ISSN: 1131-6950

EXCERPTA E DISSERTATIONIBUS IN PHILOSOPHIA

CUADERNOS DOCTORALES

DE LA FACULTAD ECLESIÁSTICA DE FILOSOFÍA

PUBLICACIÓN PERIÓDICA DE LA FACULTAD
ECLESIÁSTICA DE FILOSOFÍA
UNIVERSIDAD DE NAVARRA / PAMPLONA / ESPAÑA

Universidad de Navarra

ALEX MBONIMPA

The Providence of God according to Richard Swinburne

A Critical Study under the Guidance of St. Thomas Aquinas

VOLUMEN 26 / 2016

SEPARATA

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PAMPLONA / ESPAÑA / ISSN: 1131-6950
2016 / VOLUMEN 26

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Esta publicación recoge extractos de tesis doctorales defendidas en la Facultad Eclesiástica de Filosofía de la Universidad de Navarra.

La labor científica desarrollada y recogida en esta publicación ha sido posible gracias a la ayuda prestada por el Centro Académico Romano Fundación (CARF)

Redacción, administración, intercambios y suscripciones:
«Cuadernos Doctorales de la Facultad Eclesiástica de Filosofía»
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Edita:
Servicio de Publicaciones
de la Universidad de Navarra, S.A.
Campus Universitario
31009 Pamplona (España)
T. 948 425 600

Precios 2016:
Suscripciones 1 año: 30 €
Extranjero: 43 €

Fotocomposición:
pretexto@pretexto.es

Imprime:
Ulzama Digital

Tamaño: 170 x 240 mm

DL: NA 1024-1991

SP ISSN: 1131-6950

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Alex Mbonimpa

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Facultad Eclesiástica de Filosofía de la Universidad de Navarra

Pamplona
2016

Ad normam Statutorum Facultatis Philosophiae Universitatis Navarrensis,
perlegimus et adprobavimus

Pampilonae, die 5 mensis septembris anni 2016

Dr. Henricus Moros

Dr. Ruben Pereda

Coram tribunali, die 14 mensis iunii anni 2016, hanc
dissertationem ad Lauream Candidatus palam defendit

Secretarius Facultatis
D. nus Eduardus Flandes

Cuadernos Doctorales de la Facultad Eclesiástica de Filosofía
Vol. XXVI, n. 3

Introduction

Abstract: This dissertation is a study of the theme of divine providence in Richard Swinburne's work. This consists principally in his response to the problem of evil. He argues that all evil that occurs is logically necessary if God is to give us all the goods that we value greatly. He suggests that the good that God brings about outweighs the evil that he permits and that this is the best that God could do. His aim is to show that the occurrence of evil does not count against theism. The thesis that is defended in the present work, following Thomas Aquinas, is that Swinburne's theodicy is inadequate and that any theodicy that does not take into account final causality will be inadequate. For a satisfactory theodicy, a more metaphysical approach to the problem of evil has to be employed. The thesis holds that a teleological concept of nature is indispensable in the recognition of the real goods and evils. This concept is the basis for the traditional understanding of evil as *privatio boni*, which the present work defends. The thesis argues that this way of understanding evil solves many of the difficulties faced by Swinburne's theodicy. It also means that Swinburne's free-will defence, which necessitates the existence of evil as an alternative reality to the good, is not sustainable. The study also shows that it is his conceptions of good and freedom that make him reject some of the doctrines in the theodicy in the Christian tradition.

Keywords: Theodicy, *Privatio Boni*, Evil.

Resumen: Esta tesis es un estudio del tema de la providencia divina en el trabajo de Richard Swinburne. Su pensamiento sobre este tema consiste principalmente en su respuesta al problema del mal. Argumenta que todo el mal que ocurre es lógicamente necesario para que Dios nos dé todos los bienes que consideramos valiosos. Swinburne sugiere que los bienes que nos otorga pesan más que los males y que esto es lo mejor que Dios puede hacer. Su meta es mostrar que la ocurrencia del mal no cuenta contra el teísmo. El presente trabajo defiende la tesis, siguiendo a Tomás de Aquino, que la teodicea de Swinburne es inadecuado y que cualquier teodicea que no tenga en cuenta la causalidad final será inadecuado. Para conseguir una teodicea satisfactoria, ha de emplearse un procedimiento más metafísico. La tesis dice que un concepto teleológico de la naturaleza es indispensable para reconocer los bienes y males verdaderos. Este concepto es la base de la concepción tradicional del mal como *privatio boni*, que este trabajo defiende. La tesis argumenta que esta concepción del mal resuelve muchos de las dificultades que encuentra la teodicea de Swinburne. Además, implica que la «defensa de la libertad de la voluntad» de Swinburne, que hace necesario la existencia positiva del mal, no es sostenible. El trabajo muestra también que son sus concepciones del bien y de la libertad que le hacen rechazar algunas de las doctrinas de la teodicea en la tradición cristiana.

Palabras clave: claves: teodicea, *privatio boni*, el mal.

«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] This affirmation gives perspective to the dissertation whose extract is presented in this work. The dissertation studies the theme of divine providence

[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.

in Richard Swinburne's work from a Thomistic viewpoint. It endeavours to 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.

The central theme of divine providence, not to say the only one, in Swinburne's work, is the problem of evil. He has developed a theodicy which he considers to be a satisfactory response to the atheistic objection to the existence of God. He says that if a theist «can provide for [bad] states of each kind a reason why God could justifiably allow a state of that kind to occur... he will have provided an adequate total theodicy.»[2] Failure to provide an adequate theodicy would be a setback for the justification of theism. According to him, it would be sufficient ground for the denial of the existence of God.[3] I argue in the dissertation that the theodicy he presents is insufficient because of the wrong conceptions of good, evil and freedom. I therefore propose an alternative from an Aristotelian-Thomistic perspective.

The present work does not deal directly with the main theme of the dissertation but comprises of its first chapter (out of four chapters). This chapter has been selected because, on one hand, it presents a summary of Swinburne's whole project of the justification of theism, and on the other, it relates the specific topic that was studied in the dissertation (i.e. God's providence), to the whole project. The selected chapter presents and discusses Swinburne's conceptions of the divine attributes. Its purpose was not 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 is an indication of what kind of providence we can expect. I also present his views about the different arguments for or against the existence of God. This is necessary because 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 depend greatly on his views about what arguments are successful in proving the existence of God. Before dealing with these however, I have found it necessary to consider his epistemological presuppositions for it to be clear why he proceeds the way he does.

I wish also to present here what the other chapters of the dissertation deal with. Chapter II deals with what we may say to be the only theme of

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2 SWINBURNE, R., *Providence and the Problem of Evil*, 15.
3 Cf. *ibid*.

providence for Swinburne: the problem of evil. It presents 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. This chapter also considers the logical and philosophical difficulties that arise from his proposal. I argue that his theodicy compromises the divine attributes. I suggest here 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. The second chapter also contains 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 discuss not only his views but those of some other contemporary philosophers. The alternative concept that I propose in this chapter seeks 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 make is just one more among many possible ones from a Thomistic point of view. The third chapter also includes a proposal, based on a teleological concept of nature, of a theodicy that judges all goods and evils in reference to the ultimate good.

In Chapter IV, I consider the concept of freedom. Here, I emphasise the intimate relation there is between the will (and therefore free will) and the good. This, then, is 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 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 consider the role that some themes which are traditionally considered under providence have in Swinburne's doctrine.

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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 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.

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1 SWINBURNE, R., *Is there a God?*, 3.
2 SWINBURNE, R., *The Existence of God*, 2 ed., Clarendon Press, Oxford; Oxford University Press, New York, 2004, 7.
3 Cf. *ibid*., footnote 1.
4 Cf. SWINBURNE, R., *Is there a God?*, 2.

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 that have been formulated to defend the existence of God and his proposal of how 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 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

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

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 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]

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[8] Cf. *ibid*.
[9] Cf. *ibid*., 58; 64.
[10] *Ibidem*.
[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 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 pro-

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15 *Ibid*., 20.
16 SWINBURNE, R., *The Evolution of the Soul*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1986, 12.
17 SWINBURNE, R., *Providence and the Problem of Evil*, 22.
18 *Ibidem*.

vided 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. 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

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19 *Ibid*., 29.
20 *Ibidem*.
21 *Ibid*., 59.
22 *Ibidem*.
23 *Ibidem*.
24 Cf. *ibid*.

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),
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> (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 which satisfies criteria (1-3) as well as well as our proposed law).[25]

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.[26] 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 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.[27]

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 sub-sections. 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

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[25] SWINBURNE, R., *Is there a God?*, 25.
[26] *Ibidem*.
[27] Cf. *ibid*., 62-64.

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.»[28]

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.»[29] Scientific explanation is about inanimate causation, while personal explanation is about intentional causation.[30] 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.»[31] 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*.[32] An event may also be called a phenomenon or a state of affairs.[33]

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[28] SWINBURNE, R., *Is there a God?*, 21.
[29] SWINBURNE, R., «The Vocation of a Natural Theologian», 189.
[30] SWINBURNE, R., *Is there a God?*, 21.
[31] *Ibid*., 20.
[32] Cf. *ibid*.
[33] 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.»[34] 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.»[35] 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.»[36] 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*.[37] «In this case, the 'what' and 'why' together will deductively entail the occurrence of *E*.»[38] In 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*.»[39]

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

[34] Swinburne, R., *The Existence of God*, 23.
[35] *Ibid*., 24.
[36] *Ibidem*.
[37] *Ibid*., 25.
[38] *Ibidem*.
[39] *Ibid*., 76.

> 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.[40]

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.»[41] This he calls a *complete explanation*. He gives the following example of a complete explanation:[42] 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 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*.[43]

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

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[40] *Ibidem*.
[41] *Ibid*., 78.
[42] Cf. *ibid*.
[43] Cf. *ibid*., 78-79.

factors cited are either self-explanatory or logically necessary.»[44] 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.[45] 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 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.»[46]

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.»[47] 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. 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

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[44] *Ibid*., 79.
[45] Cf. *ibid*., 80.
[46] *Ibid*., 92.
[47] *Ibid*., 90.

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.[48]

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)[49]. 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 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 prior probability of *h* and its explanatory power with respect to *e*.»[50] 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.[51] It may be seen that the two factors that determine the explanatory power are what are contained in Criteria 1 and 4.[52]

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48 Cf. *ibid*., 90-92.
49 Cf. p. 34.
50 SWINBURNE, R., *The Existence of God*, 58.
51 Cf. *ibid*., 56-57.
52 Cf. p. 34.

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 determinant of the prior probability of fundamental theories.[53]

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.»[54]

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...»[55] 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.»[56] He rejects the view of some writers who claim that our preference for simplicity is a matter of convenience and

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[53] Cf. SWINBURNE, R., *The Existence of God*, 59-60.
[54] SWINBURNE, R., *Is there a God?*, 31.
[55] SWINBURNE, R., *The Existence of God*, 58.
[56] SWINBURNE, R., *Is there a God?*, 30.

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 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.»[57]

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 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.[58]

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 estab-

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[57] *Ibid*., 31.
[58] Cf. Swinburne, R., *The Existence of God*, 81-82.

lish 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.»[59] 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.

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 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.[60] 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

[59] *Ibid*., 108.
[60] Cf. *ibid*., 43-44.

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.»[61] 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.[62]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.[63]

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 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.[64]

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).[65]

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61 SWINBURNE, R., *The Existence of God*, 97.
62 Cf. SWINBURNE, R., *Is there a God?*, 44.
63 Cf. SWINBURNE, R., *The Existence of God*, 97.
64 Cf. SWINBURNE, R., *Is there a God?*, 45-46.
65 Cf. *ibid*., 47.

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.»[66] 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.»[67] 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 expected otherwise. Therefore, I suggest, it provides some evidence for its conclusion.»[68]

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.[69]

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66 *Ibid*., 48.
67 SWINBURNE, R., «The Vocation of a Natural Theologian», 191.
68 *Ibid*., 192.
69 *Ibid*., 193.

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.[70]. 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 law, and evolutionary potential of the universe. Theism provides just such explanation.»[71]

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 Section 3.

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.[72] The extent of the providence of any person depends on his power and knowledge. Hence, God's providence

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[70] Cf. *ibid*., 195.
[71] Swinburne, R., *Is there a God?*, 68.
[72] Cf. Echavarría, A., «Providencia», in *Diccionario de Filosofía*, Eunsa, 2010, 946.

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 dissertation, 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 worthy of worship.[73]

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.»[74] 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.»[75] 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.»[76] 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

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[73] Cf. SWINBURNE, R., *The Existence of God*, 95.
[74] *Ibid*., 93.
[75] *Ibidem*.
[76] *Ibid*., 94.

to suppose) that he can do.»[77] Thus, «whatever (logically possible) action he formed the intention to do, he would succeed in doing.»[78] 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.[79]

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.»[80] 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.[81] He admits that his view is opposed to the common position in the Christian tradition.[82] 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.[83] 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).[84] He believes that it is more consonant with

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77 Cf. *ibid*., 7.
78 *Ibid*., 98.
79 Cf. *ibid*., 94-95
80 *Ibid*., 95.
81 I shall present Swinburne's views on the free-will defence in Chapter IV.
82 Cf. Swinburne, R., *Coherence of Theism*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1986, 219.
83 Cf. Swinburne, R., *The Existence of God*, 7.
84 Cf. pp. 31-35 for Swinburne's views on what knowledge is.

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.[85]

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 actions that he does.»[86] The choices that God makes and the intentions that he forms depend entirely on him at the moment of the choice alone.[87] He is not influenced causally by desires (i.e. by any external object).[88] 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.»[89] 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

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85 Cf. SWINBURNE, R., *The Existence of God*, 98.
86 *Ibid*., 7.
87 Cf. *ibid*., 98.
88 SWINBURNE, R., *Is there a God?*, 7.
89 *Ibid*., 12.

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.[90] He agrees with Mellor in that we can assess the probability of a 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.[91] 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.»[92]

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.»[93] 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.[94]

Nevertheless, according to Swinburne, there is no contradiction in that 'an uncaused state of affairs' occur.[95] Thus, the undifferentiated non-complex universe needs no 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 vari-

[90] Cf. MELLOR, D. H., «God and Probability», *Religious Studies*, 5 (1969) 223-234.
[91] Cf. SWINBURNE, R., *The Existence of God*, 131.
[92] *Ibid*., 132.
[93] *Ibid*., 94.
[94] Cf. *ibid*.
[95] Cf. *ibid*., 95.

ous combinations.[96] 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.[97] Therefore, «God must bring about the existence of other things.»[98] 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.[99]

He claims that a «solitary God would be a bad state of affairs. God needs to share, to interact, to love...»[100] Since God must bring about something, Swinburne goes further to 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.»[101] 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.[102]

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.[103] He does not seem to find any

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[96] Cf. *ibid*., 136-137.
[97] Cf. SWINBURNE, R., *Is there a God?*, 12.
[98] *Ibid*., 117.
[99] Cf. *ibid*., 117.
[100] *Ibid*.,119.
[101] *Ibidem*.
[102] Cf. *ibid*., foot note 7.
[103] Cf. *ibid*., 97; *Is there a God?*, 43-44.

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 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.[104]

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.»[105] 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.»[106] He says he prefers «the understanding of God being eternal as his being everlasting rather than as his being timeless.»[107] 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.[108]

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.»[109] He says that there are no signs of it in the Old Testament. He

[104] Cf. SWINBURNE, R., *The Existence of God*, 97.
[105] *Ibid*., 7.
[106] *Ibid*., 96.
[107] SWINBURNE, R., *Is there a God?*, 9.
[108] Cf. SWINBURNE, R., *The Existence of God*, 7.
[109] SWINBURNE, R., *Coherence of Theism*, 217.

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.[110]

Swinburne presents Boethius exposition, which he says is the best-known, of the doctrine that God's eternity means that he is timeless.[111] 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.[112] 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.»[113] 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...»[114]

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.»[115] Having these properties is essential to being the kind of being that God is. God «belongs to the essential kind of

[110] Cf. *ibid*., 220.
[111] Cf. *ibid*., 216.
[112] Cf. *ibid*., 218.
[113] *Ibid*., 219.
[114] *Ibidem*.
[115] Swinburne, R., *The Existence of God*, 95.

divine being.»[116] A divine being is «a person who is omnipotent, omniscient, perfectly free, perfectly good, and creator of all things.»[117] 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.»[118] 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.»[119] 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 know its explanation, but in the sense that it does not have one.»[120] 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.»[121] 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.[122]

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

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[116] *Ibid*., 96.
[117] *Ibidem*.
[118] *Ibid*., 95.
[119] *Ibidem*.
[120] *Ibid*., 96.
[121] *Ibidem*.
[122] Cf. *ibid*., 136.

that can be granted to God. That is, it is «the strongest kind of necessity compatible with his being a logically contingent being.»[123] 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 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»[124], then Kant's criticisms have force. Swinburne insists that «[there] can be no 'absolute explanation' of the existence of the universe.»[125] 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.[126]

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.»[127] 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 phenomena.[128] 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*.

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[123] *Ibid*., 96.
[124] *Ibid*., 148, footnote 19.
[125] *Ibid*., 148.
[126] *Ibid*., 149.
[127] *Ibidem*.
[128] Cf. pp. 40-44.

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».[129] 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.»[130] 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.

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.'»[131] 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.»[132] 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.»[133] 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.

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[129] SWINBURNE, R., *Is there a God?*, 44.
[130] SWINBURNE, R., *The Existence of God*, 95.
[131] DAVIES, B., *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion*, 3 ed., Oxford University Press, New York, 2004, 2.
[132] *Ibidem*.
[133] *Ibid*., 10.

Among other theistic personalists, according to Davies, are Charles Hartshorne, John Lucas, Richard Creel and Steven T. Davis.[134] He claims that «theistic personalists frequently reject almost all the tenets of classical theism.»[135] 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 phrase).»[136] 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.»[137] This may be seen from Swinburne's debate with D. H. Mellor that I reported earlier.[138] 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.»[139] 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.[140]

Davies suggests that theistic personalists more or less follow the approach that René Descartes uses to prove that 'I exist.'[141] Descartes says that it is absurd to doubt one's existence as long as one is thinking. «I am a thing

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[134] Cf. *ibid*., 10-14.
[135] *Ibid*., 11.
[136] *Ibid*., 2.
[137] *Ibid*., 14.
[138] Cf. p. 57.
[139] SWINBURNE, R., *The Existence of God*, 132.
[140] DAVIES, B., *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion*, 2004, 7.
[141] Cf. *ibid*., 14.

that thinks... a thing that doubts, understands, affirms, denies, wills, refuses, and that also imagines and senses.»[142] 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.[143] 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.[144] 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 every*thing*', it would be an 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.

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[142] DESCARTES, R., «Meditations», II, in Cress, D. A. (ed.), *Discourse on Method and Meditations on First Philosophy*, 3 ed., Hackett Publishing Company, Indianapolis, 1993, 66.
[143] Cf. DAVIES, B., *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion*, 2004, 14.
[144] Cf. p. 50.

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»[145] 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 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.[146]

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.[147] 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»[148] 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.[149] 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.

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[145] SWINBURNE, R., *Providence and the Problem of Evil*, 24.
[146] Cf. DAVIES, B., *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion*, 2004, 211.
[147] Cf. pp. 43-44.
[148] MOROS, E. R., *Modalidad y esencia: La metafísica de Alvin Plantinga*, Eunsa, Pamplona, 1996, 40.
[149] Cf. p. 84.

So, despite all that we observe (man and the physical 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.[150] 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.[151] 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 there is an explanation, and one that does not generate an infinite regress.[152]

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 op-

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[150] Cf. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, q.2, a.3; *Summa contra Gentiles*, I, 13, par 33.
[151] Cf. pp. 43-44.
[152] Adams, R. M., «Presumption and the Necessary Existence of God», *Noûs*, 22 (1988) 30.

eration on another contingent being?[153] 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.[154]

Besides, by claiming that the physical universe, which is all that we observe, could exist even if God did not exist,[155] 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? This seems, moreover, to defeat his theory of simplicity which states that one should not postulate more objects than are necessary. If the universe 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.[156]

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[153] Cf. p. 52.
[154] Moros, E. R., *El argumento ontológico modal de Alvin Plantinga*, Eunsa, Pamplona, 1997, 116. The translation is mine.
[155] Cf. p. 84.
[156] Moros, E. R., *El argumento ontológico modal de Alvin Plantinga*, 119.

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.»[157]

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*.[158] 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.[159] This, he says, is because the predicate is included in the 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.[160]

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

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[157] *Ibid*., 118.
[158] Cf. St. Thomas Aquinas, *De Ente et Essentia*, Ch. 4, par. 7.
[159] Cf. Logan, I., *Reading Anselm's Proslogion: The History of Anselm's Argument and its Significance Today*, Ashgate Publishing Limited, Farnham (UK), 2009, 138.
[160] St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, q.2, a.1, co.

may be demonstrated that the predicate in this proposition is the same as the subject.[161] 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.»[162] 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 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.»[163] 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.»[164] I shall return to

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[161] Cf. *ibid*.
[162] Logan, I., *Reading Anselm's Proslogion*, 138.
[163] Moros, E. R., *Modalidad y esencia: La metafísica de Alvin Plantinga*, Eunsa, Pamplona, 1996, 40.
[164] González, A. L., *Teología Natural*, 93.

this when I deal with the deductive proofs. However, at this point, we can make a preliminary conclusion 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).»[165] The distance between non-being (nothingness) and being is infinite. Only an infinite being can overcome it. This is omnipotence.[166] 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.[167] He says that this may be noted, for example, from what Swinburne says he understands by God being the creator of all things.[168]

Moreover, when classical theism claims that everything that *is* has received being from God and is 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. I argue, in Chapter III of the dissertation, 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

[165] Cf. Davies, B., *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion*, 2004, 2.
[166] Cf. Polo, L., *Presente y Futuro del Hombre*, Rialp, Madrid, 1993, 138-139.
[167] Cf. Davies, B., *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion*, 2004, 12.
[168] Cf. p. 52.

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.[169]

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.[170]

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.[171] Hence, limiting God's creation would also limit his providence. In the same vein, Agustin 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.»[172]

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

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[169] TORRELL, J. P., *St. Thomas Aquinas: The Person and His Work*, I, 2 ed., translation by Robert Royal, The Catholic University Press, Washington, D.C., 2005, 163.
[170] ST. THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae*, I, q.22, a.2, co.
[171] Cf. ARROYO, J. M., *El tratado de la providencia divina en la obra de Santo Tomás de Aquino*, Pontificia Universitas Sanctae Crucis, Facultas Theologiae, Roma, 2007, 512-515.
[172] ECHAVARRIA, A., «Providencia», 945. The translation is mine.

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 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.[173] William Hasker observes: «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.»[174] Hasker concludes that this «opens a significant breach between Swinburne and the main trinitarian tradition.»[175] 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.

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

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[173] Cf. Hasker, W., *Metaphysics and the Tri-Personal God*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2013, 153.
[174] Hasker, W., *Metaphysics and the Tri-Personal God*, 153.
[175] *Ibidem*.

sufficiently well what we observe.[176] 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).[177] 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.»[178] That is, he will know only what we think that a person can know. Only what is coherent to us that a person 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*.»[179] 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 pos-

[176] Cf. SWINBURNE, R., *Is there a God?*, 43-45.
[177] Cf. SWINBURNE, R., *The Existence of God*, 266.
[178] *Ibid*., 95.
[179] *Ibidem*.

sible, at any given time *t*, what action a person is likely to perform freely at a future time *t+1*.[180] 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.

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 essential omniscience, as God knowing all true propositions; and combines this with the view that God is not timeless but everlasting.»[181] 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.[182] 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 and done with but rather of the fact that the past is solely a feature of the experience of temporal entities.[183]

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[180] Cf. SWINBURNE, R., *Providence and the Problem of Evil*, 6.
[181] *Ibid*., 128.
[182] Cf. STUMP, E. and KRETZMANN, N., «Eternity», in Stump, E. and Murray, M. J. (eds.), *Philosophy of Religion: The Big Questions*, Malden (Massachusetts); Blackwell Publishers, Oxford, 1999, 52.
[183] *Ibid*. On Agathon's affirmation, cf. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, VI, 2, 1139b 10.

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.»[184] 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.[185] 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 in Anglo-American philosophical theology.»[186] 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.»[187]

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

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[184] SWINBURNE, R., *Coherence of Theism*, 219.
[185] ST. THOMAS AQUINAS, *De Veritate*, q.5, a.1, co.
[186] ALSTON, W. P., «Does God Have Beliefs?», *Religious Studies*, 22 (1986) 287.
[187] DAVIES, B., *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion*, 2004, 12.

would be one thought which lasted for ever...»[188] 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.»[189] 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 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.[190]

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 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, on the other hand, rejects this kind of understanding of eternity but admits that it has «the advantage of saving the former doctrine against ob-

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[188] SWINBURNE, R., *Coherence of Theism*, 214.
[189] GALE, R., «Swinburne on Providence», *Religious Studies*, 36 (2000) 213.
[190] STUMP, E. and KRETZMANN, N., «Eternity», 51.

vious difficulties.»[191] He 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.»[192] 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.[193]

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: that of elucidating and explaining the philosophical issues present in different Christian doctrines.[194] 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 forev-

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[191] SWINBURNE, R., *Coherence of Theism*, 219. The former doctrine that he refers to is God's knowledge of future human actions.
[192] SWINBURNE, R., *The Existence of God*, 7.
[193] Cf. p. 55.
[194] Cf. SWINBURNE, R., *Providence and the Problem of Evil*, back cover.

er – 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 present to all times at once, just as he is present to all places at once.[195]

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

[195] SWINBURNE, R., *Coherence of Theism*, 216.

> 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.[196]

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 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.»[197] 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.»[198] 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,»[199] 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

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[196] *Ibid*., 220.
[197] *Ibid*., 221. The italics are mine.
[198] Hasker, W., «From God, Time and Knowledge», in Stump, E. and Murray, M. J. (eds.), *Philosophy of Religion...*, *ibid*., 1999, 57.
[199] *Ibid*., 56.

so no longer in its possession, or future and so not yet in its possession.»[200] They note that none of the classical philosophers who accepted eternity as a real atemporal mode of existence, with the possible exception of Parmenides, denied the reality of time. The classical philosophers simply proposed two separate modes of existence.

Swinburne's third and last objection against the timelessness of God 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 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.[201]

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

[200] STUMP, E. and KRETZMANN, N., «Eternity», 44.
[201] Cf. SWINBURNE, R., *Coherence of Theism*, 212-215; 219.

> not extended previously. Hence *movement* in no way belongs to Him. So, some of the ancients, constrained, as it were, by the truth, decided that the first principle was *immovable*.[202]

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.[203] 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 classical and contemporary views which affirm that understanding God's eternity as timelessness is not only coherent but also necessary for safeguarding his infinite perfection.

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.[204] Swinburne notes that others have formulated the reasons for their belief in explicit forms. And some

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[202] 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.
[203] Swinburne, R., *Coherence of Theism*, 219.
[204] Cf. Swinburne, R., *The Existence of God*, 8.

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.

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,»[205] 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

[205] *Ibid*., v.

is no God.»[206] 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.»[207] 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' arguments and do not codify any of the reasons that ordinary people have for believing that there is a God.»[208]

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.[209]

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 philosophers[210], so does Richard Swinburne. Kenny attributes the philosophers' disinterest to a belief that Kant had discredited all kinds of proofs definitively.[211] 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 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.»[212] Swinburne however be-

[206] *Ibid*., 8.
[207] *Ibidem*.
[208] *Ibidem*.
[209] Cf. *ibid*., 9.
[210] Cf. Kenny, A., *The Five Ways*, Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd, London, 1969, 2.
[211] Cf. *ibid*., 3.
[212] Swinburne, R., *The Existence of God*, 2.

lieves 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»[213] 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.»[214] He sees an advantage in this in that it leaves «abundant room for faith in the practice of religion.»[215] He quickly dismisses any possibility of a deductive proof because «relatively few philosophers today would accept that there are good deductive proofs.»[216] 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.»[217] He considers Aquinas' first four of his 'five ways' «to be one of his least successful pieces of philosophy.»[218] 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.[219]

Similarly, Swinburne believes that no teleological argument, whether Aquinas' fifth way or any other argument, can be a good deductive argument.

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[213] *Ibid*., 2.
[214] *Ibidem*.
[215] *Ibidem*.
[216] *Ibid*., 14.
[217] *Ibid*., 136.
[218] *Ibidem*.
[219] *Ibidem*.

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,»[220] 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.

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.[221] 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.»[222] 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).»[223] He says that obviously among correct C-inductive arguments, some will be stronger than others (i.e. some premises will 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

[220] *Ibid*., 155.
[221] Cf. *ibid*., 5.
[222] *Ibid*., 6.
[223] *Ibidem*.

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.[224] 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.»[225] 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 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

[224] Cf. *ibid*.
[225] *Ibid*., 12, footnote 10.

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.[226]

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 $P(h\backslash e\&k)$. 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) $P(h\backslash e\&k) > P(h\backslash k)$. 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. $P(p\backslash q) + P(\sim p\backslash q) = 1$). It follows from this that an argument from *e* to *h* is a correct P-inductive argument if (and only if) $P(h\backslash e\&k) > ½$ (i.e. if $P(h\backslash e\&k) > P(\sim h\backslash e\&k)$).[227]

In his argument for the existence of God, Swinburne takes e_1, e_2... 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 $P(h\backslash e_1\&k)$ represents the probability that God exists given that there is a physical universe and given mere tautological evidence. If $P(h\backslash e_1\&k) > P(h\backslash k)$, then the cosmological argument is a correct C-inductive argument and inasmuch as the premises are known by all, it is a good one.[228]

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, $P(h\backslash e_2\&k)$ 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.

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[226] Cf. *ibid*., 16-17.
[227] Cf. *ibid*., 17.
[228] Cf. *ibid*.

The crucial question of Swinburne's book, *The Existence of God*, is whether $P(h\backslash e_{11}\&k) > ½$. If it is the case, the probability that God exists will be greater than the probability that God does not exist (i.e. that $P(h\backslash e_{11}\&k) > P(\sim h\backslash e_{11}\&k)$).[229] This would mean that the premises make 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 (½), 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. $P(h\backslash e_n\&k) > P(h\backslash k)$, where n = 1, 2... 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. $P(h\backslash e_n\&k) < P(h\backslash k)$). 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. $P(h\backslash e_n\&k) = P(h\backslash k)$). 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. $P(h\backslash e_{11}\&k) > ½$).[230]

While our main concern is to get the values $P(h\backslash e_n\&k)$, and eventually $P(h\backslash e_{11}\&k)$, Swinburne's arguments do not lead directly to these values. Rather, the arguments that he gives lead to the values of $P(e_n\backslash h\&k)$. In order to arrive at the values in which we are interested, Swinburne applies Bayes' theorem to the values of $P(e_n\backslash h\&k)$. The use of Bayes' theorem in the justification of theism is considered by many as Swinburne's prime contribution to the philosophy of religion.[231] Bayes' theorem is expressed by the following formula:

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

[229] Cf. *ibid*.
[230] *Ibidem*.
[231] Cf. CHARTIER, G., «Richard Swinburne», 467.

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 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 $P(e\backslash h\&k)$ while the prior probability of *h* (i.e. the probability of *h* before we consider any evidence) will be $P(h\backslash k)$ and that of *e* (i.e. supposing that *h* is not true) as $P(e\backslash k)$. 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 consider whether Swinburne's arguments are *a posteriori* as he claims. I shall then 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) 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.»[232] 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, Swinburne summarises his procedure, in the last chapter of *The Existence of God*, entitled 'The Balance of Probability', 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 if there is not.»[233] 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. 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'. 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.»[234]

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 $P(e_n \setminus h\&k)$, 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

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[232] SWINBURNE, R., *The Existence of God*, 8.
[233] *Ibid*., 328.
[234] MCCABE, H., *God and Evil: In the Theology of St Thomas Aquinas*, Continuum International Publishing Group, London-New York, 2010, 68.

are 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.»[235]

b) 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 ½. 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?

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?[236]

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[235] St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, q.2, a.1, co.

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

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.[237]

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.[238]

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.[239] 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.[240] Besides they argue that his use

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[237] PLANTINGA, A., «Rationality and Public Evidence: A Reply to Richard Swinburne», *Religious Studies*, 37 (2001) 221.

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

[239] Cf. pp. 41-43.

[240] 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*, Ontos Verlag, Frankfurt, 2008, 39-40.

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.[241] Similarly, Quentin Smith argues that the criterion of fit with 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.[242]

Alvin Plantinga argues in his 1979 article[243] 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.[244] 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).[245]

In the same vein, Korbmacher et al. suggest that there is room for doubt on whether we do in fact treat simplicity as evidence of truth.[246] 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*

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[241] Cf. *ibid*., 37-38.
[242] Cf. Smith, Q., «Swinburne's Explanation of the Universe», 93-95.
[243] Cf. Plantinga, A., «The Probabilistic Argument from Evil», *Philosophical Studies*, 35 (1979) 1-53.
[244] Cf. *ibid*., 25; 47-48.
[245] *Ibid*., 22. The italics are in the original text.
[246] 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*, Ontos Verlag, Frankfurt, 2008, 39-40.

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).[247]

> 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.[248]

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 consensus among scientists and philosophers of science about the importance of the criterion of simplicity. It is clear however that this is not the case.

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.»[249]

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 «hy-

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[247] Cf. *ibid*., 53-54.
[248] Parson, K., *God and the Burden of Proof*, 99.
[249] Langtry, B., «Swinburne on Simplicity of Theism», *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, 3 (2011) 421.

potheses attributing infinite values of properties to objects are simpler than ones attributing finite values.»[250] 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.»[251] 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 intrinsic probability of theism is high basically because it is simple.[252]

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.»[253] 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.[254]

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

[250] Gwiazda, J., «The Existence of God and the Principle P», *Sophia*, 48 (2009) 394.
[251] *Ibid*., 393.
[252] Cf. Swinburne, R., *The Existence of God*, 93.
[253] Gwiazda, J., «Richard Swinburne's Argument to the Simplicity of God via the Infinite», *Religious Studies*, 45 (2009) 488.
[254] Cf. *ibid*., 492.

> 'having pure, limitless intentional power'. I acknowledge that I should have repeated that account in *The Existence of God*. So I will repeat it here in a clearer form.[255]

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.»[256]

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 'simpler' hypothesis than materialism is the conclusion of an argument based on an equivocation on 'infinity.'»[257]

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

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[255] SWINBURNE, R., «How the Divine Properties Fit Together: Reply to Gwiazda», *Religious Studies* 45 (2009) 495.
[256] *Ibid*., 497.
[257] SMITH, Q., «Swinburne's Explanation of the Universe», *Religious Studies*, 34 (1998) 93.

the 'principle of dwindling probabilities.'[258] 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.[259]

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.[260] Cuoco however admits that, firstly, «Swinburne's insistence on the principle of simplicity sometimes obscures the crucial importance of conditionalization in a Bayesian analysis.»[261] And secondly, «strong belief is not the same as certainty,»[262] 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.

All in all, I cannot discuss the difficulties with which Swinburne's inductive probabilistic proposal in defence of theism is faced 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

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[258] Cf. PLANTINGA, A., *Warranted Christian Belief*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2000, 280.
[259] HASKER, W., «Is Christianity Probable? Swinburne's Apologetic Programme», *Religious Studies*, 38 (2002) 256.
[260] Cf. CUOCO PORTUGAL, A., «Plantinga and the Bayesian Justification of Beliefs», *Veritas* (Porto Alegre), 57 (2012) 21-23.
[261] *Ibid*., 21.
[262] *Ibid*., 24.

theology belongs to metaphysics, but that, at least since the Greeks, metaphysics is its natural place.»[263]

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

c) 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.»[264]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'.[265]

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

[263] Moros, E. R., «Presupuestos de la demostración de la existencia de Dios», 431, foot note 35.
[264] Maritain, J., *Approaches to God*, Collier Books, New York, 1962, 24.
[265] *Ibidem*.

of religion of considering that arguments cannot be cumulative. At this point, I do not wish 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.[266] 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.[267] 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 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

[266] Cf. p. 86.
[267] Cf. p. 84.

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...[268]

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.»[269] So, whereas, «relatively few philosophers today would accept that there are good deductive proofs,»[270] 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 ex-

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[268] MARITAIN, J., *Approaches to God*, 31.
[269] GILSON, E., *Being and Some Philosophers*, 2 ed., Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, Toronto, 2005 (reprint), 4.
[270] SWINBURNE, R., *The Existence of God*, 14.

planation 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 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.[271] 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.[272]

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 that is not pure being has a cause of its being, as has been said.[273]

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[271] 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.
[272] González, A. L., *Teología Natural*, 93.
[273] St. Thomas Aquinas, *De Ente et Essentia*, Ch. 4, par 7.

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.»[274] St. Thomas says that these separate substances have the composition of being-essence.[275]

> 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.[276]

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 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 doctrine[277] 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

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[274] WIPPEL, J. F., *Metaphysical Themes in Thomas Aquinas*, The Catholic University of America Press, Washington, D.C., 1984, 109.
[275] Cf. ST. THOMAS AQUINAS, *De Ente et Essentia*, Ch. 4, par 6.
[276] *Ibidem*.
[277] Cf. ARISTOTLE, *Metaphysics*, II, 2, 994a 1-19.

> 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.[278]

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.»[279] 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 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 did[280] – 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

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[278] St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra Gentiles*, I, 13, par 33.
[279] Swinburne, R., *The Existence of God*, 53.
[280] Cf. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, II.II, q.25, a.5, co.

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 makes it to be: the cause of the being of things and of all created effect.[281]

The following considerations will make the above points clearer: While we praise Michelangelo for 'creating' the *Pietà*, 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 *Pietà*. 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 *Pietà* 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 *Pietà* came to be a *Pietà* (i.e. its way of being or essence) and not its being (existence). It would explain its becoming (*fieri*) 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, 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 not give it *esse* but only

[281] González, A. L., *Teología Natural*, 93.

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.»[282]

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).

d) Conclusion

In conclusion, Swinburne's work about the attributes and existence of God has received wide-ranging evaluation. I 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 worthy of worship and is he the God believed in

[282] SWINBURNE, R., *The Existence of God*, 76.

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 an 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.»[283]

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

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