested earlier that a correct concept of the good was necessary for an adequate conception of freedom. Since it is the good that moves the will, the main question concerning freedom should be whether the will tends to its object freely and not whether an agent can do otherwise or not. Instead, the current debate is almost wholly focused on the PAP, which states that “a person is morally responsible for what he has done only if he could have done otherwise.”⁵⁶ This has led to saying much about the free will, without any mention of the object of the will and only a passing mention of its acts. Such a situation ought to set off alarms sooner rather than later. Couldn't it be that the source of the difficulties that are being faced is this not so light omission?

While I suggest here that the central question about freedom should be whether the will tends to its object freely and not whether an agent can do otherwise or not, the PAP requires that an agent be able to do otherwise if he is to be considered to be free. That is, it requires that an agent have alternatives in order to be said to be free. Hence, on one hand, one party to the dispute presents examples in which we would consider the agent to be free and morally responsible yet he could not have done otherwise. On the other hand, the other party either tries to show that the agent in fact had alternatives or re-formulates the PAP in order to cover the said example. I already cited James Lamb's discussion of the case of the lifeguard who could not save the drowning child

⁵⁶ Frankfurt, H. G., «Alternate Possibilities and Moral Responsibility», 829. I shall use this formulation because it is simpler than the others and captures the points considered in the present work.

because she could not swim.⁵⁷ Lamb admits that this case overcomes the PAP in both its *strong* and *moderate* versions. He then goes ahead to formulate the *weak* PAP, which he believes overcomes this challenge and can stand the test of time. The dispute however continues.

So, why has it proved so difficult to formulate the PAP with the precision necessary to capture what we understand intuitively as freedom? This is a question that Edward Wierenga asks himself.⁵⁸ Couldn't it be because it ignores some key aspects of freedom (e.g. the object and acts of the will)? Couldn't it be that it has been interpreted in a manner far from the metaphysical reality? It should be noted that the evaluation of the PAP in the current debate is normally carried out according to what is said to be our 'intuitive' conception of freedom. Thus, the counter-examples that are proposed are judged according to the said conception. Couldn't there be an alternative concept of freedom (alternative and prior to the PAP) which may be the one that we 'intuitively' use to judge the PAP?

The PAP has been interpreted as either a negation or affirmation of the compatibility between freedom and determinism.⁵⁹ In general, incompatibilists defend the principle and claim that it implies that free will is incompatible with determinism. On the other hand, compatibilists generally reject the principle and suggest cases in which a person could not have done otherwise and yet we would agree that he was morally responsible. There is a need to examine the PAP closely. Recourse to some traditional notions may show the source of the conflict. It may on one hand be shown that the incompatibilists are right in claiming

⁵⁷ Cf. pp. 241-244.

⁵⁸ Cf. Wierenga, E., «Perfect Goodness and Divine Freedom», 210.

⁵⁹ Cf. Alarcón, E., «Libertad y Necesidad», 25.

that freedom (and hence moral responsibility) is incompatible with determinism. On the other hand, it may also be shown that compatibilists are right in claiming that freedom (and hence moral responsibility) is compatible with ‘not being able to do otherwise,’ and therefore that the PAP is false.

For, is ‘not being able to do or be otherwise’ the same as determinism? The source of difficulty here is that contemporary philosophy tends to consider everything from a scientific view. It has thus interpreted ‘cannot be otherwise’ as implying determinism (in the sense of the determinism of physical laws). Determinism is considered by Swinburne as “[the] view that every event is caused to occur in all its detail by prior causes.”⁶⁰ There is also Peter van Inwagen’s definition of determinism that is part of his famous ‘consequence argument’ in favour of incompatibilism. It states that “[if] determinism is true, then our acts are the consequences of the laws of nature and events in the remote past.”⁶¹ It may be seen therefore that when they argue that determinism is incompatible with free will, they are thinking of causal or physical determinism.

Enrique Alarcón notes that in the contemporary debate, “a restricted meaning of the term ‘necessary’ is used which limits it to the deterministic link between efficient causes and physical effects.”⁶² He suggests that we need to understand necessity in its most metaphysical rendering rather than limiting it to physical determinism. He says that the most proper metaphysical use of ‘necessary’ is “what cannot be otherwise, what lacks an alternative; what can only

⁶⁰ Swinburne, R., *Responsibility and Atonement*, 52.

⁶¹ Van Inwagen, P., *An Essay on Free Will*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983, 16.

⁶² Alarcón, E., «Libertad y Necesidad», 26. The translation is mine.

be and cannot not be and cannot change.”⁶³ So, ‘what cannot be otherwise’ refers to metaphysical necessity and this has a far greater reach than physical determinism. Necessity understood in this sense is not only compatible with freedom but is a condition sine qua non for freedom.⁶⁴ I shall elaborate this later on. I shall also later on present St. Thomas’ view that, of all kinds of necessity, only the necessity due to the efficient cause (i.e. coercion/ external necessity) is opposed to free will.

Indeed, an efficient cause necessarily brings about its proper effects when it acts. Similarly, the laws of nature lead us to expect certain results when an object is subject to them. Thus, efficient causes and laws of nature necessitate their effects and an agent subject to them does not act freely. This is causal or physical determinism. I agree therefore with Swinburne (and incompatibilists) “that an agent has free will if his intentional actions do not have necessitating causes.”⁶⁵ However, determinism according to efficient causes and laws of nature is not the only kind of necessity. It is not the only instance in which the agent cannot do otherwise. There are cases, for example, in which the free subject does not want to have any alternatives and so a lack of alternatives would not reduce his freedom. These are not opposed to freedom.

One such case is that of self-determination, whereby a person apprehends an object as good for him and is thus determined to obtain it. Here, the agent is not determined by any laws of nature or any coercion (external force). I suggest that only those conditions that determine an agent and yet are not part of the object of his will remove his freedom. This is not the case with self-determination. Self-determination

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Cf. Alarcón, E., «Libertad y Necesidad», 43.

⁶⁵ Swinburne, R., *Responsibility and Atonement*, 58.

depends on the will of the person. The will in turn depends on what it has been trained to care about or to value. It depends on the 'high level goods' which are the principles of choice.⁶⁶ This kind of determination is not opposed to freedom. In the same vein, Ana M. González, following Aristotle's ideas in Book I of *Nicomachean Ethics*, suggests that if we were not drawn necessarily (i.e. naturally) to any good (to the general good), we would not choose freely any good.⁶⁷ It would be a good thing if a man's high level goods are true goods (i.e. they are adequate for man's proper end). I was referring to this when I mentioned earlier that if a man wants goods that are true goods, we can say that he experiences true freedom.

One of the frequent cases of not being able to do otherwise that is considered in the debate on the PAP is that whereby one is determined by the character that one has developed from one's childhood. It is normally considered as a kind of determinism such that even those who consider it positively find themselves in need of giving some qualifications.⁶⁸ Like I have emphasised, every man has some high level goods which guide his choice of actions and hence the kind of life that he leads. Without the high level ends, there would be no action and no free choice to talk about. Thus, the tendency to these ends is not opposed to freedom but rather its condition. Now, one's character comprises of the combination and relation of these high level goods.

If freedom did not necessarily include a reference to the good, it would be reduced to mere spontaneity or

⁶⁶ Cf. pp. 248-250, where I have discussed the concept of 'high level goods' and related it to Harry Frankfurt's notion of 'what we care about.'

⁶⁷ Cf. González, A. M., *El Bien y el Sumo Bien*, 40.

⁶⁸ Cf. Talbott, T., «God, Freedom and Human agency», *Faith and Philosophy* 26 (2009) 389-391; Mele, A. R., «A Critique of Pereboom's 'Four-Case Argument' for Incompatibilism», 75-76.

unpredictability. Surprisingly, Swinburne seems to endorse this in his attempt to reconcile human free will with the functioning of the brain. He gives two explanations both of which found free will in brain events and therefore in a material explanation. Besides this, he seems to reduce free will to unpredictability when he claims in the second explanation that Quantum Theory could possibly account for it.⁶⁹ Leonardo Polo refers to this as a negative consideration of freedom and illustrates it with an example that he takes from Max Scheler. The example is of a frivolous young lady that belongs to a rich family. She has no responsibilities and has a lot of money at her disposition. Her caprices or whims are the rule of her behaviour. Indeed her behaviour will be completely unpredictable and she may consider herself to be very free.

Polo notes that there are some who consider themselves free because they have no ties to anyone or anything and are not conditioned by anything other than their feelings at any given moment. It is a consideration of freedom as mere indetermination (i.e. not being determined in one's action by something considered to be rationally good). But to act without any profound motivation is the poorest form of freedom possible. A conduct according to caprices is one that is not determined internally but is in fact determined externally.⁷⁰

On the other hand, if one resolved to do the same thing always in given circumstances and in fact kept to this resolution, we could rightly speak of determination. The stronger this determination, the more predictable his behaviour will be. But we cannot deny that this person is free

⁶⁹ Cf. p. 332.

⁷⁰ Cf. Polo, L., *Persona y Libertad*, 1 ed. Pamplona: EUNSA, 2007, 265-266.

since in fact it is a resolution that he must renew whenever the said circumstances are given and one which can only be maintained if he is free from whims and any psychobiological impulses (i.e. he is not determined by them). Therefore, among human beings, the freer that a conduct is, the more predictable it is.⁷¹ From all this, Leonardo Polo concludes that “freedom is a capacity of self-determination. It is not indetermination, but the absence of or staying above external determination.”⁷²

From the above, it can therefore be seen that freedom is the ability of the will to attain the good. Freedom is about whether we can do what we want. It is not about whether we have an alternative (a choice) or not. To prove this, we may ask anyone: when do you think yourself really free, when you have lots of alternatives from which to choose or when what you can get is what you wanted? That the latter is the case may be seen from the fact that we would not mind if we had only one alternative if it is what we considered to be good. Therefore, freedom is about the good (i.e. about what we want) and not about having alternatives. I shall illustrate this with the following example:

My favourite toothpaste is ‘Nile toothpaste’. Back in my home country, it is available in all stores and so I acquire a sample by simply walking into any store. It is often the only option available in many stores because it is the favourite for many. I do not however consider my freedom or choice curtailed by the lack of offer of the other kinds which on my part I consider to be bad. On the other hand, here abroad where I study, in any store or supermarket that I go to, there are dozens of options that are offered but not Nile toothpaste. Without doubt, I consider myself not to be free because I lack

⁷¹ Cf. *Ibid.*, 267.

⁷² *Ibid.* The translation is mine.

what I consider to be the good. This shows that the important element of freedom is the capacity to attain what we consider to be good, and that it is not necessary that we should be offered various alternatives. Alternatives are needed only if there is no object that contains all the good that one seeks or desires. I wish here to take note of Alarcón's explanation:

[If] freedom required choice, then the greater the range of possibilities that were offered to us, the freer we would be. Our common experience however shows that this is quite far from the truth: What we want freely is that which we consider to be the greatest good, at least here and now. What is bad, we do not want. Thus, the number of alternatives is accidental and completely without importance...

Variety increases neither the voluntariness, nor, therefore, the freedom. On the contrary, if the goods are incompatible, we choose in spite of ourselves... Similarly, we do not experience greater freedom when we are under threats even if these present new future possibilities, nor is he who finds himself cornered to some choices that he did not want. What contributes to our freedom always belongs to the area of what we want. It is only goods that we want freely, not possibilities that do not bring us any good.⁷³

Alarcón goes further to argue that it is not the variety of options that increases our freedom but rather the variety of goods. Instead, the increase of alternatives sometimes limits our freedom. It is always preferable that the goods coincide in one object rather than that they be distributed among opposed alternatives. In the latter case, we would be obliged to choose one of the alternatives and this would lack the good that is in the other alternatives. Hence, the greatest goods are those that have no alternative.⁷⁴

⁷³ Alarcón, E., «Libertad y Necesidad», 32-33.

⁷⁴ Cf. *Ibid.*, 41.

[The] goods that we value most, that we are most afraid of losing, those which we most freely and voluntarily want, are precisely those that we least compare with other possibilities. It is enough to ask a mother if she would like to exchange her son with another. The more she loves him, the less ready she will be to choose, to consider alternatives.⁷⁵

Thus, an increase in alternatives does not imply an increase of freedom. An alternative that is open to me but is not wanted by me does not increase my freedom. This is a clear sign that freedom is about whether I can attain what I consider to be good. Freedom makes no reference to the bad. It does not therefore require a choice between the good and the bad. Hence, St. Thomas notes that it “does not belong to the essence of free will to be able to decide for evil.”⁷⁶ So, “the possibility of choosing evil is for Aquinas a ‘sign’ of free will, but it is not a constituent part of it.”⁷⁷ Swinburne on the other hand considers that only an opportunity of choosing between good and bad is an exercise of serious free will. This is a principal element of his ‘free will’ defence by which he explains why God permits evil to occur. However, it is evident that the offer of what is bad in order to widen the range of alternatives does not increase our freedom. If it did, “it would be enough for a good restaurant, in order to improve its customer service, apart from delicious dishes on its menu, to offer repulsive ones as well.”⁷⁸ Likewise, Thomas Talbott notes that he and Susan Wolf agree that the “psychological ability of acting in an utterly irrational way, far from enhancing the freedom of a rational agent, might

⁷⁵ Ibid., 35.

⁷⁶ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Quaestiones Disputatae De Veritate*, q.24, a.3, ad 2.

⁷⁷ Echavarría, A., «Thomas Aquinas and the Modern and Contemporary Debate on Evil», 746.

⁷⁸ Alarcón, E., «Libertad y Necesidad», 32.

even undermine such freedom altogether.”⁷⁹ Thus, Wolf affirms that “responsibility depends on the ability to act in accordance with the True and the Good.”⁸⁰ This means that freedom, which moral responsibility supposes, also depends on this.

It may be argued that freedom requires that there should always be a possibility of the subject doing otherwise, at least of abstaining from acting. This may be the case but I do not think that I need to pursue this question in order to make the point that I am trying to make. What is of interest here are the acts of practical reason (in which freedom is exercised) at the time of acting. It is clear that there are many instances in which a person acts without considering any alternatives but simply having his eye on the goal (i.e. simply maintaining his will on what he considers to be good and which he needs not to deliberate about). And if the question of whether he has alternatives or not does not come into play while acting, neither does it have to when considering the moral responsibility.

Therefore, like Wolf says, freedom necessarily refers to what we consider to be good. If someone did something and really wanted to do it, we say that he did it freely (wholeheartedly). It does not matter whether he could do otherwise. This view is similar to the one that Gary Watson and Harry Frankfurt say to be a familiar conception of freedom. Both of them think that it generally captures what freedom is but think that it must have several qualifications. It is the qualifications that they make, I believe, that lead to some of the objections that Swinburne has against them. I

⁷⁹ Talbott, T., «God, Freedom and Human agency», 388. Cf. Wolf, S., *Freedom Within Reason*, New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990, 96.

⁸⁰ Wolf, S., *Freedom Within Reason*, 79.

think however that Swinburne's criticism of Frankfurt and Watson is not compelling. I shall return to this issue when I consider the role of desires in action. Frankfurt, for example, says:

According to one familiar philosophical tradition, being free is fundamentally a matter of doing what one wants to do. Now the notion of an agent who does what he wants to do is by no means an altogether clear one: both the doing and the wanting, and the appropriate relation between them as well, require elucidation. But although its focus needs to be sharpened and its formulation refined, I believe that this notion does capture at least part of what is implicit in the idea of an agent who acts freely.⁸¹

The qualifications that Watson and Frankfurt think should be made are necessitated by their lack of a concept of the will as a rational appetite. This may be seen from Frankfurt's suggestion above that "both the doing and the wanting, and the appropriate relation between them as well, require elucidation." It seems moreover that Watson, like Swinburne, considers that someone could act solely on the basis of a rational judgement.⁸² I have however argued in the previous chapter that it is the will attracted to some good that moves us to action. In addition, one of the motives for which Frankfurt thinks that the definition of freedom in these terms is not completely adequate is that he uses the term 'to want' with a special sense.⁸³ The sense in which I have used it in the present work implies rational desire. In this sense, it is synonymous with 'to will.' I believe that this is the more proper way that we use the term. When I say that 'I *want* to

⁸¹ Frankfurt, H. G., «Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person», 89; Cf. Watson, G., «Free Agency», 96.

⁸² Cf. his discussion of the relation between evaluation and motivation, *Ibid.*, 104-107.

⁸³ Cf. Frankfurt, H. G., «Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person», 86; 90.

go to London,' my listeners understand that this is a rational judgement that I have formed after considering all factors and that this is now an object of my will. However, leaving aside the different uses of 'to want,' if it means to desire according to reason, then my view is that the definition of freedom in terms of being "able to do or get what one wants"⁸⁴ is correct.

There are other interesting cases in the current debate on freedom (apart from the ones that I have already presented) that manifest the difficulties that may be faced if freedom is not conceived as being able to do what one wants. An example is Odysseus' case that is discussed by Thomas Talbott in response to an earlier discussion by William Rowe. Accordingly, Odysseus orders his men to tie him to the mast so that at the time he hears the voices of the sirens he will be unable to yield to the temptation to follow the sirens' call. Rowe had asserted that "it is simply a mistake to think that when he hears the sirens' song Odysseus 'freely refrains' from responding."⁸⁵ Rowe explains that "[after] all, he is unable to respond, freely or unfreely, for he is securely tied to the mast."⁸⁶ Talbott agrees with him. It should be noted that Talbott declares himself to "flatly reject the so-called principle of alternative possibilities."⁸⁷

I should think however that this is not the most intuitive opinion. I think that most people would think that Odysseus acts freely. Isn't it by his will that Odysseus is tied to the mast? Doesn't he freely choose to be tied to the mast? And doesn't this mean therefore that he freely decides not to follow the sirens' call (since he does not follow it because he is tied to the mast, something he has chosen freely)? Rowe

⁸⁴ Watson, G., «Free Agency», 96.

⁸⁵ Rowe, W. L., *Can God be Free?*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004, 145.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Talbott, T., «God, Freedom and Human agency», 389.

seems not to deny this when he affirms that: “In Odysseus’ case, however, it is clear that the order to his men is freely given so as to achieve the specific end of rendering him unable to respond to the sirens’ song.”⁸⁸ What takes place is that Odysseus’ rational desire (his will) dominates whichever other desires he might have. He sets his will on what he has apprehended as the good and puts all the necessary means for obtaining it. He ensures that nothing stops him from obtaining his goal. He does what he wants! This is the definition of freedom that I have defended here (i.e. the ability to do what one considers to be good).

Odysseus’ case is similar to that of someone whose passion would lead him to revenge (to murder, fight, etc.) but who does everything possible not to succumb. This kind of freedom seems to me much more fundamental than the external one (i.e. the absence of physical determinism). The freedom of being able to decide not to follow the passions that push me to an irrational action is much more basic than the freedom of not being tied with ropes to a mast. It is much more basic because it is much more human. This is self-determination to the good. On the other hand, the freedom that Odysseus would have if he were not tied to the mast is not different from the freedom that a cow which is not tied to a post has.

Another example is from James Lamb’s discussion. He takes it from John Locke’s *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*.⁸⁹ John Locke describes the case of a man who, enjoying the company he is with, ‘voluntarily’ stays in a

⁸⁸ Rowe, W. L., *Can God be Free?*, 145.

⁸⁹ Locke, J., *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Bk II, Ch. xxi, Sect. 10. Cited in Lamb, J. W., «Evaluative Compatibilism and the Principle of Alternative Possibilities», 524.

room which, unknown to him, is locked. Lamb elaborates the case further:

Now suppose, elaborating on Locke's scenario, that the man decides against appearing at some dull function he had promised to attend. In not attending, the man acts on his own and is thus morally responsible; but he could not have attended the function since the room was locked.⁹⁰

Lamb admits that the man could not do otherwise yet he is blameworthy for the action. Nevertheless, he believes that this does not invalidate the PAP. He argues that what makes the difference is an external factor to “what goes on in the mind and brain of the man.”⁹¹ It is the door lock that makes the man not able to do otherwise. If by ‘the mind and brain of the man’ he implies the man’s will, then he would be agreeing with the definition of freedom that I’m defending here. It is highly doubtful however that he might mean this. In any case, not even Lamb is convinced by his explanation. Hence, he adds: “It is not clear, however, that ‘external’ circumstances are always irrelevant to questions of moral responsibility.”⁹² What is clear is that the man did not want to go and that is what he did. Doing what he wants is the same as his being free. This explains his responsibility. It is also clear that if it is his fiancée who wanted him to be present at the dull function and somehow she found out that he had no intention of attending the function, she would not forgive him for that (even if the door was in fact locked) and we would think rightly so.

It is clear therefore that freedom has got to do with our being able to get what we consider to be good (i.e. what

⁹⁰ Lamb, J. W., «Evaluative Compatibilism and the Principle of Alternative Possibilities», 524.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid.

we want). The claim that freedom has to do with having alternatives from which to choose is an attempt to reduce freedom to free choice. I have however shown that there are many instances in which we have no alternatives and yet act freely. Some of these have been provided by the counter-examples that have been presented by some authors to prove that the PAP is false. I have noted that in fact some times, alternatives are a limit to our freedom. In order for a person to act freely, it is not essential that he have alternatives. In fact, like I noted in the introduction to this sub-section, there is a more basic level of freedom which does not imply any action but the will is simply satisfied (or not) with the status quo. Freedom is “wanting that is free, and by addition, action.”⁹³

Swinburne on the other hand admits no conception of freedom in which an agent does not have alternatives to choose from. The reduction of freedom to only free choice is a great impoverishment of freedom. The cause of this reduction to free choice is the attempt by modern philosophy to extend the scientific method to beyond its reach. Modern philosophy limits itself to the external aspects of freedom. Hence, it considers only free choice, which is the only aspect of freedom to which the scientific method has some minimum access. Nevertheless, “freedom neither requires to choose, nor, therefore, is it essentially identical with free choice (*liberum arbitrium*).”⁹⁴

In conclusion, I have argued that ‘cannot do/ be otherwise’ is not the same as determinism. I have thus argued that although freedom is incompatible with determinism, it is not incompatible with ‘not being able to do otherwise.’ This means that the PAP is false as has been suggested by various

⁹³ Alarcón, E., «Libertad y Necesidad», 28.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 34.

authors. However, even those authors who have pointed out its falsity have not been able to get to the core of the issue. I have argued that this has been so because they have not given prime place to the object of the will (i.e. what moves the will). In the next sub-section, I shall present, following the ideas that I have defended here, an understanding of freedom that takes into account the object and the acts of the will. It will take free choice as one but not the only act of the will. All the acts of the will are *voluntary*, and therefore free, even if they do not include choice.

2.2 *The Acts and Object of the Will*

I have already considered in different places that the object of the will is the good. I wish here to consider briefly the different acts of the will and how they are directed to its object. I have argued in the previous sub-section that as long as the will is not impeded from attaining its end (good), it is free. My intention here is to show that all acts of the will are rightly considered to be free when directed toward what has been apprehended as good, even when they do not involve any choice. As I have highlighted, Swinburne places human free will at the level of choice between at least two actions. If the choice is between two good actions, one of which is better than the other, it will be unserious free will; while if it is between two equally good actions, it will be very unserious free will. And if the choice is between a good and bad action, it will be serious free will; while if it is between a good and wrong action, it will be very serious free will. On the other hand, according to Swinburne, the spontaneous and fully desired pursuit of the good by an agent is not an exercise of free will. Neither does he believe free will possible if one is

not subject to desire that is contrary to what one thinks is the best action.

I wish to note here that it is true that the term ‘free will’ is often restricted to ‘free choice’ or *liberum arbitrium*. However, since Swinburne uses it to refer to the entire nature and capacity of the human will, it is clear that he considers free choice to be all there is about human freedom. I have argued that this is not true. Precisely, freedom is a subject of study here because of the ‘free will’ defence, which as I have noted Swinburne says is a ‘central plank’ of his theodicy. He claims, in his theodicy, that evil had to exist if God were to make beings with free will. My main aim in this chapter has been (and is) to show that human freedom does not require that good and evil exist as two alternative realities from which to choose. I on the other hand do not limit ‘free will’ to choice but use it simply to designate a characteristic of the will: that it is free.

According to St. Thomas Aquinas, the will has different acts that are proper to it. He divides these into two groups: those that have to do with the end, among which is the *intentio* (intention),⁹⁵ and those to do with the means, among which is the *electio* (choice).⁹⁶ The *electio* is an act of the will by which the will desires (‘chooses’) the means for attaining the end that it desires (‘intends’). The desire of the will for the end is prior to choice. St. Thomas explains it in the following way:

[Choice] results from the decision or judgment which is, as it were, the conclusion of a practical syllogism. Hence that which is the conclusion of a practical syllogism, is the matter of choice. Now in practical things the end stands in the position of a principle, not of a conclusion, as the Philosopher

⁹⁵ Cf. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I. II, q.12, a.1, ad 4.

⁹⁶ Cf. *Ibid.*, q.13, a.3, co; q.15, a.3, co; q.16, a.3, co.

says (Phys. ii, 9). Wherefore the end, as such, is not a matter of choice.⁹⁷

In other words, the end is the starting point of practical deliberation. Like I noted earlier, the intellect is naturally inclined to the goods of man but reason has to work out (discursively) the relation or hierarchy among them. Some of these attain the level of ‘high level ends’ as I have suggested and act as principles of all choices. Hence, like I have argued, they are a condition for any choice or action. Moreover, inasmuch as they are proposed by reason, which is open to opposites,⁹⁸ they are also said to be wanted freely. In the same vein, Aristotle affirms that “[choice] seems to be voluntary, but not the same as the voluntary; the latter extends more widely.”⁹⁹

How, then, does the will move towards the ultimate good? I have suggested that in order to speak of freedom, it is necessary to make a reference to the good. And in order to speak of seeking any good, it is necessary, as Aristotle argues, that there be an ultimate good, without which there would not be any movement or action.¹⁰⁰ It is necessary to make reference to the good when speaking of free will because what we want, we want it under the aspect of good; and all action we realise is for the sake of attaining what we consider to be good.¹⁰¹ In short, each end (*intentio*) that we have has the aspect of good. In addition, since every choice (*electio*) that we make is for the sake of something we consider to be good, it means that we consider the choice itself to be a good, albeit an instrumental or useful good. All acts of free will

⁹⁷ Ibid., q.13, a.3, co.

⁹⁸ Cf. Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, IX, 2, 1046b 5.

⁹⁹ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, III, 2, 1111b 7-8.

¹⁰⁰ Cf. Ibid., I, 2, 1094a 18-21.

¹⁰¹ Cf. Ibid., I, 1, 1094a 1.

therefore, whether they are to do with the end or with the means, are for the sake of something we consider as a good.

Therefore, if free will is for moving us towards ends through choices, more so is it for moving us to the ultimate end, which is the end of all ends and the first cause of all our actions and choices. The ultimate end is what moves the will first, and the will moves towards it through intermediate ends. If there were no ultimate good, there would be no good at all and so there would neither be intermediate ends nor choices and consequently no free will to speak about. Therefore, the fact that the will is drawn necessarily towards the ultimate good does not annul free will but rather is its condition. We can rightly say that the will is determined to the ultimate good and to good in general and yet this would not be repugnant to free will. St. Thomas explains that there are four kinds of necessity: according to the material, formal, final and efficient principles. Only the last of these is repugnant to the will because it entails coercion or violence by an agent.

For we call that violent which is against the inclination of a thing. But the very movement of the will is an inclination to something. Therefore, as a thing is called natural because it is according to the inclination of nature, so a thing is called voluntary because it is according to the will.¹⁰²

So, we call an action voluntary because the will is inclined to it. And an action is free if it is directed towards what the will wants. The inclination of the will to the ultimate good and to the good in general is the principle of free will. It is an inclination by necessity. We cannot not want happiness! It is however necessity according to the final principle and therefore not repugnant to the will. I noted earlier that in this life we can neither know nor attain any single good, the possession of which would be perfect happiness. Here in this

¹⁰² St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, q.82, a.1, co.

life, there are high level goods that may have the character of the ultimate good, inasmuch as they are principles of choice. But none of these contains all the good possible and so none imposes an absolute necessity on us. Heaven (the beatific vision) on the other hand, as it is understood in Christianity, is the possession of the ultimate good. Perfect happiness consists in this. The blessed in heaven see (or possess) God in his essence and so cannot reject him or seek an alternative good.¹⁰³ This is so because God, who is perfect goodness, has in himself all the good that could be sought. He is good from whichever point of view that he may be considered.

On the other hand, Swinburne's concepts of good and free will lead him to affirm that the blessed in heaven lack some goods that we have in this world. He affirms that heaven is a "marvellous world with a vast range of possible deep goods, but it lacks a few goods which our world contains, including the good of being able to reject the good."¹⁰⁴ I wish on my part to reiterate the claim that since the ultimate good and good in general are conditions for the concept of free will, the fact that the will is determined to them is neither repugnant to reason nor leads to the denial of free will.

2.3 The Direction of the Desires by Reason

With regard to the role of desires in the exercise of human free will, Swinburne on one hand claims that humans are not completely free because they are subject to desires, while on the other he claims that free will is possible only if

¹⁰³ Cf. *Ibid.*, q.82, a.2, co.

¹⁰⁴ Swinburne, R., *Is there a God?*, 113.

we are subject to some desire (temptation) contrary to what we believe to be the best action. He contrasts this with God, whom he says is perfectly free because he is not subject to desires. Furthermore, he says on one hand that temptations are bad and so we should avoid them and on the other hand believes that we need temptations because they are necessary for the 'great good of serious free will'. These seem to me to be cases of contradiction. Swinburne realises this but believes that the way out of this dilemma is to find some formula or equation that would strike a right balance. He expresses the dilemma and his hope of finding such a formula as follows:

To give someone free will makes it up to him what will happen. That is a great good, and... there is a certain chance of a further good that he will use it to choose the best. Both of these... have to be weighed against the chance that the agent will do the less good, bad, or wrong act, and the badness of the bad desires which make the latter choice possible. The chance that the agent will do (what he believes to be) the best will be greater, the less is the temptation to do the alternative. But the less the latter temptation, the less is the goodness of the act done in resisting it. I have no easy algorithm for working out which kind of free will is the best to have.¹⁰⁵

I on my part think that rather than finding a formula for how much choice of bad or good and how much temptation will give the best kind of free will, there is need for a better account of the role of desires in human action.

His consideration of desires seems to allocate them only a negative role, even though he explains that by calling them 'non-rational,' he does not mean that it is wrong to have them. But since he affirms that if it were not for desires, a person who acted solely on the basis of rationality would inevitably do the action which he believed the best one to do, it seems to me fair to conclude that he considers them to be

¹⁰⁵ Swinburne, R., *Providence and the Problem of Evil*, 87.

an obstacle to good action. The following affirmation that he makes while explaining why it is a good thing that there are temptations further illustrates this:

[The] agent is more ultimately the source of [things going well rather than very badly] the more the *passive forces* at work in the world were sweeping it along in the wrong direction and by *his effort alone* the current was turned in a different direction.¹⁰⁶

We may ask ourselves: in what does ‘his effort alone’ consist? How will one do a good action if he has stronger bad desires than good desires? I believe that unless one’s good desires become stronger, one will not be able to do good. Swinburne considers that we are led to do good by ‘rational beliefs’ while the desires (‘passive forces’) hinder our progress towards the good. In this, he follows Immanuel Kant who believes that we can be moved to act by pure rationality only (by the categorical imperatives) without any reference to a desired object, that is, without any motive other than the precept of reason. Kant claims that:

pure reason contains in itself a practical motive, that is, one adequate to determine the will... Laws must be sufficient to determine the will as will, even before I ask whether I have power sufficient for a desired effect, or the means necessary to produce it...¹⁰⁷

It is clear that Swinburne opposes rational belief to desire and does not envisage a situation of their co-operation in moving us to rational action. This may also be seen clearly from another passage:

If I have no desire to do one available action rather than another, [...] I form the intention to do what I believe is the best action to do, that is the one which, it seems to me, I have

¹⁰⁶ Ibid. The italics are mine.

¹⁰⁷ Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Practical Reason*, 5:20.

most reason to do. If I have no belief about the relative value of certain actions, [...] I form the intention to do that available action which I most desire to do, that is the one which I find myself most inclined to do.¹⁰⁸

Accordingly, we are led to act either by the value belief or by the inclination (desire) but not both. He further comments that “it is just under the circumstances where desires or value beliefs are of equal strength or in opposition to each other, that we are conscious of deciding between competing alternatives.”¹⁰⁹

I have however argued in Chapter III – following Aristotle and St. Thomas Aquinas – that we cannot act unless moved by some desire (i.e. unless we *want* or *desire* some good). I said there that human action is an interaction between reason and desire. We cannot but count on desires! Desires neither annul free will nor do they have to be non-rational. In order to do a good action, we do not have to get rid of all desires so that we are moved by only rationality. Aristotle and Aquinas think that desires can be subjected to and directed by reason such that they even assist the realisation of the good of reason. They therefore speak of ‘rational desire’, which is the desire in line with the good of reason. Hence, Aristotle affirms that “choice is either desiderative thought or intellectual desire, and such an origin of action is man.”¹¹⁰ They go on to suggest that a man can develop or tune his desires in complete harmony with reason over time. In other words, it is possible to acquire upright appetites or desires (i.e. desires according to reason).

¹⁰⁸ Swinburne, R., «Dualism and the Determination of Action», in Id. (ed.), *Free Will and Modern Science*, Oxford; New York, Oxford University Press, 2011, 67.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 82.

¹¹⁰ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, VI, 2, 1139b 4.

This means that we can do something about our desires. We are not completely at their mercy. At this point, I would like to consider some of Swinburne's criticisms of both what he calls the extreme and subtle forms of compatibilism. The example that he discusses is that of a bank clerk, who surrenders the bank money to armed robbers that threaten him.¹¹¹ Swinburne's view is that an agent who is subject to irresistible desire loses his freedom and so is not morally responsible for his actions. On the other hand, one who is subject to resistible desire is morally responsible for his actions. The defenders of what Swinburne calls the extreme form of compatibilism however think that a person who does an intentional action does not lose his freedom. Thus, they argue that the bank clerk does what he thinks (and we all think) is the right action and for this reason he is not blameworthy. Swinburne claims that they are mistaken in this. The only reason he thinks that they are mistaken is that: "We feel that men are not morally responsible for their intentional actions on those occasions when (to all appearances) they are caused so to act by irresistible desires."¹¹²

I suggest that sometimes we blame agents when they are subject to 'irresistible' desires or passions. If an agent is subject to an 'irresistible' passion (e.g. fear), we still ask ourselves if it was reasonable that he should have been subject to such desires. On one hand, like Aristotle says, there are situations in which the reasonable thing to do is to be fearful (and sometimes, very fearful!). In these cases, to fear would be the virtuous act, while to persist would be the vicious act of temerity. On the other hand, we blame someone who did not do the right action because he was

¹¹¹ Cf. p. 325.

¹¹² Ibid., 54.

subject to an 'irresistible' desire if it were not reasonable that in such a case he should be subject to it. We may perhaps be understanding with him (and therefore limit the blame) but we would encourage him to grow in virtue (to develop his character) such that he can respond reasonably to the passion the next time.

The following simple example may show that we can do something about the desires or passions such that in each situation we are subject to the reasonable amount passion. Growth in virtue involves this. There is a young boy who has great fear of darkness (an irresistible passion) such that when the room suddenly becomes dark, he is completely beside himself. But the parents or older siblings encourage him and show him that he is not in great danger. They assure him that even if he cannot see them, they are still with him and would not let anything happen to him. The boy gradually overcomes the fear with successive black outs. Although he may still be subject to fear, he learns how to react to it reasonably. Of course it may be a pathological case, in which case there is no way he can have the situation under his control. But this is not normally the case when people succumb to an 'irresistible' passion. Apart from the fact that it is possible to do something about desires or passions that are initially 'irresistible', it can also be seen from this example that it was not reasonable for the boy to be subject to 'irresistible' fear in this case and so his family did not remain indifferent to his attitude. Rather, they tried to correct it.

If then it is true that whether we blame someone who acts under the influence of 'irresistible' desire depends on whether it was reasonable for one to act that way or not, it means that the resistibility of a desire cannot be the basic criterion for moral responsibility but rather its rationality. Swinburne could argue that the reason we blame the boy or try to correct his behaviour is because the desire that he was

subject to was in fact resistible. But this would only mean that we can always say that a desire that was ‘irresistible’ in a given case should not have been so. And we would do this depending on whether we think it reasonable or not that the desire should exercise so much influence on the agent. It seems therefore that the rationality of the desire is the primary criterion for whether the actions done under the desire are blameworthy or praiseworthy. Earlier, I took note of Susan Wolf’s view that freedom depends on the ability to act in accordance with the ‘True and the Good.’ She further affirms that responsibility (and the freedom it presupposes) requires only “the ability to choose and to act in accordance with Reason, that is, the ability to choose and to act in accordance with what reasons there are.”¹¹³

When we come to the case of the bank clerk, I think that we would all think that this was the reasonable or right thing to do (to hand over the money). It is an extreme case and most probably the victim would be overcome by fear. But there is no reason to assume that all people would be overcome by fear. Someone could have the situation under control (subject to little or no fear at all). If such a person handed over the money, we would still not blame him because it was the reasonable thing to do. Swinburne objects further that if the bank clerk believed that he had the duty not to hand over the money and yet did not manage to overcome the fear, according to the compatibilist, we would have to hold him responsible for handing over the money. I think that we would not blame him because we would think that he was mistaken in thinking that this was the right thing to do. Nevertheless, since the proper moral perspective is the first person perspective, like I have argued in the previous chapter, it is clear that the bank clerk would blame himself for not

¹¹³ Wolf, S., *Freedom Within Reason*, 96.

doing what he thought was the right action. He would be filled with remorse for not acting well. It can be seen therefore that Swinburne's criticism of the proponents of the 'straight rule' on this point is not correct.

We may now go further and consider his criticism of Frankfurt, Watson and Neely, who he says are defenders of the subtle form of compatibilism.¹¹⁴ He says that these basically define 'free will' in terms of rationality. They think that the "free man is the rational man, the man who pursues what he values and does what he sees reason for doing."¹¹⁵ This criticism is similar to the one that he directs towards the proponents of the 'straight rule,' which I have shown above not to be well founded. I have argued that the only way we admit that a desire is (should be) irresistible is by judging whether it was reasonable or not. Moreover, if we examine closely Swinburne's criticism here, it becomes clear that what he says is not different from what these say. Swinburne notes that by taking this position, Frankfurt is able to distinguish between a heroin addict who wishes that he was not addicted (who desires that his desire not to take heroin defeat his desire for heroin) from the heroin addict who is glad to be addicted. He says that Frankfurt would consider the former not to have 'free will' when he takes the drug. Frankfurt says that the heroin addict fails to do what he values (what he wants) and so is not culpable. I do not defend Frankfurt's view but let me ask: when Swinburne says that the first heroin addict took the drug because he was under an 'irresistible' desire and so is not culpable, doesn't he say the same thing as Frankfurt? I suggest that the only difference is that Frankfurt refers the desire to a point of rationality. This, I

¹¹⁴ Cf. 327-328.

¹¹⁵ Swinburne, R., *Responsibility and Atonement*, 57.

have argued, we must do if we are to say whether a desire is really irresistible.

Therefore, desires cannot be completely irresistible. The cases in which they may exercise an 'irresistible' influence over an agent, we can still ask if it was reasonable for this to occur and then might blame the agent or not. It is true that excess passion takes away the freedom of a person. But then, often it would be a sign of immaturity of character and thus we would blame the person or encourage him to develop his character. Like I have said above, Aristotle and Aquinas believe that a man can develop or tune his desires in complete harmony with reason. In this case, the desires favour rather than hinder the good of reason.

Aristotle refers to a man who manages to subject his passions or desires to reason as a 'good man' or a virtuous man. Such a man tends to the good of reason without any deliberation and without being tempted to do what is contrary to reason. In other words, he does not consider any alternatives to the good of reason. And such a man is completely free. According to Aristotle, just like a flute-player plays the flute with pleasure, a virtuous man does good acts with pleasure.¹¹⁶ I believe that Aristotle's affirmation that such a man is better than a continent man¹¹⁷ is right on the mark. And indeed I should think that this is the kind of man that St. Thomas has in mind when he refers to man as an "intelligent being endowed with free will and self movement" and as a "principle of his own actions."¹¹⁸ Swinburne on the other hand, by claiming that the spontaneous and fully desired pursuit of the good and the realisation of good action without first fighting against temptation are not exercises of

¹¹⁶ Cf. *Ibid.*, X, 5, 1175a 29-35; 1176a 15-20.

¹¹⁷ Cf. *Ibid.*, VII, 2, 1146a 10-15.

¹¹⁸ Cf. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, II, Prologue.

free will, favours the continent man over the good man. Following Aristotle and St. Thomas, Herbert McCabe comments:

As it seems to me, our lives are to a greater or lesser extent *our own*. They are our own to the extent that we are grown-up, to the extent that we have managed to acquire skills in living (what Aristotle called virtues). To this extent we compose the story of our own lives; we play a part in a drama of our own composition. It marks us off from our fellow-animals that we do not just have a stationary lifetime between birth and death, but a *life-story*, determined by our own decisions – not random choices, but decisions that flow out of our own characters, from what we have made ourselves.¹¹⁹

2.4 Conclusion

Given the importance that Swinburne grants the topic of freedom and given its own metaphysical importance (especially its relation with the good), it was necessary to pay special attention to it in the present study. It is one of the goods that Swinburne says we should expect a good God to grant us. He considers that we should value it greatly and that it is well worth the evil that it necessitates. There is indeed no doubt about its great value and about the great dignity it bestows on man among all creatures of this world. I have however endeavoured, in this chapter, to show that a concept of good like the one I proposed in Chapter III is necessary for a correct understanding of freedom. I have first of all (in Section 1) presented Swinburne's conception of freedom and its relation with the dominant views in the contemporary

¹¹⁹ McCabe, H., *Faith within Reason*, London; New York: Continuum, 2007, 45.

debate. I have then considered (in Section 2) – including a discussion of some specific cases – how the above mentioned concept of good would solve easily the difficulties that arise in the study of freedom by Swinburne and some other contemporary authors.

According to Swinburne, the central core of any theodicy must be the free-will defence. He believes that it explains the occurrence of moral evil but can also account for much natural evil. He is of the view that God could not create beings with the kind of free will that human beings have without this entailing the existence of evil. He notes that human beings have more to them than their bodies. They are conscious beings. Not only are they subjects of brain events but also of mental events. The fact that humans are not fully determined by brain events shows that they have free will. However, he bases the free will in brain events. Thus, he offers a material explanation for what he believes to be immaterial.

He says that free will must be understood in the libertarian sense. He rejects the compatibilist understanding of free will. I have argued that both of these senses, as they are presented in the contemporary debate on freedom, have a major shortcoming: the debate involves saying much about the will but nothing about its object (i.e. to what it is supposed to be *free* to move). Such a discrepancy is most likely to lead to missing the essence of freedom. I have suggested that although causal or physical determinism is incompatible with freedom, this does not mean that ‘not being able to do otherwise’ is also incompatible with freedom. This point, which is clearly grasped from notions in the classical metaphysical tradition, can help solve great part of the difficulties in the current debate over the principle of alternate possibilities (PAP) and the issue of freedom in

general. Most importantly, I have suggested that giving the will and its object (the good) their rightful place in the study of human freedom would solve many of these difficulties.

In addition, I have defended the view that the concept of freedom does not require that there should be alternatives to choose from. Neither does the option for a bad action form part of the concept of freedom. On the other hand, Swinburne thinks that serious free will is only possible if there is a choice between good and evil, both as existing realities. It is for this reason that he insists that evil cannot be the absence of good but must have a positive existence. It is true that the lack of a teleological concept of nature (and all finality) makes it impossible for him to conceive evil as the absence of good. It is however clear that the position that he takes with regards to the nature of freedom is at the origin of most of the other positions that he takes in his theodicy. This however is not surprising since, like I have noted, he asserts that the free-will defence must be central core of any theodicy.

I have argued that freedom should be understood as the will being free to attain its object. I have considered several cases in which this way of conceiving freedom solves easily the difficulties that arise and is clearly the ordinary way that we think about freedom. Freedom is thus the capacity of man by which he determines (moves) himself to the good. This way, man participates in God's providence. However, if his providence is to be right, he ought to follow the first norm of providence. Man, being a free being, can provide for himself in a way that is not in accord with God's providence. St. Thomas expresses it in the following way:

Now, among all things, spiritual substances stand closest to the first principle; this is why they are said to be stamped with God's image. Consequently, by God's providence they are not only provided for, but they are provident themselves. This is why these substances can exercise a choice in their

actions while other creatures cannot. The latter are provided for, but they themselves are not provident.

Now, since providence is concerned with directing to an end, it must take place with the end as its norm; and since the first provider is Himself the end of His providence, He has the norm of providence within Himself... Now, creatures to whom His providence has been communicated are not the ends of their own providence. They are directed to another end, namely, God. Hence, it is necessary that they draw the rectitude of their own providence from God's norm...

Now, man is numbered among these creatures, because his form—that is, his soul—is a spiritual being, the root of all his human acts, and that by which even his body has a relation to immortality. Consequently, human acts come under divine providence according as men themselves have providence over their own acts...¹²⁰

3. Other Themes of Providence

This section should be considered as an appendix to the present study. I have already discussed and studied what I have identified as the main issues of Swinburne's doctrine on divine providence. Above all, it consists in his response to the problem of evil. The consideration of this topic has raised many issues that have occupied a considerable amount of space. This has been so especially since the study has necessitated a dialogue between the classical metaphysical and analytical traditions. I have found it indispensable to carry out a detailed discussion of how notions from the classical metaphysical perspective could enrich the current debate on divine providence. Consequently, only a mention

¹²⁰ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Quaestiones Disputatae De Veritate*, q.5, a.5, co.

can be made of the other themes of providence that appear in Swinburne's works. However, this will not leave out anything decisive for the understanding of Swinburne's doctrine on divine providence. For, I shall simply give them as much importance as he himself gives them as topics of providence.

Perhaps, with regards to the topics of Revelation, the Incarnation of God and Redemption, Swinburne may have quite a number of controversial positions. However, he does not introduce any new philosophical notions when dealing with these. According to the method that I proposed to use in the present work, I would study theological doctrines only inasmuch as they threw some light on some philosophical concept of interest. Apart from considering the divine Revelation and Redemption carried out by God Incarnate as acts of divine providence, Swinburne also considers them as arguments in favour of the existence of God. He says, for example, that the life, death and purported resurrection of Jesus Christ, followed by the rapid spread of Christianity throughout the Roman Empire have been interpreted by many as signs of God acting in the world. "For many Christians these remarkable events have been evidence not merely that a God in whom they already believed was at work in a particular way, proclaiming a particular message, but that there is a God."¹²¹ However, in similar fashion to that employed in arguing for the good things that God would give to his creatures, he considers that these are events that we should expect God to do. Hence, with regard to the Revelation, he comments:

If God does create such creatures capable of loving him, he must make himself known to them, and help them to deal with their problems... Or at least he must do this, except in so

¹²¹ Swinburne, R., *The Existence of God*, 274.

far as making himself known and helping them makes it more difficult for them to make significant free moral choices themselves. I shall argue in Chapter 11 that there are such limits to the goodness of God making himself known to humans and helping us. But barring these limits, my view is that God has an obligation to make himself known... Hence there is a probability of 1 that he will do so.¹²²

His view is that there is a probability of 1 for divine revelation. That is, it is 100 percent to be expected. Similarly, with regard to the Incarnation and Redemption, he thinks that:

if there is a God and if the human condition falls low, we may well expect there to appear on Earth a human being who lived a humble and sacrificial life and suffered the evil that humans do to other people (for example, by suffering an unjust death at their hands), who taught great moral and religious truths, who even suggested that he was God... If we have evidence that things have happened like that, as in the Christian story of the life, death and Resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth... then that all confirms the claim that there is a God, for God has reason for bringing about such a state of affairs – namely the good of humans.¹²³

Among the topics of providence with several philosophical notions that he studies are the creation and conservation of the universe on one hand, and miracles, on the other. I have dealt with the former during the discussion of the divine attributes. On the other hand, the topic of miracles is also of great interest to Swinburne. He has written a book entitled *The Concept of Miracle* and edited another, entitled *Miracles*. He normally treats ‘miracles’ as an independent argument for the existence of God and not as part of providence. He says that miracles are “certain events, the occurrence of which is normally disputed, which are such

¹²² Ibid., 130.

¹²³ Ibid., 290.

that if they occurred they would constitute a ‘violation’ (or ‘quasi-violation’) of laws of nature.”¹²⁴ He generally defends the views that have been historically held by Christian authors about miracles and claims that their occurrence is an argument in favour of the existence of God.¹²⁵

He places however special emphasis on the idea of historical evidence. He discusses the different kinds of historical evidence that we can come across.¹²⁶ He thinks that in weighing the value of evidence in form of testimonies by witnesses of miraculous events, “it is just a question of how much evidence [...] we have and how reliable we can show it to have been.”¹²⁷ He concludes that “although standards for weighing evidence are not always clear, apparent memory, testimony and traces could sometimes outweigh the evidence of physical impossibility.”¹²⁸

In summary, it can be seen that Swinburne uses the same approach and epistemological presuppositions as in the themes that I have discussed in the previous chapters. The providence of God comprises in his carrying out good works in favour of his creatures. According to him, from what we know about God (i.e. from the concept of God that we have), all these are to be expected. There does not seem to be room for God doing anything that is beyond what we can rationally expect. However, it has not been possible to carry out an extensive study of these themes of providence. Such a study would divert the attention from the nucleus of Swinburne’s doctrine, since he does not treat them as topics of divine providence.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 277.

¹²⁵ *Cf. Ibid.*, 282-287.

¹²⁶ *Cf. Swinburne, R.*, «Historical Evidence» in Swinburne, R., (ed.), *Miracles*, New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1989, 133-137.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 151.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*

CONCLUSION

Providence refers to a plan through which an agent avails the means for attaining his good or the good of those under his care. Thus, the head of a family foresees, secures and puts at the disposition of the family the resources that it needs for a good life. God on the other hand does not provide for himself but provides for all his creatures so that they can reach the end that he has set for them. But no one provides means or useful goods without having in mind the end to which they lead. God, who is the Creator, has set an end for each of his creatures and he provides to them the means to reach it. The ultimate end that he has set for the non-spiritual beings is not their individual good but that of their species or nature in general. On the other hand, since the spiritual creatures, – including man – are immortal and so last forever, each one has a personal end. Their ultimate end is the contemplation of the first and deepest truth or the possession of the supreme good, which is God himself and their communion with him.

I have thus defended in this work the view that a correct understanding of the providence of God must have as its principle the ultimate good. I have also argued that a teleological concept of nature is indispensable in the recognition of the real goods and evils and in the evaluation of their importance. God provides to man the means that he needs to attain his ultimate good and guides him thence

through different intermediate goods. I have presented in Chapter II Richard Swinburne's understanding of God's providence and his theodicy in the face of the existence of evil. I have highlighted the logical and philosophical problems that arise from his response to the 'atheist's argument'. I have also shown that his conceptions of good and freedom make him reject some of the doctrines of the theodicy in the Christian tradition. In the same chapter, I have argued that his conception of good and evil without any reference to the ultimate good makes his theodicy unsatisfactory.

For this reason, I have dedicated Chapter III to presenting a concept of good, basing myself on the classical metaphysical tradition. By this, I have hoped to enrich the conceptions in Swinburne's philosophy and in the contemporary philosophical debate. From the fact that we always act for some end or good, something that Swinburne agrees to, I have presented Aristotle's demonstration of the necessity of the ultimate good. From this metaphysical notion, I have carried out a brief analysis of human action from which I have been able to conclude that God's goodness is more fundamental than moral goodness. From this discussion, I have also been able to show that evil has no real existence but is the absence of the due good. This conclusion completely undermines Swinburne's free-will defence which I have discussed in Chapter IV. This is so because the existence of evil as an alternative reality to the good is, for Swinburne, a condition for freedom. I have besides in the fourth chapter also shown that the concept of freedom does not include in itself that there be alternatives from which to choose.

At the end of Chapter III, I have proposed an explanation for why God would permit the different kinds of evil. This has man's ultimate good as its point of reference. I

have suggested that this understanding of good and evil which I have defended – apart from being the one that guides our reaction to the minor evils in our day to day life – also takes into account God’s freedom, wisdom and power. However, even though it seems to me clear that this explanation adequately represents reality and is followed by us implicitly in our normal life, by itself alone, it may not fully convince someone faced with great evil. This is so because the experience of some evils is so tremendous that no rational explanation would suffice. Unless one conceives the necessity of the existence of God – either through religious faith or through a metaphysical demonstration – and understands that God in his wisdom and power can permit these evils (i.e. relative evils) for one’s good, one may not be convinced by any theodicy.

It is for this reason that I have presented in Chapter I Swinburne’s theory of explanation and justification. I have argued that it is not enough that we stop at showing the probability of the hypothesis ‘God exists’ but must go further to demonstrate his real existence. Contemporary philosophy however has preferred to limit itself to analysing the concept ‘God’ and to arguing that it is coherent to believe that a being with the attributes contained in this concept exists. In addition, I have presented the procedure which Swinburne believes should be followed in the argument for the existence of God. I have highlighted some weak points in his defence of theism. Above all, I have considered the criterion of simplicity on which his project is founded and shown that the criticisms it has received cannot be taken lightly. The motive has been to show that the proposal that he makes is not a stronger (more plausible) alternative than the demonstrative via that he thinks should be discarded. I have restated the classical case of the possibility of the demonstration of God and compared it with some of Swinburne’s views about the

kind of explanation for all that exists. I have suggested that one reason we should not be quick to discard this via is that the problem of evil is less of a problem if we can demonstrate the existence of God.

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