

RETHINKING THE QUESTION OF NATURAL EVIL
IN LIGHT OF INSIGHTS ON CREATION FROM DAVID BURRELL

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Abstract

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This dissertation addresses what has traditionally been called natural evil by drawing on a reading of David Burrell, using his perspective of philosophical theology. The main thesis is that Burrell's refined understanding of creation and existence provides a way of reframing and advancing the question of natural evil, this, principally in the way he conceives of creation as relation and how his notion of relation bears on our understanding of the goodness of God as creator and the goodness of the universe as creation.

The dissertation begins with a brief historical review of major features of the problem of natural evil from the ancients to the modern day in order to show that evil is not a single problem. It identifies various issues that are involved in the question of natural evil as this engages an understanding of our relation to the world. The chapter examines theodicies as responses and exposes, in light of current debate, their inadequacy. Fundamentally, they treat evil as an abstraction that ignores its harsh facticity and treats the reality of evils as evidence that places God in the dock presenting implicitly God's action as subject to a form of moral judgement.

While many scholars have identified the limits of theodicy, the literature indicates an impasse: how, on the one hand does one affirm God's goodness and the goodness of creation, while, on the other hand, continue the abiding quest to understand why, why is their evil? Nowhere is this struggle to understand more evident than in a group of select authors who seek to explore the notion of creativity as exhibited in the universe. This dissertation invites a response by thinking the question of evil differently, more specifically, by turning to the work of David Burrell and examining, in particular, his approach crafted on the basis of a philosophical theology, an approach that privileges in many way a hermeneutical retrieval of Christian tradition.

Chapter two explores Burrell's theological understanding and his deep examination of Thomas Aquinas that shapes Burrell's particular approach to philosophical theology, an approach theologically grounded yet using and expanding philosophical tools and perspectives.

With regard to the question, its value resides in the way he conceives of creation as relation and how his notion of relation bears on one's understanding of the goodness of God as creator and the goodness of the universe as creation, a perspective, rooted in the tradition, giving a promising way of engaging with both theological and contemporary modes of understanding.

Chapters three and four provide the data for framing and elaborating, in light of a reading of Burrell, an approach to the question of evil. Their aims are to develop Burrell's broader perspective on creation and existence. The notion of existence is framed within a deeper understanding of creation as relation, a singularly unique transcendent nature of the relation between God and creation, this particularly as a personal relation. The key to understanding this relationship is that it does not imply the remoteness of God but rather the even greater intimacy of the relationship between God and what God has created.

The next two chapters are the nub of the argument for the thesis. The first diagnoses in more detail the present impasse, the second proposes a more constructive way of 'thinking differently'. The aim of these chapters is to bring the resources of Burrell's thinking on philosophical theology to bear more directly on the topic. Each of these two chapters represent a step in advancing the contention that David Burrell's retrieval of the tradition, through the use of philosophical theology, invites us to think the question of natural evil differently.

The issue underlying the present impasse is not our notions of world or of God, but how we speak about God and how such language draws on strategies such as analogy to introduce correctives to habitual presuppositions, how we can speak of the 'unknowable God'. This includes an examination of 'Language in Divinis', with an emphasis on analogy and a further discussion of the 'perfection' terms. From this, the discussion moves to a consideration of the notion of creativeness in God, creativeness as a perfection term, from which the dissertation considers the notions of ordering, God as an artisan, our participation in creativeness, culminating in the notion of emergence, all to provide a framework for an examination of the question of natural evil and the contrast between perspectives commonly assumed by modern science as a mode of inquiry and investigation and a broader perspective for which we have been searching. The aim is to reflect on the way the question of natural evil is posed and to identify more clearly the source of the impasse. There are two aspects to the impasse: trying to 'explain'

natural evil using the tools for the ‘what-ness’ to understand the ‘is-ness’; and ascribing a moral imperative on God, a mistaken human construct confusing God and creatures.

Chapter six proposes a more constructive way of ‘thinking the question of evil differently’. To begin with, Burrell allows us to address the more existential features of the question. We turn to the understanding of God who is with us, who is more intimate to us than any thing else. We can speak to God and God speaks to us, such that we can “dare to enter into this founding relation with our creator who gives each of us our very being, and should we do so, the personal boundlessness of that relation will allow us to ‘go on’.” As an elaboration, the dissertation argues that Burrell's approach to rethinking the question of evil can be developed on the basis of his threefold structure of word, source and community: word that examines how we, through such dialogue, develop a mode of friendship with God; source that cultivates an in-depth trust in God; community, whereby we are sustained in our trust by the example of those who undergoing great suffering yet continue to testify to the presence of God and to work at transforming suffering and evil into the good.

Each of the final two chapters represents a step in advancing the contention that David Burrell's philosophical theological understanding of creation together with his retrieval, in particular, of resources within a Thomistic tradition, opens an avenue for thinking the question of natural evil differently. In short, the question of natural evil, as commonly expressed, remains a question without an intelligible response, and as such is a non-question. Theodicies represent a fundamental misconception in our presuppositions about the God we worship. There is NO explanation for natural evil.

This being said, the fact of natural evil remains; evil is not something to be endured stoically; it provokes outrage; there remains the harsh raw suffering resulting from some of these events. The challenge of natural evil is not so much to seek explanation but to understand and, more importantly, to respond. In view of this, what is called for is not explanation, but a renewed mode of understanding, one, such as offered by a Burrell's retrieval of an understanding of God as Creator in the mode of a philosophical theology. To be sure our reading of David Burrell does not present a definitive solution. It is offered as a way of advancing a way of questioning and understanding as these relate to the topic of natural evil.

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Preface

The genesis of this work goes back to a week spent with Keith Ward, at a summer school in theology, examining the science and faith debate, a study which was very congenial to my lifetime of working on the borderline between advance development and applied research related to the physical sciences, and a study which introduced me to the notion of creativity in this context. I found the notion an intriguing one and displayed in many other authors.¹ As a consequence of this study I later read Ward's *Rational Theology and the Creativity of God*² where he used the notion of 'creativity' as a partial answer to the problem of evil. I noticed on the way by that he adapted or omitted what have been termed the 'attributes' of God, the assertions traditionally made. Other authors in the science-faith debate had similar attitudes. The question 'why?' came to mind but was not pursued. Later, reading Cobb and Griffin's *Process Theology: An Introductory Exposition*,³ I encountered what I would describe as strong aversion to 'classical theism' and I began to engage with the question.⁴ At the urging of my (to become) director, Prof. J. Pambrun, I read Burrell's *Aquinas: God and*

¹ See Chapter 1, *infra*, 38ff.

² Keith Ward, *Rational Theology and the Creativity of God* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1982).

³ John B. Jr. Cobb and David Ray Griffin, *Process Theology: An Introductory Exposition* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1976).

⁴ I later understood that this attitude stems from the work of Charles Hartshorne, an early expositor of process theology. In a number of places Burrell contends against the use of the term 'classical theism', a notion particularly used in a dismissive sense by some Process Theologians as a means to contest the tradition in favour of their own approach. Burrell spent a semester in the Perkin School of Theology, Southern Methodist University with Schubert Ogden in 1968-1969. As a sampling of Burrell's perspective see David B. Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action* (Scranton, PA: University of Scranton Press, 2008), 14n9, 41, Chapter 6, 89-103; David B. Burrell, "Does Process Theology Rest on a Mistake?," *Theological Studies* 43, no. 1 (1982); David B. Burrell, "Incarnation and Creation: The Hidden Dimension," in *Faith and Freedom* (Malden, MA, Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 240; and David B. Burrell, *Questing for Understanding* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2012), 47.

*Action*⁵ and discovered that Burrell provides a way of retrieving the tradition such as to let it speak to us today. My contention, from a reading of David Burrell, is that he provides a way of addressing an impasse when we address the question of natural evil through his understanding of creation and existence and adopting his approach to what he terms philosophical theology. He provides a perspective, rooted in the tradition, an understanding which is broadly compatible with both theological and scientific modes of understanding and which can enable us to engage more deeply in the struggle with natural evil.

In this dissertation I have tried to examine this understanding and its implications in an examination of natural evil, a way of thinking about God and the universe God created. The question of *natural* evil entails some view of the universe, some view of reality. I have found that this examination has given me a richer perspective such that starting with what we can say about God, in consonance with the tradition, I can expand my perspective to understanding “that the mainstream of that tradition coheres with the emerging worldview so mightily informed by natural science,”⁶ an understanding encompassing both theological and scientific modes of understanding. This provides comprehensiveness encompassing the common criteria for scientific theories and a broader perspective encompassing more of our understandings, not merely data, theories, but also revelation, belief. David Burrell provides the resources for such a study.

⁵ Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action*.

⁶ Duane H. Larson, "Reifying Analogy in Natural Theology," *Zygon* 34, no. 2 (June) (1999), 339; a reference to Karl Schmitz-Moormann, (in collaboration with James F. Salmon, S.J.), *Theology of Creation in an Evolutionary World* (Cleveland, OH: The Pilgrim Press, 1997).

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I have been on quite a journey and feel incredibly blessed in this endeavour. There are some people who have been instrumental in my doing this work.

I would like to thank the late David Pankhurst whose challenging and goading led me to begin.

I must mention this university, its marvellous library and staff, and particularly Professor Greg Bloomquist who not only enabled me to take some graduate school courses without being in a program but smoothed my way into the Doctoral program. I also owed a debt of gratitude to the Academic Advisor, Mme. Francine Quesnel for her patience and guidance in navigating the intricacies of the way things are done at St. Paul University.

This leads directly to my committee. They have been most helpful in challenging me to clarify what I am doing and, as I understand is fairly common, challenging me to decide which dissertation I was planning to write — a most instructive conversation. I also wish to thank the members of the jury, particularly Professors Schlitt and Tilley for recommending, in the course of their reading, and evaluation, precisions to terminology and phrasing for greater clarity. Above all I owe profound thanks to my Director, Professor James Pambrun. Jim is one of those people who, when one is doing a Masters and idly thinks of a Doctorate, comes to mind as a director under whom one would learn so much. Jim, deep deep thanks for your guidance and patience — my musings have been more than met, I HAVE learned so much. Again, profound thanks.

Lastly there is my family, my own cheerleaders, who have encouraged me along the way and particularly my beloved wife Patricia who encouraged, and sustained me in this, my latest undertaking, and without whom this would never have been accomplished. Thank you my love! from the bottom of my heart.

I believe that I shall see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. Psalm 27.13.

INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

Every age, given its exigencies and presuppositions, has to rediscover the goodness of God and the goodness of creation amid the challenges to such belief. In particular, the experiences, evidences, and the questions of the evils of its days raise strong challenges to the confession of the goodness of God and God's creation. Such beliefs, beyond simple fideism, require fresh modes and forms of understanding to meet these challenges.

For our age, in a more immediate way, the challenges to belief in the goodness of God and the goodness of creation are perhaps driven by, among others, a couple of dominant factors: two appallingly destructive 'world wars' resulting in the wanton destruction of millions of people and societies, and the horrors and magnitude of the Holocaust which began to become evident in the late 1940's. Beyond these factors, in a more indirect way, the very notion of 'world' itself implied in the notion of creation and appealed to in the experience of evil has changed. The discoveries early in the 20th century have reshaped our image of the universe and our understanding of ourselves in the universe. Our perspective is increasingly dominated by the rise of modern science, particularly physics, biology, and cosmology and their effective employment in modern technology. We have shifted from a static to a dynamic image of the universe.¹ To add

¹ An excellent perspective is found in N. Max Wildiers, *The Theologian and his Universe: Theology and Cosmology from the Middle Ages to the Present* (New York: Seabury Press, 1982), particularly Part 1, 13-78. See also "Gaudium et Spes: Pastoral Constitution on the Church in The Modern World," (1965), http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html (Accessed 15 June 2015).

to this, the rise of Post-Modernism, particularly in the 1960's, with its contestation of all meta-narratives, its suspicion of subjective bias, represents in so many ways a fundamental break with the self-understanding of the past. These among other challenges and developments only serve to sharpen the difficulties faced by ongoing attempts to hold together a sound belief in God's goodness and to address at its foundational level an understanding of the goodness of creation in the face of the phenomenon of evil in the universe.

Christian theological history over the centuries shows some achievement in meeting such challenges. But such achievements are rooted in the understandings of their times. Some of these past formulations may endure and could speak to us today but need a fresh examination as to their development and adaptation for our age. For them to speak to us and give us their benefit we must re-examine the basic insights in these resources of meaning and understanding, what gave them their strength, and how that can be transposed and augmented in light of our current challenges to belief in the face of evil.

This is the field of studies where the question of this dissertation is situated. Its aim is to make a modest contribution to advancing the holding of a belief in the goodness of God and the goodness of God's creation in the face of the question of evil in light of the modern understanding of the universe. Its scope is modest and its focus is specific. Its scope consists of a reading of the works of David Burrell, one of the foremost scholars on the theological topic of creation today; its specificity is that of reading Burrell's work in light of a particular aspect of the question of evil, namely, natural evil. As will be discussed later, one cannot dissociate natural evil from the

question of moral evil. The results of catastrophes or epidemics are frequently exacerbated by social or systemic evils. However, this relating of Burrell to the question of natural evil arises from an understanding that regardless of a response to moral evil and prior to human freedom itself, there is the unavoidable reality of belonging to a universe and order of life which is characterized by the raw facticity of suffering. Hence the basic conundrum – why, no matter what, will there always be a condition of physical pain and suffering?

Both the presuppositions and the implications of this question have to be examined, particularly as to whether such a question and its formulations and presuppositions can avoid the pitfalls so clearly identified with theodicies, efforts that attempt in one fashion or other to ‘make sense’ of suffering and evil, that is, to try to explain it, to justify the ways of God to man. In recent years there has been a resurgence of the practice of theodicy, however, there has also risen a strong counteraction in contemporary theology to resist such efforts at explanation of evil. Nevertheless, our desire to understand goes beyond both theodicy and its counter positions. Neither explanation nor the resistance to theodicy exhausts the effort or desire to understand and neither has silenced such efforts. The challenge to theological understanding, in my view, is to think differently in face of the overwhelming distortions both of the world and of humanity as a result of sin and evil. One such approach, as alluded to in the beginning of this introduction, is that of affirming God’s goodness and the goodness of creation along with one’s reasons for this affirmation². This entails seeking, with an

² “Always be ready to make your defence to anyone who demands from you an account of the hope that is in you”. 1 Peter 3:15b. All biblical references use the NRSV unless otherwise noted.

appeal to the developments of human reason itself, those very resources that can help one to think differently.

Thesis

My thesis, argued in this dissertation and based on a reading of David Burrell, using his perspective of philosophical theology, is that his refined understanding of creation and existence provides a way of advancing the question and exploration of natural evil, principally in the way he conceives of creation as relation and how his notion of relation bears on our understanding of the goodness of God as creator and the goodness of the universe as creation.

Why am I inviting the reader to consider such a reading of David Burrell? As I wish to maintain continuity with the classical Western tradition, Burrell, an excellent modern scholar on the theological topic of creation, provides the framework, the access to, and the nature of the thinking which maintains a continuity with the neo-Thomist tradition. Burrell's own trajectory included being a member of the faculty of philosophy at Notre Dame from 1964 until 1970 when he became chair of the department of theology until 1980. Thus he was "invited to move my philosophical interests in discourse about divinity in a more substantively theological direction"³ and thereby is deeply informed in both disciplines and has developed a particular perspective on philosophical theology, one that forms the method for this dissertation.

I suggest that his reflections on God as creator, existence, creation, the relationship between God and creation are of import for addressing the question of

³ See David B. Burrell, "Brief Bio," <http://www3.nd.edu/~dburrell/> (Accessed 15 June 2015).

natural evil.⁴ He gives direction as to how to use his philosophical theology and provides the underlying direction in this examination, a direction which allows one to encompass God, agency, and the world. Put simply, Burrell provides the tools for the argument.

An Approach

I would suggest that one resource in the context of this particular exploration of the question of natural evil, with its perplexing linkages to the question of moral evil, is the increasing recognition of the intelligibility that marks the emergence of a profusion and variety of life in the order of the universe. This emergence is evinced not only in the findings and understandings of the modern sciences but also in the development of the emergence of understandings as a whole in science itself. Science is increasingly intelligible in an interrelated way from sub-atomic physics, through atomic physics, molecular physics, chemistry, cellular biology, sensitive biology, to sensitive and rational psychology. Modern science is increasingly the self-organization of an interrelated set of disciplines that themselves testify to the fact that this universe shows itself, discloses itself, in face of our questions.⁵ It is not simply the fact that there is emergence in the order of life, but much more, the fact that there is emergence in the understanding that is co-extensive with this emergent order. However, as we shall discover, science cannot on its own measure up to the question of evil, its perspective is incomplete.

⁴ It must be noted that the phrasing ‘relation between God and ...’ or ‘relationship between God and ...’ in *no way* implies that God and the world or humankind are on a par. Any such relation is premised on the ‘distinction’ of God and what God has created. The notion of relation is defined quite differently. See *infra*, Chapter 3, particularly 117ff.

⁵ An interesting perspective of this is found in Jean Ladrière, *The Challenge Presented to Cultures by Science and Technology* (Paris: UNESCO, 1977) in Part I, “Science”, 19-38, particularly 36-37.

These developments that have taken place in our understanding of the universe have been matched by corresponding developments in the way the question of evil itself is posed. Another resource is the modern perspective of philosophical theology whose strategies of investigation this dissertation wishes to explore. The response provided by this perspective rests on a prior commitment, namely, a commitment to the goodness of God and the goodness of God's act of creating, to the very goodness of creation. In my judgement, its promise is that the theological or confessional commitment invites the philosophical effort. It must be borne in mind, however, that whereas a philosophical theology draws on and is informed by the resources of philosophy, it is the theological meaning that holds the promise of opening up horizons for asking the questions and seeking to understand differently. As observed by Bernard Lonergan, the question of evil cannot be addressed on the level of philosophy alone; there is a need of a higher viewpoint, a religious response.⁶ Thus, the effort in such an undertaking is far from any attempt to justify God's action or to justify a belief in God. As Lonergan noted: "Without faith, without the eye of love, the world is too evil for God to be good, for a good God to exist. ... Faith places human efforts in a friendly universe; it reveals an ultimate significance in human achievement; it strengthens new undertakings with confidence."⁷

Among the challenges related to developing such a response are the underlying theological issues that, if not addressed, continue to stall our efforts in thinking the

⁶ Bernard J.F. Lonergan, *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding*, 5th ed. (Toronto, Ontario: University of Toronto Press, 1992), 709-751.

⁷ Bernard J.F. Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (Toronto, Ontario: University of Toronto Press, 2007), 117.

meaning of the goodness of our world differently. While underlying the enigma of evil are implicit references to divine action and the goodness of creation, it is not immediately evident, even theologically, what we mean today when we refer to God's action or a belief in God as creator.

As I intend to show in my reading of David Burrell, the deeper meanings that his explorations have uncovered of the meaning of God as creator and creation in Christian tradition (in dialogue with other monotheistic traditions) hold every promise of inviting us to think, to think differently, about God's relation to this world. Furthermore, it is also this more fundamental perspective that will establish the framework within which we may appeal to and examine how theological understanding may itself be enriched by its own encounter with a more philosophically refined understanding of the meaning of something like a notion of a 'world', especially as this philosophical reflection is informed by developments in modern science that alert us to a notion of the creativity and the fecundity of the universe.

These references come to mind due to their possible implications in the nature of the current questions on the problem of evil. Hence, I am not proposing a reading in general of the merits of Burrell on God as creator or on creation; rather, as was noted, I intend a reading of Burrell in light of a very specific question, namely, the question of natural evil – with its links to the related moral questions – from the perspective of the goodness of God and of God's creation. And if we are to appreciate something of the significance of the contribution of a reading of Burrell on this matter it remains, therefore, my more immediate task to identify in clearer terms the nature of the question, its current obstacles and challenges, and why a reading of Burrell may offer a way of

advancing and perhaps refining what has presented itself as one of the more promising avenues of investigation.

Motif

As an underlying motif in this attempt to think the question differently I shall explore an avenue of thought, something of a notion proposed by Terrence Tilley as part of what he termed a ‘creativity defense’. Its attractiveness lies in its consideration of the advances in modern science, suggesting that “God’s grace is in the world as the gift of creativity, a gift visible in a universe that evolves by chance in the natural realm and by constructions in the social realm.”⁸ He suggests that this notion can be consonant with some contemporary forms of Thomism, a way of understanding the relationship of the world with God. This is the challenge undertaken in the approach of this dissertation

Hence, the very appeal to the notion of creativity itself compels us to return to fundamental topics as the way we speak of the relationship of God and the world, God’s action as creator and the meaning of creation. In addition, as I shall underscore in my remarks on Tilley’s invitation, any viable response will need to clarify and to retrieve as part of its own achievement the truth of earlier achievements. Given the nature of our question on natural evil and its own philosophical exigencies, following Tilley’s suggestion I propose the reconsideration of a Thomistic line of thought, to re-examine its resources of meaning and understanding, to let it speak to us today, to help us think differently. It is the integration of these elements in the work of David Burrell that will

⁸ Terrence Tilley, "Towards a Creativity Defense of Belief in God in the Face of Evil," in *Physics and Cosmology: Scientific Perspectives on the Problem of Natural Evil*, ed. Nancey Murphy, Robert John Russell, and William R. Stoeger, S.J. (Vatican City State: Vatican Observatory Publications, 2007), 202-203.

lead us to invite the reader into a further exploration of his work. Hence, this dissertation draws on Burrell's reflections on creation and on God as creator as a foundation to advance the conversations on natural evil.

Overview

How does one proceed? Broadly, the argument is as follows.

We begin with an understanding of God and God's creation stressing the distinction between them. Yet, in spite of the distinction, i.e., God is God and we are creatures, I would argue that the key is the relationship between them, not one that implies the remoteness of God but rather one that stresses the intimacy of the relationship between God and what God has created. This leads to considerations of how we speak of what God has created, the way we describe the creation, our habitual presuppositions in our discourse of the universe. I contend that this is at the root of the impasse in our talk of natural evil. Finally, given an understanding of the impasse and given the development in understanding of the relation between God and God's creation, there is the nature of the response available to us in contending with instances of natural evil.

This leads to the structure of the dissertation: "Chapter 1. Natural Evil: Challenges and Prospects" provides background, perspectives, and presuppositions used in the arguments of this dissertation. It provides a discussion of the problem of evil along with clarification of the meaning of the term 'natural evil' as a dimension of the larger question of evil, along with a historical review of this problem. However, today, no reflection on evil has remained untouched by reflections on the limits and shortcomings of theodicies which are examined as to their adequacy. As a contrast to

theodicy there is a need to say a word about how responses to the practice of theodicy have required us to think the question of evil differently as an exercise of understanding. In order to relate this attempt to think the question differently to the more specific topic of natural evil I shall explore the notion of creativity. This notion of creativity as exhibited in the universe is examined through selected authors and from this the implications for ordering in the universe, all to set the scene for the substance of the dissertation.

Since this dissertation is rooted in the work of David Burrell, in particular his approach to philosophical theology and his retrieval of the tradition, “Chapter 2. Burrell and Theological Understanding” explores both Burrell’s development in theological understanding, his approach to philosophical theology, and his deep examination of Thomas Aquinas, particularly Aquinas’ ‘dialogue’ with the philosophers who preceded him, Greek, Jewish and Muslim, used as reference points in Aquinas’ writing. This, in turn, leads to consideration of Burrell’s approach to philosophical theology as it invites us to examine how his reflections on creation retrieve critical features in our understanding of the relationship between God as creator and the world, the universe, as created.

From this we are in a position to begin the development of the factors to be considered in addressing the question of natural evil. Given the foregoing, a re-examination of the theological foundations of the notion of creation is necessary to provide a basis for what follows. “Chapter 3. God As Creator in Burrell” provides a broad perspective on creation and from this discusses the notion of existence, how we can understand existence, particularly in light of our understanding of creation. The

notion of our being created, given existence, raises the question of how we understand our relation to the creator. This includes an examination of the notion of creation from a variety of perspectives. This sets the stage for the next chapter where we will examine certain characteristics of our creator and the creation.

“Chapter 4. On God’s Action In Burrell” undertakes a re-examination of the theological foundations of the notion of God to provide a basis for consideration of God’s action in creation, a re-examination I feel necessary to provide a basis for what follows because what one understands about God is at the root of the ‘problem of evil’, and God *is* involved in the universe. This includes an examination of the notions of God, in the form of what we term God’s ‘formal features’, the ‘perfections’ of God, and what we can say of God’s acting in the world, particularly knowing, providence, causality, and loving. The notion of creation is examined further, particularly with respect to the notions of free creation, *creatio ex nihilo*, *creatio continua*, and ordering. The overall thrust is to bring together some somewhat disparate elements into relationship with each other in order to construct the argument for my thesis.

The next two chapters are the nub of the argument for the thesis. The one reveals in more detail the present impasse, the other proposes a more constructive way of ‘thinking differently’. The aim of these chapters is to bring the resources of Burrell’s thinking on philosophical theology to bear more directly on the topic of natural evil. Each of these two chapters represent a step in advancing my thesis that David Burrell’s retrieval of the tradition, through the use of philosophical theology, invites us to think the question of natural evil differently. To reiterate, this dissertation is a reading of

David Burrell as a way of advancing our way of questioning and understanding of natural evil; it does not present a definitive solution.

In “Chapter 5. On Creativity and Natural Evil in Burrell” we bring the resources of Burrell's thinking to bear more directly on the topic of natural evil. For Burrell, the issue here is not our notions of world or of God, but how we speak about God and how such language draws on strategies such as analogy to introduce correctives to habitual presuppositions. I shall proceed broadly as follows. I begin with addressing the topic of how we can speak of the ‘unknowable God. This includes an examination of ‘Language *in Divinis*’, with an emphasis on analogy and a further discussion of the ‘perfection’ terms. From this the discussion moves to a consideration of the notion of creativeness in God, creativeness as a perfection term, where we lead into notions of ordering, God as an artisan, our participation in creativeness, culminating in the notion of emergence. This provides a framework for us to examine the question of natural evil and the contrast between that commonly assumed by modern science as a mode of inquiry and investigation and the broader perspective for which we have been searching; all this to reflect on the way we pose the question of natural evil, the source of the impasse.

In “Chapter 6. Rethinking the Question of Natural Evil in Light of Insights on Creation from David Burrell,” after reviewing our understanding of the relationship between God and creation as a foundation for what follows, and using a structure of word, source and community, I shall address approaches to natural evil, both the direct response and, for our argument, beyond the direct response, toward a deeper understanding of response, one based upon our relationship to God, our creator, and, particularly, an example of response at its deepest.

Finally, in the “Conclusion,” I shall recapitulate the essential notions discussed in order to show the logic of the argument to substantiate the resolution arrived at in Chapter 6.

NOTE:

Every attempt has been made to use inclusive language. However, quotations have not been changed.

In this dissertation, I have made frequent references to Thomas Aquinas’ *Summa Theologiae*. The primary reference, unless otherwise noted, will be to the Blackfriars Edition published by Eyre & Spottiswoode. Following Burrell, the references will follow his pattern: “1.13.1.4 refers to Part I” (*Prima Pars*), “question 13, article 1, response to the fourth query (or objection);” similarly, “2-1.12.2. refers to the first part of Part II (*Prima Secundae*), question 12, article 2 (the body of the response).” The pattern continues: 2-2 refers to the second part of Part II (*Secunda Secundae*) and 3 refers to Part III (*Tertia Pars*).⁹ Further, following Kate L. Turabian, *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*, Sixth Edition, given that the referenced version of the *Summa* is in 60 volumes, I have included the volume reference.

⁹

Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action*, xiv.

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. John 1:5.

1. NATURAL EVIL: CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS

The aim of this chapter is to provide background, perspectives, and presuppositions used in the arguments of this dissertation. Hence I discuss the problem of evil with a clarification of the meaning of the term natural evil, a dimension of the larger question of evil, along with a historical review of this problem. However, today, no reflection on evil has remained untouched by reflections on the limits and shortcomings of theodicies, attempts to vindicate God in view of the existence of evil, which are examined as to their adequacy. An aspect of the practice of theodicy is the perspective brought about by modern science. In order to relate this attempt to think the question differently to the more specific topic of natural evil, as noted, I shall explore the notion of creativity as expressed by a selection of modern theologians, those with a strong scientific bent. There is a further extension of the notion in Terrence Tilley's notion of a creativity defence and its value as an alternative to the thinking of theodicy. From this we examine a critique of the practice of theodicy as such. Finally, as a contrast to theodicy there is a need to say a word about how responses to the practice of theodicy press us to think the question of evil differently as an exercise of understanding.

Problem of Evil

Let us begin by examining what, over the centuries, has been called the problem of evil with an emphasis on what is labeled 'natural evil'. The term evil is defined broadly as something wrong, bad or unpleasant, faulty, improper, a misfortune,

something harmful or tending to harm.¹ While evil suffered may be due to the actions of others, it also may be due to what has traditionally been called natural evil.² It is the *effects* of some natural events, the hurt to sentient beings, that leads us to call some instances of these natural processes evil, hence the term. It must be noted that any discussion of natural evil cannot be separated completely from the question of moral evil. As noted in the “Introduction,”³ the modern experiences of war and the holocaust, and the pessimism of some streams of post modernism, raise moral evil issues yet my interest is piqued by the way commentators end up attributing moral characteristics to nature and the cosmos on the basis of human experiences of moral failure.⁴

Natural evil, a characteristic of the universe, implies states of affairs and their effects, which are to be avoided and for which no agent is morally responsible. Obvious examples are natural disasters such as meteorites, hurricanes, tornados, earthquakes and accompanying tsunamis, but also there are human illnesses, diseases, viruses, bacterial infections, cancers, and genetic defects as well as disorders in the animal and plant world.⁵ However, the effects of such calamities are complicated both by human

¹ A good general overview is provided in Brian Davies, *Thomas Aquinas on God and Evil* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2011), Chapter 1, “The Problem of Evil”, 1-8.

² The term ‘natural evil’ seems an oxymoron. As noted by Tilley: “in scientific discourse, what is natural is what is by nature: it is neither good nor evil; it just is. Once philosophers and theologians, however, view some event, action, person, or state of affairs as “good for something” they value or view something as “bad for something”, they disvalue, they come to talk of natural good and natural evil. But this fundamentally changes the use of the word natural from a factual use to a normative one;” Tilley, “The Problems of Theodicy: A Background Essay,” 37.

³ *Supra*, Introduction, 1.

⁴ It seems common in the literature in discussions of evil to find the emphasis on ‘moral’ evil. Burrell is no exception. His major discussion of evil is found in David B. Burrell, *Deconstructing Theodicy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2008), a discussion of Job and, contrary to much common discussion, Burrell posits the Book of Job as a *deconstruction* of the assumptions of theodicy. While Job’s afflictions bear a strong relation to natural evil, Burrell’s emphasis is on theodicy, not the distinction between natural and moral evil. However, there are some mentions of natural evil in his oeuvre.

⁵ Davies, *Thomas Aquinas on God and Evil*, 69.

foolishness, e.g., building cities in earthquake zones, improper diet, and by moral and social factors such as our collective actions leading, for example, to ‘global warming’, or by the results of economic conditions such as the cheapness of low lying, and hence floodable, land on which the poor can afford to live.⁶ Therefore, the modern question of natural evil is in fact a hybrid question – a question about the moral character of nature in light of our experiences of both nature itself and humanity’s own moral contributions to the historical unfolding of this nature. Clearly, for today, nature cannot be understood apart from history and history is a human moral project. Thus, for our age, there can be no purely natural thinking about matters of good and evil. However, the focus of this dissertation is not first and foremost on the classic question of moral evil, rather its focus is on the question of good and evil as it is posed with regards to the creation, the universe, the totality of all that is understood to exist, in the light of modern science and theology.

Evils are commonplace, not rare or unusual. Evils frequently lead to suffering; hence, the question of suffering and evil which has vexed humanity for centuries. As noted by Davies, “Philosophers and theologians often refer to ‘the problem of evil,’ and spend much effort and time trying to comment on it. Some argue that the problem shows belief in God to be unreasonable. Others hold that it can be dealt with so as to leave belief in God intact.”⁷ As such, evil in the world has long presented a challenge to belief in the goodness of God and the goodness of creation. The challenge is age old, the question: “Why God? Why?”; even more poignantly, “Why me?” An underlying

⁶ See also Tilley, "Towards a Creativity Defense of Belief in God in the Face of Evil," 214-215.

⁷ Davies, *Thomas Aquinas on God and Evil*, x.

background view seems to be an assumption of morality in the universe. Things are not as they *should* be, they are unfair. This theme is even implied in atheistic attacks on theism. “It has been said that God, if he exists, has a moral case to answer, and both theists and nontheists have written on this presumption.”⁸ Hence, what does one believe about God? The challenge to our ordinary way of thinking: “Does there or does there not necessarily exist a transcendent intelligent ground of the universe? Is that ground or are we the primary instance of moral consciousness? Are cosmogenesis, biological evolution, historical process basically cognate to us as moral beings or are they indifferent and so alien to us? Such is the question of God.”⁹ In essence, is the universe a moral act?

Let us explore some of the discussions on the subject of evil bearing in mind that many of the issues treated in this section reveal a mixture of questions related to natural evil and moral evil; deemed necessary because the issue of natural evil is invariably linked to moral issues arising within human life and hence, often raised to challenge belief in God itself. I must reiterate, this dissertation focuses on natural evil as a challenge to one’s belief in the goodness of God and the goodness of creation but the question of belief itself is often part of the challenge and therefore has to be noted.

ANCIENT CONTEXT

In considering some of the discourse on evil let us begin with the ancients. An early statement of the question of evil is found in the Greek philosopher Epicurus. Since then, many philosophers and theologians have wrestled with the problem, causing some

⁸ Davies, *Thomas Aquinas on God and Evil*, 77.

⁹ Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 102-103.

to state that God does not exist. From a philosophical perspective the basic question posed by evil is whether the world contains undesirable states of affairs that provide the basis for an argument that belief in God is unreasonable. Tertullian (ca. 160-ca. 225 CE), in an imprecation against “heretics and the philosophers” in *The Prescription Against Heretics*, notes that the question “Whence comes evil? Why is it permitted?” is commonly noised about.¹⁰ Lactantius (ca. 250–ca. 325 CE), in *A Treatise on The Anger of God*, notes of Epicurus (342-270 BCE):

God, he says, either wishes to take away evils, and is unable;
or He is able, and is unwilling;
or He is neither willing nor able,
or He is both willing and able.
If He is willing and is unable, He is feeble, which is not in accordance with the character of God;
if He is able and unwilling, He is envious, which is equally at variance with God;
if He is neither willing nor able, He is both envious and feeble, and therefore not God;
if He is both willing and able, which alone is suitable to God,
from what source then are evils? or why does He not remove them?¹¹

Boethius (ca. 480–524 CE) gave a succinct form of this quandary: “*Si Deus est, unde malum? Et si non est, unde bonum?*” (If God exists, whence evil? And if not, whence good?)¹² Thus, some classical perspectives on the problem, the quandary and enigma of evil.

Each age has had its particular approaches to trying to understand or deal with evil limited within its understanding of its world. The concepts have ranged across: *propitiatory*, placating the powers of one’s world; *covenantal*, the agreement to live one’s life according to God’s laws and all will be well; *corruptive*, the world is ‘fallen’

¹⁰ Quintus Septimius Florens Tertullian, *De praescriptione Haereticorum* (*The Prescription Against Heretics*) (ca. 200).

¹¹ Lucius Caecilius Firmianus Lactantius, *A Treatise on the Anger of God* (*De ira Dei*) (313-314), Chapter XIII, CCEL Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol. VII, (Accessed 28 May 2015); available from http://www.bible.ca/history/fathers/ANF-07/anf07-13.htm#P3322_1348266.

¹² Anicius Manlius Severinus Boëthius, *De Consolatione Philosophiae* (ca. 524), Bk. 1, Chapter 4.

from its intended state; *fideistic*, human reason cannot understand evil so trust in God in spite of evil; *resigned*, evil is real but the world does not make sense nor can it be understood; forms of *dualism*, of conflicting powers of good and evil in the world, e.g., Manichaeism; evil as a *privation* or negation of the good or being, so that evil is only evil as set against the greater good; *intrinsic*, evil understood as part of God's larger plans for the world.¹³ Frequently some of these have been used together. It would appear that the question of what one understands about God is at the root of the 'problem of evil'.

How can there be evil if Christians are right to say that God exists and that he is as they take him to be? Christians do not just claim that God exists. They also traditionally hold that God is omnipotent, omniscient, and perfectly good. But if all that is so, does it not seem to follow that there would be no evil? For would not an omnipotent, omniscient and good God prevent it? Evil seems to be no illusion. So does it not cast doubt on the reality of God?¹⁴

Much of the background thinking on the problem of evil (among other matters) was, and is today, deeply influenced by two thinkers, Augustine (354-430 CE) and Thomas Aquinas (*ca.* 1225-1274 CE). While these two exceptional thinkers wrote broadly and prolifically on many topics, I am focusing here only on the problem of natural evil. As noted, it would appear that while what one understands about God is a major issue, the context for the question of natural evil is embedded in what we understand of the notion of world, hence creation, and this study emphasizes Burrell's understanding of creation. However, the very notion of 'world' itself implied in the notion of creation and appealed to in the experience of evil has changed during the millennia. The notion of world in Augustine's time was drawn from Neo-Platonism,

¹³ In part adapted from Philip Mitchell, "Theodicy: An Overview" <http://www3.dbu.edu/mitchell/theodicy.htm> (accessed 15 June 2015).

¹⁴ Brian Davies, "Evil," in *Christianity: The Complete Guide*, ed. John Bowden (Toronto, ON: Novalis, 2005), 444.

particularly the notion of emanation. It should be noted that the Plotinian formulation was not accepted in total, that is, Christian philosophers never adopted Platonism wholesale; at numerous points their commitment to biblical texts contravened Platonism. Jews, Christians and Muslims, all who believed in free creation, contended against philosophical opinions which contradicted the scriptures.¹⁵ For Augustine, a major consideration is the relationship between sin and grace, it is eschatological and shows in his struggle with his sense and understanding of evil in the world, yet for him the creation *is* good.¹⁶ Counter to the notion of emanation, Aquinas' notion of world would appear to have been drawn from Aristotle although considerably modified. However, I would posit that underlying his understanding was a sense of the supernatural perfecting the natural; God was involved in the world. In either case, the question of natural evil entails the relationship of God and the world.

AUGUSTINE

Augustine was raised a Christian but wandered away from the Church in his youth. His restless intellect led him into a neo-Christian cult, Manichaeism. He travelled from his small home town in North Africa to Carthage, then to Rome, and finally to the imperial capital of Milan where he underwent a spiritual and intellectual crisis which brought him back to the Church.¹⁷ Augustine, as a 'Hearer', was a follower of the ideas of Mani (*ca.* 216-276 CE) for approximately nine years as a young man after

¹⁵ See David B. Burrell, *Knowing the Unknowable God* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1986), 12; David B. Burrell, "Aquinas Appropriation of *Liber de Causis* to Articulate the Creator as Cause-of-Being," in *Contemplating Aquinas*, ed. Fergus Kerr (London, UK: SCM Press, 2003), 75.

¹⁶ Aurelius Augustinus, *Confessions* (Oxford: The University Press, 1991), Book 13, ii(2).

¹⁷ A useful overview of Augustine is given in Henry Chadwick, *Augustine: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1986).

his ‘conversion’ to philosophy.¹⁸ Manichaeism was a radical offshoot of a dualistic form of Persian Gnosticism based upon a supposed primeval conflict between light and dark and revulsion from the material world.¹⁹ According to Brown, “Only this group, Augustine thought, could answer the question that had begun to ‘torment’ him as soon as his ‘conversion’ to philosophy had caused him to think seriously: ‘From what cause do we do evil?’ (*De lib. arb.* I, ii, 4)” (388CE) Being Gnostic, Manichaeism has a strong rationalistic basis; one could use reason to help understand “‘Where did these sins come from?’ ... ‘Whence did evil come at all? ... If from a man, where did the man come from? If from an angel, whence the angel? And if you say, ‘From God ...’, then it would seem that all sin and evil were linked, as in an unbroken chain, to God Himself.”²⁰ This question would occupy Augustine in one way or another throughout his life.²¹ In returning to the church Augustine turned from any notion of dualism and became deeply steeped in the Bible. For him creation was good, the problem of evil was the struggle in understanding the relationship between sin and grace.

In the *Confessions* Augustine, citing the ‘pear tree incident’, “I was being gratuitously wanton”, illustrates the utter pointlessness of evil at its core.²² Further, in, for example, the *City of God*, he notes that God has the right not to intervene and put a stop to evil and suffering since God is a just God and we are worthy of punishment. It is by God’s grace and infinite love however, that we (some of us, those to whom God

¹⁸ Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo* (London, UK: Faber and Faber, 1967), 35.

¹⁹ “Mani”, in *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, ed. F.L. Cross and E.A. Livingstone (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 1027; Chadwick, *Augustine: A Very Short Introduction*, 12.

²⁰ Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*, 37; citing Augustine, *De immortalitate animae*, 10.

²¹ See Serge Lancel, *St Augustine* (London, UK: SCM Press, 2002), *passim*.

²² Augustinus, *Confessions*, Book 2, Chapter 4, par. 9.

chooses to give grace) are able to accept the offer of salvation and eternal life in heaven.²³

The notion of Original Sin, or the Fall, had its roots in the Pauline teaching that “through one man [i.e. Adam] sin entered into the world”, so that “by the trespass of the one many died.” (see Rom. 5: 12-21 and I Cor. 15: 22) The doctrine began to be developed in the struggle by Irenaeus against the Gnostic errors. However, the precise formulation of the doctrine was reserved to Tertullian, Cyprian, and Ambrose, who taught the solidarity of the whole human race with Adam not only in the consequences of his sin but in the sin itself, transmitted through natural generation.²⁴ Augustine’s development of the notion of original sin led to the notion of the world as a ‘fallen world’, a way of understanding evil in the world. In the *Enchiridion* (*Enchiridion ad Laurentium*), a later work and probably reflecting a mature position, Augustine notes:

11. In this universe, even what is called evil, when it is rightly ordered and kept in its place, commends the good more eminently, ... For the Omnipotent God, whom even the heathen acknowledge as the Supreme Power over all, would not allow any evil in his works, unless in his omnipotence and goodness, as the Supreme Good, he is able to bring forth good out of evil. What, after all, is anything we call evil except the privation of good? ...

12. All of nature, therefore, is good, since the Creator of all nature is supremely good. But nature is not supremely and immutably good as is the Creator of it. Thus the good in created things can be diminished and augmented. For good to be diminished is evil; still, however much it is diminished, something must remain of its original nature as long as it exists at all. For no matter what kind or however insignificant a thing may be, the good which is its “nature” cannot be destroyed without the thing itself being destroyed. ... When, however, a thing is corrupted, its corruption is an evil because it is, by just so much, a privation of the good. Where there is no privation of the good, there is no evil. Where there is evil, there is a corresponding diminution of the good. ...

13. From this it follows that there is nothing to be called evil if there is nothing good. ... Thus, every entity, even if it is a defective one, in so far as it is an entity, is good. In so far as it is defective, it is evil.²⁵

²³ Aurelius Augustinus, *The City of God (De civitate Dei)* (413-426), Bk. 1, Chapter 9.

²⁴ “Original Sin” in *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 1195-1196.

²⁵ Aurelius Augustinus, “Enchiridion,” (421-423),

<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/augustine/enchiridion.html> (Accessed 15 June 2015).

As Tilley observes, Augustine rejects the notion of evil having a nature, rather it is a deprivation of what should be. However, there are two notions of evil in the above example of Augustine's thinking: firstly there is a notion based upon comparison of things, not exactly evil but the notion of 'less than' or 'bad' compared to each other, perhaps out of place as, for example, a weed. Secondly there is the notion of something not being what it should be by nature, the notion of privation or corruption.²⁶

Augustine, also known as the Doctor of Grace, was the first of all to synthesize the great theories of the Fall, grace, and free will. His understanding of the consequences of original sin and of the necessity of redeeming grace was developed in the struggle with Pelagianism. The grace of Christ was indispensable to rescue us from the Fall but also to human freedom, itself tied into free will. An important work in this regard is *On Nature and Grace (De natura et gratia)*.²⁷

But what of natural evil? Clearly this is a question related to the issue of moral evil but remains a distinct question of its own. For Augustine, evil first came into the world through the Fall of the angels who took all the created order with them, i.e., Augustine's doctrine of Original Sin, the abuse of free will. Therefore creation itself became a place of suffering, a just punishment for the sin and disobedience of humans. We have a tendency to view things materialistically, a tendency to focus only upon the tangible. Natural suffering is either sin or a punishment for sin, in the sense that it comes about in a world that is fallen, and therefore full of suffering. "For you evil does not exist at all, and not only for you but for your created universe, because there is

²⁶ Tilley, "Towards a Creativity Defense of Belief in God in the Face of Evil," 208-209.

²⁷ Aurelius Augustinus, *On Nature and Grace (De natura et gratia)* (413-415).

nothing outside it which could break in and destroy the order which you have imposed upon it. But in the parts of the universe, there are certain elements which are thought evil because of a conflict of interest.”²⁸ Hence, in that sense, natural evils are not evil at all.²⁹

Thus we have some notions of evil: of evil as a surd, not rational; of original sin and a consequent fallen world; and the notion of evil as a diminution or privation of that good, yet accompanied with a notion of the goodness of creation and a graced creation.

THOMAS AQUINAS

Thomas Aquinas was a thirteenth-century Dominican friar who spent most of his adult life teaching in universities or seminary. He attended the University of Naples where, among other things, he encountered the thought of Aristotle. At the age of nineteen he broke with his family and after some struggle joined the Dominican Order. Some of his training was at Paris and Cologne under Albert the Great. As a religious, he was a man of constant prayer and deeply knowledgeable of the scriptures. Unlike many other theologians at that time, Thomas saw no contradiction between human reason and God’s revelation. For example, he said “Since grace does not scrap nature but brings it to perfection, so also natural reason should assist faith as the natural loving bent of the will yields to charity. ... Hence holy teaching uses the authority of philosophers who

²⁸ Augustinus, *Confessions*, VII.xiii.19. See also Augustinus, *The City of God (De civitate Dei)*, XI, 22.

²⁹ Michael Mendelson, "Saint Augustine," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Winter 2010 Edition)* (2012), <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2010/entries/augustine/> (Accessed 15 June 2015).

have been able to perceive the truth by natural reasoning” – to raise it above itself, so that the whole human being, through its reason, might actively share in God’s own life.³⁰

Thomas Aquinas distinguished two kinds of evil: *malum poenae* and *malum culpae*, described as evil suffered or evil done.³¹ Following on from Augustine, he agrees that evil is not a substance or entity in its own right, but a *privatio boni*: the absence or lack of some good power or quality which a thing by its nature ought to possess, that is, not a simple negation.³² As noted by Burrell, “since good and evil do not appear as simple contraries ... the very grammar of evil demands that we first acknowledge the primacy of good, otherwise there would be no evil, but only an alternate way of acting.”³³ Further, as Davies notes, for Aquinas there is no reason to question God’s goodness, “the explanation of evil is not to be found in what God has *done* or is *doing*. Rather it lies in what he has *not* done or is *not* doing.”³⁴ “For Aquinas, therefore, the question to ask when confronted by evil is not ‘Why does God produce so much evil?’ It is, ‘Why is there less good than there might be?’”³⁵ Burrell notes Aquinas as “countering the claim that there is more evil than good in the universe by means of a distinction: in the natural world, despite cataclysms, miscarriages, and other

³⁰ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Blackfriars Edition ed., 60 vols. (London, UK: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1265-1273), Vol. 1, CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY, 1.1.8 ad2.

³¹ Brian Davies, *The Thought of Thomas Aquinas* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1992), 92; Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 8, CREATION, 1.48.5.

³² Thomas Gilby, O.P., "Appendix 4, Evil," in *Summa Theologiae* ed. Thomas Gilby, O.P. (London, UK: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1964-1968), Vol. 8, CREATION, 161.

³³ David B. Burrell, *Learning to Trust in Freedom* (Scranton, PA: University of Scranton Press, 2010), 6.

³⁴ Davies, *The Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, 89. Emphasis in the original.

³⁵ Davies, *The Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, 91.

defects of nature – there is manifestly more good than evil in creation.”³⁶ In essence, for

Aquinas, creation must be good because, it participates in God:

Therefore if there is an agent not contained in any “genus,” its effect will still more distantly reproduce the form of the agent, not, that is, so as to participate in the likeness of the agent’s form according to the same specific or generic formality, but only according to some sort of analogy; as existence is common to all. In this way all created things, so far as they are beings, are like God as the first and universal principle of all being.³⁷

This, for Aquinas, is a basic position. This notion of participation will be pursued further.

In some of his major writings Aquinas develops more fully the notion of evil and its relationship to our thinking about God, in particular in addressing a *quaestio disputata* in *De Malo*.³⁸ It should be noted, following Davies, however, that Aquinas has nothing to say on the ‘*problem of evil*’ as such,³⁹ although he has much to say on evil; rather what he has to say is “scattered throughout almost the entire corpus of his writing,”⁴⁰ in the context of other problems.⁴¹ We will revisit Aquinas, many times, through Burrell, on many of these ‘problems’.

³⁶ Burrell, *Learning to Trust in Freedom*, 37, referring to Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 8, Creation, 1.49.3 ad 5.

³⁷ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 2, EXISTENCE AND NATURE OF GOD, 1.4.3, as referenced in Burrell, "From Analogy of 'Being' to the Analogy of Being," 118.

³⁸ E.g., *Quaestiones disputatae de Veritate*, passim; *Summa contra Gentiles*, particularly Bks. 1 & 3; *Quaestiones disputatae de potentia Dei*, particularly Q.III (Creation), Q. VI (Miracles), *Quaestiones disputatae de malo*, *Compendium Theologiae*, Part I, Chapter 114-120, 141-142; *Summa Theologiae*, particularly Vol. 8, CREATION, 1.48-49. As noted by Davies in *Thomas Aquinas on God and Evil*, what Aquinas has to say on evil is “scattered throughout almost the entire corpus of his writing.” One has to follow “what he has to say about God in general and from a number of other questions he discusses such as ‘What is a being?’ ‘What is a cause?’ ‘What kinds of beings are there?’ and ‘What kinds of causes are there?’” (p. 7) Even *De Malo* is fundamentally an essay on moral evil. (135n21) Further, according to Davies, for Aquinas, the question “How can God justify himself morally for the evil that exists” is a pseudo-problem, it doesn’t engage what has to be said of God’s nature. (114).

³⁹ The ‘*problem of evil*’ as such is an enlightenment notion to be discussed later, *infra*, 28.

⁴⁰ Davies, *Thomas Aquinas on God and Evil*, 6.

⁴¹ Tilley, "The Problems of Theodicy: A Background Essay," 41-42.

All in all, Aquinas offers a dispassionate analysis, not trying to resolve the question but rather setting it in proportion.⁴² As noted by Davies, “[Aquinas] thinks that evil suffered in the world is neither *more* nor *less* than we can expect in a material world in which scientific explanations can be given for what happens. According to Aquinas, God has created a material world in which there is evil suffered.”⁴³ Further, Davies observes that “what goes by the name ‘the problem of evil’ since the time of Hume (or, indeed, Epicurus) is not a problem for Aquinas. Without denying God’s omnipotence, omniscience, or goodness, he does not think that God has any moral case to answer.”⁴⁴

Whitney characterizes the Augustinian-Thomistic perspective as having four philosophical motifs.⁴⁵ Firstly, evil has not been created by God nor even desired, it is the privation of good;⁴⁶ i.e., “evil was nothing but a privation of good (that, indeed, it has no being)”.⁴⁷ Secondly, evil can arise from the extensive variety of creatures having varying abilities and qualities.⁴⁸ Thirdly, Whitney refers to the so-called aesthetic theory, God created a world which as a whole is good while parts may seem as evils

⁴² Gilby, "Appendix 4, Evil," 160.

⁴³ Thomas Aquinas, *On Evil*, trans., Richard Regan, with a foreword by Brian Davies (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2003), 22. Emphasis in the original. See also *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 8, CREATION, 1.48.1, particularly: Reply, A.5 and 1.48.2, Reply.

⁴⁴ Davies, *Thomas Aquinas on God and Evil*, 129.

⁴⁵ Barry Whitney, *What Are They Saying About God and Evil?* (New York, NY: Paulist Press, 1989), 29-34.

⁴⁶ Whitney, *What Are They Saying About God and Evil?*, 30, is referring to Augustine, "Enchiridion", 11.

⁴⁷ Whitney, *What Are They Saying About God and Evil?*, 30, n., 2, 101, referring to Augustine, *Confessions*, Bk. 3, Chapter 7, par., 12. This follows from the notion that creation is good as it possesses existence ("And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very Good", Gen. 1:31). Hence evil is a privation of what should be, not a negative of the good. See also Davies, *Thomas Aquinas on God and Evil*, 33-37.

⁴⁸ Whitney, *What Are They Saying About God and Evil?*, 31, n. 6, 102 referring to Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 8, CREATION, 1.47.1.

though they “are either means to good ends or parts of a good whole.”⁴⁹ Fourthly, there is the distinction between God causing evil and merely permitting it. This has some implications for natural evil though heavily used in moral theodicy and arguments for free will. However, he notes Rahner’s challenge, this distinction being of secondary importance since God is the only ground of being and hence is the cause of all things: “Having regard to God’s omnipotent freedom, which knows no bounds, causing and permitting seem to us to come so closely together that we can ask quite simply why God allows us to suffer, without having to distinguish *a priori* in this ‘allowing’ by God between permitting and causing.”⁵⁰

This Augustinian-Thomistic perspective on evil also has some important related theological themes. There is the notion of Original Sin, the inherited sin from the sin of Adam and Eve, from the Fall. This relates primarily to moral evil but carries the overtones of all evil suffered being deserved due to our sinfulness. As Whitney notes: “that suffering is an inevitable by-product of natural laws and of conflicting species is also an essential aspect of the Thomist theodicy,”⁵¹ which takes us back to Davies’ remark. Augustine insisted upon the reality of free-will in spite of divine omnipotence which predestined all earthly decisions and events. Why some are elected for blessing and others not “lies forever hidden from us in the mind of God”.⁵² The notion of free-will leads into the question of causality. God is the primary cause of all earthly events

⁴⁹ Whitney, *What Are They Saying About God and Evil?*, 31.

⁵⁰ Karl Rahner, "Why does God Allow us to Suffer," in *Theological Investigations, XIX* (New York, NY: Crossroad, 1983), 196, as cited by Whitney, 33.

⁵¹ Whitney, *What Are They Saying About God and Evil?*, 34-35.

⁵² Whitney, *What Are They Saying About God and Evil?*, 35.

and creatures the secondary cause.⁵³ Again, this highlights how the question of natural evil invariably gets shaped by answers to questions about moral evil.

MODERN CONTEXT

The *problem of evil* in a modern context, with a very different perspective of world, would appear to begin with the Anglican Archbishop of Dublin, William King (1650-1729), in *An Essay on the Origin of Evil* (written in 1697, published in Latin in 1702 with the English translation published in 1731); what Tilley calls a “classic fully developed Enlightenment theodicy.”⁵⁴ This was followed in turn with Leibniz (1646-1716) in 1710 when he discussed this problem in *Essais de théodicée sur la bonté de Dieu, la liberté de l’homme et l’origine du mal* from whence we get the term theodicy, from the Greek for God’s justice (*theos dike*).⁵⁵ For Leibniz, arguing against the skepticism of Pierre Bayle (1647-1706)⁵⁶, in spite of its many evils the world is the best of all possible worlds (“*ce monde ne fût le meilleur qui pût être choisi.*”)⁵⁷ A contradiction to this assertion came to the fore with the Lisbon earthquake on 1 November 1755, All Saints’ Day, a major holy day, around 09:40 in the morning with the churches full. The earthquake and the resulting tsunami largely destroyed Lisbon

⁵³ Ricœur observes that Augustine’s concept is an antignostic gnosticism in that “The previous content of this gnosis is denied but the form of its discourse is reconstituted, that of a rationalized myth.” Paul Ricœur, “Evil, a Challenge to Philosophy and Theology,” in *Figuring the Sacred* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 1995), 254.

⁵⁴ Terrence Tilley, *The Evils of Theodicy* (Washington: Georgetown University Press, 1990), 224. Tilley provides a broader perspective on the notion of a ‘first theodicy’ in a substantial footnote, n. 2, 251-252.

⁵⁵ Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, “Essais de théodicée sur la bonté de Dieu, la liberté de l’homme et l’origine du mal,” (1710), <http://abu.cnam.fr/cgi-bin/go?theodicee1> (Accessed 15 June 2015). A more rigorous version of this was presented in Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, “Making The Case for God,” <http://www.earlymoderntexts.com/pdfs/leibniz1710.pdf> (Accessed 15 June 2015).

⁵⁶ See Leibniz, “Making The Case for God”, par. 80, 87; Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, “Leibniz’s Exchange of Views with Bayle,” http://www.earlymoderntexts.com/pdfs/leibniz1697a_1.pdf (Accessed 15 June 2015), 33-34.

⁵⁷ Leibniz, “Essais de théodicée sur la bonté de Dieu, la liberté de l’homme et l’origine du mal”.

with very large loss of life, largely Christian and at prayer, estimated at between 40,000 and 50,000.⁵⁸ Leibniz' notion and his optimism were ridiculed by the enlightenment intelligentsia, particularly by Voltaire in *Candide* in 1759. The goodness of God became a hotly debated question.

As Tilley has observed, the so-called classical theodicians were not, strictly speaking, doing theodicy as understood later, the 'theodicy problem' is an '*enlightenment problematique*.'⁵⁹ Further, it is important to keep in mind that the ancient perspectives of the world, their notion of world, are radically different from ours, e.g., "Aristotelian biology is incomprehensible, clearly wrong, or simply nonsense if understood as commensurable with contemporary biology."⁶⁰ It must be borne in mind that Augustine and Aquinas "lived in a static pre-modern universe with stable *naturae*"⁶¹, the so-called Augustinian-Thomistic theodicy is an anachronistic construct.⁶² More broadly, in the theological systems of Irenaeus, Augustine, Boethius, Aquinas, along with the major reformers of the 15th and 16th centuries, "the conceptual problems of evil were small anomalies ... 'Evil' was not a single problem to be solved, but an aspect of various issues."⁶³ To the contrary, modern theodicies have been developed by others from these past writings. From this let us take a look at theodicy itself.

⁵⁸ Alvaro S. Pereira, "The Opportunity of a Disaster," <https://www.york.ac.uk/media/economics/documents/cherrydiscussionpapers/0603.pdf> (Accessed 15 June 2015), 5n7.

⁵⁹ Tilley, "Towards a Creativity Defense of Belief in God in the Face of Evil," 196.

⁶⁰ Tilley, "Towards a Creativity Defense of Belief in God in the Face of Evil," 196.

⁶¹ Tilley, "Towards a Creativity Defense of Belief in God in the Face of Evil," 210.

⁶² Tilley, "The Problems of Theodicy: A Background Essay," 47.

⁶³ Tilley, "The Problems of Theodicy: A Background Essay," 39.

Theodicy

As noted earlier, the problem of evil, in a modern context, begins with Leibniz in 1710 when he discussed this problem in *Essais de théodicée sur la bonté de Dieu, la liberté de l'homme et l'origine du mal*. Further, in *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* (1779) Hume (1711-1776) notes: "Epicurus's old questions are yet unanswered. Is he willing to prevent evil, but not able? then is he impotent. Is he able, but not willing? then is he malevolent. Is he both able and willing? whence then is evil?"⁶⁴ There were a few authors who engaged in the conversation in subsequent years, e.g., Kant, Schleiermacher, Goethe, Tennyson, Dostoevsky.

Although the problem of evil has persisted as a serious challenge to belief in God, it has come again to renewed attention in the West in the latter part of the 20th century, particularly in the 1960's and 1970's for the logical problem, in the 1980's for the evidential problem, and since the 1970's for the existential problem.⁶⁵ There have been a number of approaches to the problem of evil, perhaps viewed as a consequence of the horrors of our age. They, however, tacitly accept the premise of theodicy – God has a moral case to answer, i.e., "Why?" demanding explanation. It would appear that a major issue in theodicy is the goodness of God.⁶⁶ Hence, the problem of evil leads into the notion of theodicy which itself has developed an enormous volume of literature today.

⁶⁴ David Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* (1779), Part X, published posthumously.

⁶⁵ Michael L. Peterson, "The Problem of Evil," in *A Companion to the Philosophy of Religion* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 1997), 393-401.

⁶⁶ Terrence Tilley, "The Use and Abuse of Theodicy," *Horizons* 11, no. 2 (1984), 316.

There are a variety of ways of considering theodicies; most of them consider both natural and moral forms of evil though with an emphasis on moral evil. However, as noted earlier, any discussion of natural evil cannot be separated from the question of moral evil, the question of natural evil invariably gets shaped by assumptions and arguments about moral evil – particularly when these are attributed to God and thus inscribed into the creation that is God’s work.

Whitney notes a variety of modern theodicies. For our current purposes there are two that are germane: Irenaean, and Process Thought, although Whitney notes a miscellany of philosophical and conservative and popular theodicies. Here we will consider the Irenaean theodicy. Process thought will be considered later.

IRENAEAN THEODICY

The so-called ‘Irenaean theodicy’ stems from John Hick in his *Evil and the God of Love* in 1978.⁶⁷ Hick developed this theodicy based upon a systematic development from the writings of Irenaeus (*ca.* 130-*ca.* 200 CE). It is a modern theodicy construct “structured neither by Irenaeus’ nor Augustine’s purposes, but by those common to enlightenment practice.”⁶⁸ It is often described as a soul-making theodicy. As Hick noted:

Irenaeus himself did not develop a theodicy, but he did – together with other Greek-speaking Christian writers of that period, such as Clement of Alexandria – build a framework of thought within which a theodicy became possible which does not depend upon the idea of the fall, and which is consonant with modern knowledge concerning the origins of the human race. This theodicy cannot, as such, be attributed to Irenaeus. We should rather speak of a type of theodicy,

⁶⁷ John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, 2nd ed. (New York, NY: Harper and Row, 1978). This discussion is based upon Whitney, pp. 38-40, 43-45.

⁶⁸ Tilley, *The Evils of Theodicy*, 236.

presented in varying ways by different subsequent thinkers (the greatest of whom has been Friedrich Schleiermacher), of which Irenaeus can properly be regarded as the patron saint.⁶⁹

In essence, in distinction from the Augustinian view of the fallen nature of humankind, God created a less than perfect world in which human beings are unfinished and in the midst of being made all that God intended them to be. Hick argues for a two-stage process whereby 'we have been created in the image of God but not yet in God's likeness' (a reference to Gen. 1:26), i.e., a teleological or developmental perspective. Hence there is a gap between what we actually are and what God intends us to be. For us to develop as God wishes, our environment must be appropriate to such development including the evils that beset us, in essence "arguing that much that is evil or bad should be thought of as a necessary means to goods aimed at by God."⁷⁰ In "a world devoid both of dangers to be avoided and rewards to be won we may assume there would have been virtually no development of the human intellect and imagination"⁷¹ and hence no chance for spiritual and moral development. Such a world would not serve a person-making purpose.

Thus the hypothesis of a divine purpose in which finite persons are created at an epistemic distance from God, in order that they may gradually become children of God through their own moral and spiritual choices, requires that their environment, instead of being a pain-free and stress-free paradise, be broadly the kind of world of which we find ourselves to be a part. It requires that it be such as to provoke the theological problem of evil. For it requires that it be an environment which offers challenges to be met, problems to be solved, dangers to be faced, and which accordingly involves real possibilities of hardship, disaster, failure, defeat, and misery as well as of delight and happiness, success, triumph and achievement.⁷²

⁶⁹ John Hick, "An Irenaean Theodicy," in *Encountering Evil*, ed. Stephen Davis (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1981), 40; yet he persists in the attribution.

⁷⁰ Davies, *Thomas Aquinas on God and Evil*, 66; commenting on modern theodicies.

⁷¹ Hick, "An Irenaean Theodicy," 47, as cited by Whitney, 43.

⁷² Hick, "An Irenaean Theodicy," 48.

For Hick, as for Swinburne,⁷³ the amount and intensity of evil in the world is relative, if the worst evil was removed another would be the worst evil. The less natural evil, the less our knowledge how to eliminate or mitigate evils and hence, the less opportunity to exercise our higher virtues.⁷⁴

To be sure, there is an eschatological element in this theodicy. Because individuals do not develop fully in this life, and some do not seem to have opportunity to develop spiritually (e.g. in the case of infant death), there must be the possibility of an afterlife so that individuals develop into the likeness of God and receive their heavenly reward. "The only conceivable justification for God's creation of imperfect creatures ... is that we all shall be brought eventually and freely to a state of spiritual perfection."⁷⁵ This "presupposes each person's survival in some form of bodily death and further living and growing toward that end-state."⁷⁶ Again, an attempt at explanation.

A SCIENTIFIC PERSPECTIVE

As noted earlier, theodicy is the explanation and justification of God's justice and goodness in the face of suffering and evil, in essence, the enigma of how can we simultaneously hold the three propositions: God is all powerful, God is absolutely good, and evil exists. The modern notion of theodicy emerged in the Enlightenment as an explanation of an anomaly in the argument from design.

The design argument, which arose out of natural theology and which was quite ancient in various forms, was picked up by empiricists in the seventeenth and eighteenth

⁷³ Richard Swinburne, *The Existence of God* (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1979).

⁷⁴ Hick, "An Irenaean Theodicy," 43-44, 65-66.

⁷⁵ Hick, "An Irenaean Theodicy," 45.

⁷⁶ Hick, "An Irenaean Theodicy," 51, as cited by Whitney, 45.

centuries who believed that the order in the world suggested the existence of God.⁷⁷

These natural philosophers saw God as the first cause, and sought secondary causes to explain what they saw as design in nature. One such example was the watchmaker analogy. It was argued that in the same way a watch's complexity implies the existence of its maker, so too one may infer the creator of the universe exists, given the evident complexity of Nature.

Newton's laws of motion and gravity seemed applicable to all objects, from the smallest particle in the laboratory to the farthest planet. This was still a single harmonious order, as in the Middle Ages, but now it was a structure of forces and masses rather than a hierarchy of purposes. This magnificent synthesis of diverse domains was rightly admired, and the perfection of mathematical law made a great impression on Newton's contemporaries. It suggested an image of *the world as an intricate machine* following immutable laws, with every detail precisely predictable.⁷⁸

Newton himself believed that the world-machine was designed by an intelligent creator and expressed God's purposes. The concepts of Newtonian physics, which had been so superbly successful in astronomy and mechanics, were increasingly adopted as the basis of an all-encompassing metaphysics.

To the early members of the Royal Society science was a religious task, "the disclosure of the admirable workmanship which God displayed in the universe."⁷⁹

"They found a pattern of divine benevolence in the design of all things. ... The argument from design assumed, of course, that the world had been instantaneously

⁷⁷ A nuanced perspective on the design argument is found in John Hedley Brooke, "Science and Theology in the Enlightenment," in *Religion and Science*, ed. W. Mark Richardson and Wesley J. Wildman (New York, NY, London, UK: Routledge, 1996), particularly pp. 12-17.

⁷⁸ Ian G. Barbour, *Religion and Science* (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, 1979), 18, emphasis in the original.

⁷⁹ Barbour, *Religion and Science*, 19.

created in its present form. ... The idea of evolution and change was simply absent from seventeenth-century thought about nature.”⁸⁰

It should be noted that a modern variant of the design argument is built upon the concept of the fine-tuned universe. The fine-tuning of the universe is the apparent delicate balance of conditions necessary not only for human life but also for the very existence of the universe itself, encompassed by the notion of the Anthropic Principle.⁸¹

Each form of the design argument is rooted in the natural science of its time, trying to explain the world and the anomaly of evil with a tendency to make evil in some way necessary in the universe.⁸² As well, a particular aspect of modern thinking arising from the Enlightenment pervades the theodicy discussions. There has been a strong shift in epistemology from the ancients. In the Enlightenment there arose the basic and narrowing discussions between empiricism (so-called British empiricism) and rationalism (so-called continental philosophy) both overlaid with a skeptical perspective. Further, there arose, largely from an evidentialist-empiric perspective, the demystification of the world, a loss of the sense of the supernatural. There is the dramatic rise in popular understanding of the results of modern science since the

⁸⁰ Barbour, *Religion and Science*, 20-21.

⁸¹ The notion appears to have arisen in the 1960's in different forms, but is now largely argued in two forms, strong and weak. As the term 'anthropic' implies, it is related to the fact of intelligent life. The weak form is related to privileged locations in the universe, e.g., our solar system and the plant earth *at this time* which is analogous to the Goldilocks' situation, neither too hot or too cold but just right; if the conditions were not just right we would not be here at this time. The strong form relates to the values of fundamental physical constants; the universe (and hence the fundamental parameters on which it depends) must be such as to admit the creation of observers within it at some stage, hence related to the values of some 20 physical constants such that if their value were slightly different, *life wouldn't exist at all*. Thus, the notion is, nowadays, often embroiled in the design argument. A number of people have remarked on it since Roger Dicke in 1961, including Brandon Carter, Steven Weinberg, Roger Penrose. A common reference is John D. Barrow and Frank J. Tipler, *The Anthropic Cosmological Principle* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), although their presentation is a matter of discussion.

⁸² Tilley, "The Problems of Theodicy: A Background Essay," 37-43.

postulates of Darwin in the 1850's. There are the discoveries of the shape and form of the universe early in the 20th century, particularly Einsteinian relativity⁸³ and its partial experimental verification by Eddington.⁸⁴ There are the discoveries, led by Hubble, of galaxies beyond the Milky Way⁸⁵ giving rise to our understanding of the expansion of the universe, all of which give one a sense of the apparent indifference of the universe.

This popular scientific understanding has given rise to the notion that

the practices and concepts of science [are] to be used as the proper pattern for all ways of understanding what there is [and] give modernity a quite different problematic from the ancient and medieval worlds. ... Making empirical, verifiable science a monolithic paradigm for knowledge resulted in a 'flatness' of method and description and a 'monochromatic' vision of being and beings not found in earlier times. ...

Yet the loss in modernity of a robust sense of the supernatural perfecting the natural ("*gratia perficit natura*") characteristic of the medieval worldview makes it at least difficult to hold a reasonable faith. Nothing can be the same after the loss of any relevant concept of the supernatural for both scientific and humanistic disciplines – and that means that the problems of evil are not the same before and after the Enlightenment's demystification of the world.⁸⁶

This thinking also distances us from God, our trying to understand a personal God in light of an impersonal universe.⁸⁷

An illustration of the development of the Enlightenment's demystification of the world can be found in Wildiers, *The Theologian and his Universe*, where he explores the

⁸³ Albert Einstein, "On the Electrodynamics of Moving Bodies," *Annalen der Physik* XVI, (Sept. 1905), which gives the Theory of Special Relativity.

⁸⁴ Observations of the solar eclipse of 29 May 1919, F. W. Dyson, A. S. Eddington, and C. Davidson, "A Determination of the Deflection of Light by the Sun's Gravitational Field, from Observations Made at the Solar eclipse of May 29, 1919," *Phil. Trans. Roy. Soc. A* 220 (571-581), 291–333, confirming Einstein's theory of General Relativity.

⁸⁵ From 1924-1929, and which also supported the Big Bang theory proposed by Georges Lemaître in 1927.

⁸⁶ Tilley, "Towards a Creativity Defense of Belief in God in the Face of Evil," 196-197. An interesting perspective on the rise of the scientific model as the paradigm for thinking and the inappropriateness of theological considerations in scientific thinking can be found in Michael J. Buckley, S.J., "The Newtonian Settlement and the Origins of Atheism," in *Physics, Philosophy, and Theology*, ed. Robert John Russell, William R. Stoeger, S.J., and George V. Coyne, S.J. (Vatican City State: Vatican Observatory, 1988), 81-102.

⁸⁷ See "Introduction," *Religion and Science*, (1996), 4. See also Brooke, "Science and Theology in the Enlightenment," 16.

evolution of thought in “Part Two: Decline of the Medieval World Picture.”

By the end of the seventeenth century the view of Galileo and Newton gained the day and the medieval picture of the universe was completely abolished. All certainties that were founded on or supported by this medieval world picture lost all force of conviction. Having lost his central position in the cosmos, man was no longer able to situate himself in the totality of things, because the entire framework of his existence had collapsed without there being any evidence of a new coherent view of the universe. What was required was no less than a complete rethinking of his views on the world, himself, society, and God.⁸⁸

A nuanced perspective on this is given by Buckley⁸⁹ where he concentrates on what he calls the Newtonian Settlement. In the *Principia Mathematica (Philosophiae Naturalis Principia Mathematica, 1687)* Newton argued for the existence of God based on the design of the universe. The Newtonian Settlement is the integration of science (specifically mechanics which he considered exhaustive and universal) and theology by making theology dependent on mechanics, i.e., making mechanics the foundation of theology; science is the underlying principle, the source of meaning, and religious belief and practice are built on top of it. However, by embracing scientific naturalism, and accepting its standards as the only suitable criteria for the generation of meaning, religion first lost its independent standing, and became more and more under attack as the discoveries of science explained more and more. This opens the door to the notion of empirical, verifiable science as the standard for knowledge, even in matters of faith, thereby challenging belief itself.

Creation and Creativity

Let us now turn to a particularly modern notion, a way of viewing the world and one which, to a large extent, presupposes the ideas of science as the standard for

⁸⁸ Wildiers, *The Theologian and his Universe: Theology and Cosmology from the Middle Ages to the Present*, 82.

⁸⁹ Buckley, "The Newtonian Settlement and the Origins of Atheism."

knowledge. An important aspect of this dissertation is an examination of natural evil in light of modern science, particularly physics, biology, evolution and cosmology. This follows from Tilley's desire to discuss "evil in the context of science"⁹⁰ and his use of his creativity defence, particularly his contention that "It is not possible for God [to] create a world in which entities could exercise creativity and which did not contain genuine evils."⁹¹ This is in contrast to the notion of theodicy which tries to 'explain' evils. However, even here many of these authors get trapped in the explanation mode. Let us examine the nature of their thinking to try to gain some insight which will take us beyond explanation.

The notion of creativity has received considerable attention in the consideration of creation, a new way of thinking of the God-world relationship. A number of theologians, in particular those with scientific training or a scientific inclination, have presented perspectives based upon this notion, an apparent thrust toward innovation, novelty, and variety.⁹² Much of this is at a scientific theoretical and conceptual level. Because it offers a significant and new way of looking at the problem, creativity appears to open promising avenues for reflection on the problem of suffering and natural evil. There are, however, critical issues that need to be identified and integrated. There are a number of approaches to, or uses of, the notion of creativity coupled with some notion of emergence, e.g., Teilhard de Chardin from a paleontology perspective, Keith Ward from

⁹⁰ Tilley, "Towards a Creativity Defense of Belief in God in the Face of Evil," 195.

⁹¹ Tilley, "Towards a Creativity Defense of Belief in God in the Face of Evil," 204.

⁹² For example, Ward, *Rational Theology and the Creativity of God*; Ian G. Barbour, *Religion in an Age of Science* (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1990); Schmitz-Moormann, *Theology of Creation in an Evolutionary World*; Arthur Peacocke, *Evolution: The Disguised Friend of Faith* (Philadelphia, PA: Templeton Foundation Press, 2004); Arthur Peacocke, *All that Is: A Naturalistic Faith for the Twenty-First Century* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2007).

the analytic tradition, Arthur Peacocke from an evolutionist perspective, and process philosophy (Alfred North Whitehead, Joseph Bracken).⁹³ In addition, a number of other authors, dealing with creativity as an aspect of their thinking on God and the universe, have adapted aspects of process thinking to their own perspectives while not necessarily considering themselves process theologians, e.g., Karl Schmitz-Moormann, Terrence Tilley, Ian Barbour. Finally, Elizabeth Johnson and Terrence Tilley have considered emergence and creativity as an aspect of creation from a neo-Thomist perspective.

TEILHARD DE CHARDIN

An early exponent of the notions of emergence based on evolution was Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881-1955), a Jesuit priest, philosopher, and paleontologist. In light of his understanding of both Darwinian evolution and from his studies in paleontology it would appear that he attempted to bring both classical dogma and this new understanding into harmony.

As early as 1920 he talks of ‘creative transformation’.

There is always only *one* creative action (identical with conservation) which continually raises creatures towards fuller-being, *by means* of their secondary activity and their earlier advances. Understood in this way, creation is not a periodic intrusion of the First Cause: it is an act co-extensive with the whole duration of the universe. God *has been creating* ever since the beginning of time, and, *seen from within*, his creation (*even his initial creation?*) takes the form of a transformation. Participated being is not introduced *in batches* which are differentiated later as a result of a non-creative modification: God is continually breathing new being into us.⁹⁴

In his thinking, while evolution in the preceding century was a hypothesis devised to meet the problem of the origin of species (and extended, particularly, to that of human origins), it became all embracing from the nuclear elements up to living beings; all of

⁹³ This choice is taken as representative. There is a larger number of authors.

⁹⁴ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *Christianity and Evolution* (Orlando, FL: Harcourt, Inc., 1974), 23; written *ca.* 1920. Emphasis in the original.

nature, scientifically viewed, is “a function of a vast and single combined process of ‘corpusculization’ and ‘complexification’, in the course of which can be distinguished the phases of a gradual and irreversible ‘interiorization’ (development of consciousness) of what we call (without knowing what it is) matter.” He posits the development from simple particles (pre-life) through the emergence of life, beings that are simply conscious, to beings that are becoming every day a little more conscious.⁹⁵ His broad view was teleological, the universe as a whole moving towards greater complexity and higher levels of consciousness; the formation of atoms, molecules and inanimate matter is followed by the development of the biosphere and organic evolution, then the appearance of man and the noosphere, evolution continuing to its culmination and unification in the Omega Point, Christ. All in all, an advanced position for its time (1953).

For him, we cannot avoid recognizing that natural evil is inherent in that it is the expression of a state of the world which is in process of formation, that is as yet incompletely organized;⁹⁶ in essence, a fact of creation, an echo of Aquinas – this is what we can expect in a material world in which scientific explanations can be given for what happens.

KEITH WARD

In *Rational Theology and the Creativity of God*, a book based upon the Cadbury Lectures in 1980, Keith Ward, an Anglican priest, theologian and analytic philosopher, presents creativity as an aspect of the creation and as an ‘attribute’ of God which offers

⁹⁵ Teilhard de Chardin, *Christianity and Evolution*, 238; published in 1968, a development in his thinking.

⁹⁶ Teilhard de Chardin, *Christianity and Evolution*, 84, written 1933.

an explanation of suffering and evil.⁹⁷ Overall, his argument relates to the nature of God and in so doing departs from the commonly held approaches to God and God's essence. To make his argument he posits a sense of temporality in God, a modification of omniscience, a sense of possibility, modification of 'perfections', and a sense of delight or pleasure, in that he conceives God as "actualizing a world in virtue of the sort of values it instantiates."⁹⁸ What is necessary is that the world actualize a set of values and contain no evil that is not an implication of a value and immeasurably greater than that value, and that on the whole it must be of unique and intrinsic value;⁹⁹ in essence, a theodicy.

ARTHUR PEACOCKE

Arthur Peacocke was a biochemist, Anglican priest, and theologian who raised the notion of chance in the Brampton Lectures of 1978.¹⁰⁰ His theology is based upon

an evolutionary perspective of the cosmological and biological sciences. This view entails an understanding of creation by God as continuous activity, so that dynamic models and metaphors of divine creation and creativity become necessary. The work of God as Creator is regarded as manifest all the time in those very natural processes that are unveiled by the sciences in all their regularities.¹⁰¹

This moves the notion of creativity beyond Ward. For Peacocke, from the evolutionary perspective, creativity is the norm, new developments arising from earlier forms.

Chance is at the root of this development, particularly thinking of the "frequent randomizations that are possible at the molecular level of DNA. The role of chance is what one would expect if the universe were so constituted that exploration of all the

⁹⁷ Ward, *Rational Theology and the Creativity of God*, 140ff.

⁹⁸ Ward, *Rational Theology and the Creativity of God*, 133. See also Ian G. Barbour, *Religion and Science: Historical and Contemporary Issues* (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, 1997), 317.

⁹⁹ Ward, *Rational Theology and the Creativity of God*, 186.

¹⁰⁰ Arthur Peacocke, *Creation and The World of Science* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1979).

¹⁰¹ Peacocke, *All that Is: A Naturalistic Faith for the Twenty-First Century*, 9.

potential organized forms of matter (both living and nonliving) were to occur.”¹⁰² He notes that this is an example of what is called emergence, the “general features of natural processes wherein complex structures, especially in living organisms, develop distinctly new capabilities and functions at levels of greater complexity.”¹⁰³ Peacocke’s approach to creativity *qua* creativity is not fully developed; rather it is an aspect of chance in evolution, “the creative interplay of chance and law in the evolution of living matter by natural selection.”¹⁰⁴ With respect to suffering and evil, “pain, suffering, and death, which have been called ‘natural evil’, appear to be inevitable concomitants of a universe that is creative of new forms, some of which are conscious and self-conscious.”¹⁰⁵ His overall perspective is a form of panentheism but distinct from that of process thought. In particular, holding both the transcendence and immanence of God, he affirms that God is causally independent of the world, the world has a derivative dependence on God, and God interacts continuously with the world.¹⁰⁶

PROCESS THOUGHT

A major proponent of creativity as a fundamental factor in the universe has been Process Thought which has influenced a large number of theologians and not only with its notion of creativity.¹⁰⁷ Process Thought stems from Alfred North Whitehead’s *Process and Reality* first published in 1929,¹⁰⁸ further elaborated by Charles Hartshorne,

¹⁰² Peacocke, *Evolution: The Disguised Friend of Faith*, 38.

¹⁰³ Peacocke, *Evolution: The Disguised Friend of Faith*, 66.

¹⁰⁴ Arthur Peacocke, "Biology and a Theology of Evolution," *Zygon* 34, no. 4 (1999), 703.

¹⁰⁵ Peacocke, "Biology and a Theology of Evolution," 705.

¹⁰⁶ He defines his position on panentheism throughout his works but the most extensive is given in Arthur Peacocke, *Theology for a Scientific Age* (Oxford, UK: Basil Blackwell, Inc., 1990), 208-209n75.

¹⁰⁷ In addition to the foregoing one could mention Wildiers, *The Theologian and his Universe: Theology and Cosmology from the Middle Ages to the Present*; Barbour, *Religion in an Age of Science*.

¹⁰⁸ A.N. Whitehead, *Process and Reality* (New York, NY: The Free Press, 1978).

and developed by, *inter alia*, John B. Cobb Jr. and David Ray Griffin in *Process Theology: An Introductory Exposition*.¹⁰⁹ Joseph Bracken, in particular in *The Divine Matrix*,¹¹⁰ has extended Whitehead's notions considering modern scientific, philosophical, and theological perspectives.¹¹¹ He considers himself a neo-Whiteheadian and works from a modified Trinitarian perspective. Whitehead proposed, argued Bracken, that instead of substance as a fundamental notion in the universe, the world consists fundamentally of a myriad of processes whereby entities are constantly coming into being and in turn being inputs to other processes which continue the cycle. At each occasion of a process God provides an initial subjective aim for its actualization but the occasion is free to use it as it wishes. This is the basis of the process-thought notion of persuasive power in God, a qualification of the notion of God's omnipotence. Thus, the freedom of the occasion can lead to decline or evil, with God constantly attempting to provide (corrective if necessary) aims to occasions for something positive; hence, for process theodicy, evil is a consequence of the freedom of the occasion. As Bracken notes, God consciously steers creativity in the right direction.¹¹²

For Whitehead, Bracken maintains, "creativity was simply a metaphysical given, something needing no further explanation ... even God is a 'creature' of creativity, since even God needs creativity to continue. In that sense creativity is even more ultimate than God within Whitehead's scheme."¹¹³ Thus, creativity is a fundamental feature of

¹⁰⁹ Cobb and Griffin, *Process Theology: An Introductory Exposition*.

¹¹⁰ Joseph A. Bracken, S.J., *The Divine Matrix* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995).

¹¹¹ Joseph A. Bracken, S.J., *Christianity and Process Thought* (Philadelphia, PA: Templeton Foundation Press, 2006); Joseph A. Bracken, S.J., *Subjectivity, Objectivity, & Intersubjectivity: A New Paradigm for Religion and Science* (Philadelphia, PA: Templeton Foundation Press, 2009).

¹¹² Bracken, *Christianity and Process Thought*, 19.

¹¹³ Bracken, *Christianity and Process Thought*, 18-19.

process thought as well as the notion of God. For this reason creativity has been described as the Ontological Ultimate and God as the Ethical Ultimate.¹¹⁴ It should be noted that process theology varies greatly from the commonly recognized attributes of God; its metaphysics is very different.

Throughout, Bracken brings a critical eye to the Thomistic philosophical and theological approach that has long dominated Western theology to let it speak, for him, more coherently and plausibly in modern times. For Bracken, Whitehead's notion of actual occasions is understood as the fundamental realities of which the world is made and creativity is a "deeper underlying reality invariably at work in the self constitution" of the occasions.¹¹⁵ Further, for him, creativity is not an entity but activity: "creativity could be the underlying nature of God, the dynamic principle or ground of the divine being, and as such, likewise the ground of all finite beings."¹¹⁶

A DEMUR

Though there are aspects of the thinking of these authors which are germane to the discussion of creativity in this dissertation there are features of these perspectives (and many like them) which give me pause. In their discussions it would appear that they are engaged in explanation of evil, engaged in theodicy. We will address this more thoroughly shortly. In addition, they make what I consider unnecessary adjustments of the traditional perspectives of God, the adjustments of the notions of what we predicate of God such as omnipotence, immutability, impassibility, omniscience, and the like, and the particular constructions placed on them. Are we trying to get a God in our own

¹¹⁴ Bracken, *Christianity and Process Thought*, 19.

¹¹⁵ Bracken, *The Divine Matrix*, 3.

¹¹⁶ Bracken, *The Divine Matrix*, 55.

image? one amenable to our thinking? Is the universe the ground or is God the ground?

As Burrell has noted:

My heuristic hypothesis contended that theologians and atheologians alike were guilty of mixing modes of inquiry: of taking the universe to be the given context for the divine-human encounter and then projecting that encounter in interpersonal terms. Such a starting point would be the expected one for natural scientists, for whom the universe is simply that: the given context for their inquiries. And if such inquirers happened also to be people of faith, it would be natural enough for them to speak of divine-human relations in interpersonal language.¹¹⁷

By contrast, Elizabeth Johnson, in "Does God Play Dice?," argues for a more discerning retrieval of "the heritage of the Thomistic tradition."¹¹⁸ She postulates that "if God works through chance, then the natural creativity of chance itself can be thought of as a mode of divine creativity in which it participates."¹¹⁹ For her "the stuff of the world has an innate creativity in virtue of which the new continuously emerges through the interplay of chance and law."¹²⁰ She suggests that Aquinas' thought is not closed to the possibilities of chance factoring into divine creative and providential action. Further,

In dialogue with contemporary science, theology understands that the Creator God is neither a maker of clocks nor an instigator of anarchy, but the one ceaselessly at work bringing overall direction and order to the free play of the undetermined realms of matter and spirit, "an Improviser of unsurpassed ingenuity." In this evolutionary world, the essential role of genuine randomness does not contradict God's providential care but somehow illumines it.¹²¹

Johnson, throughout her essay, refers to this notion of order.

Hence, in summary, we find shortcomings in the approaches to creativity. From the picture so far developed, the approaches of theodicy and the attempts by thinkers with a scientific orientation, let us now consider an alternative perspective.

¹¹⁷ David B. Burrell, *Freedom and Creation in Three Traditions* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1993), 2.

¹¹⁸ Elizabeth Johnson, "Does God Play Dice?," *Theological Studies* 57, (1996), 5.

¹¹⁹ Johnson, "Does God Play Dice?," 15-16.

¹²⁰ Johnson, "Does God Play Dice?," 7.

¹²¹ Johnson, "Does God Play Dice?," 18.

Creativity Defence

As a different perspective, let us follow Terrence Tilley in turning to this notion of creativity in creation, a different perspective on the universe, a different perspective on world order, a different world view. As a response to the question of suffering and evil, Tilley, in a second paper in *Physics and Cosmology: Scientific Perspectives on the Problem of Natural Evil*,¹²² provides a different way of considering the problem of suffering and evil, a notion of a defence of belief rather than that of theodicy, one which considers creativity as a feature of this defence.¹²³ Among the virtues of his approach is Tilley's understanding of how it adverts to an intelligibility of the profusion and variety of life in the order of cosmos while framing this intelligibility within a wider and more fundamental comprehension of our awareness of a grace-filled creation. Its attractiveness lies in its consideration of the advances in our modern understanding of world; "it suggests that God's grace is in the world as the gift of creativity, a gift visible in a universe that evolves by chance in the natural realm and by constructions in the social realm. Chance has yielded increasing complexity and consciousness in the universe that makes the social possible."¹²⁴ Hence, this suggests an exploration of creativity as to its part in a grace-filled creation. Clearly this is a way of thinking differently, a way 'informed by the resources of philosophy and an informed understanding of the universe.'

¹²² *Physics and Cosmology: Scientific Perspectives on the Problem of Natural Evil* ed. Nancey Murphy, Robert John Russell, and William R. Stoeger, S.J. (eds.) (Vatican City State: Vatican Observatory Publications, 2007).

¹²³ Tilley, "Towards a Creativity Defense of Belief in God in the Face of Evil."

¹²⁴ Tilley, "Towards a Creativity Defense of Belief in God in the Face of Evil," 202-203.

Tilley, using some of the notions from process theology and philosophy¹²⁵ and in part drawing on Johnson, sketches an outline of a defence of Christian belief, which, rather than *defending God* as in a theodicy, uses the notion of creativity as an element of the cosmos *in defence of one's belief in God* in spite of the reality of evil.¹²⁶ For him, a creativity defence “envisions that God creates a universe that can evolve entities that reflect God’s own image and likeness, the image of God as creator. ... God loved the universe enough to take the chance that creative beings would evolve in it.”¹²⁷ “Our creativity is a form of creaturely participation in the gracious agency of God available for complex entities;”¹²⁸ it is a universe with open natural systems.

He makes a careful distinction between theodicy and defenses,¹²⁹ the first, in essence, putting God in the dock while the second putting man in the dock. Each practice has a different purpose: theodicy rationalizing God’s reason for permitting evil, while a defence showing that belief in God is justified even in the face of evil. The first is presumptuous and pretentious¹³⁰ while the second is modest. The first seems to entail human preconceptions of the divine character and action, what God must be and do, what is worthy of God and what is not. Further, the first is impractical in the sense that it ignores the reality of evil and the entailed suffering; it views evil as an academic

¹²⁵ In contrast to process thought as such, Tilley notes that while he uses some of those concepts, he does not accept process thought as a system or as a theology. He finds that “process thought tends to treat God as another actual entity only a big one, and our talk of God as univocal with talk of other actual entities rather than analogical.” Tilley, “Towards a Creativity Defense of Belief in God in the Face of Evil,” 203n16.

¹²⁶ Tilley, “Towards a Creativity Defense of Belief in God in the Face of Evil,” 195-215.

¹²⁷ Tilley, “Towards a Creativity Defense of Belief in God in the Face of Evil,” 204.

¹²⁸ Tilley, “Towards a Creativity Defense of Belief in God in the Face of Evil,” 205.

¹²⁹ It should be noted that defence in this context is a defence of belief, NOT an explanation.

¹³⁰ “And what could be more pretentious than attempting to ‘justify the ways of God to us,’ as the venture of theodicy has classically been described?” Burrell, *Deconstructing Theodicy*, 13.

abstraction and, hence, denatures it. This is itself an evil; it does not face reality. For Tilley, it is important to distinguish theodicies from defences; failure to do so has serious consequences. A “defense is a response to a challenge, not the attempt to build a system.”¹³¹ In essence, the problem of evil is not a problem a human being should expect to be able to solve. Thus, for Tilley, “My basic contention is that the problems of evil generally need to be dissolved, not resolved.”¹³²

He contends that his programme could be “congruent with others who take natural science seriously as a dialogue partner for Christian theology.”¹³³ He is arguing from an analytic perspective with respect to the logical problem of evil, and addressing what he sees as a lacuna in Plantinga’s free-will defence, particularly with respect to grace.¹³⁴ In his presentation of his Creativity Defense he replaces the third proposition in the classical syllogism with “R: It is not possible for God to create a world in which entities could exercise creativity and which did not contain genuine evils.”¹³⁵ Tilley gives a good discussion of natural evil considering sensation, consciousness, and memory to distinguish inert matter, simple organic life, conscious life, and human life. He explicitly denies a rejection of divine omnipotence. Further, the creativity defence does not give reasons for God creating a world with evils in it. As he concludes, “a [creativity defence] has the potential to provide a defense of God’s goodness in the face

¹³¹ Terrence Tilley, "Theodicies in Context," in *CTSA Proceedings 50* (1995), 209.

¹³² Tilley, "Towards a Creativity Defense of Belief in God in the Face of Evil," 195.

¹³³ Tilley, "Towards a Creativity Defense of Belief in God in the Face of Evil," 195.

¹³⁴ See Tilley, "Towards a Creativity Defense of Belief in God in the Face of Evil," 200-203, for an in depth discussion of this critique.

¹³⁵ Tilley, "Towards a Creativity Defense of Belief in God in the Face of Evil," 203-204. The other two propositions are: P: God is omniscient, omnipotent, and wholly good. Q: The actual world contains genuine evils, natural, personal and social. The free-will defence has R: It is not possible that God could create a world with free creatures who never choose evil. Thus, it principally, though not exclusively, addresses moral evil.

of manifold forms of evil beyond the hackneyed ‘sin and suffering’ typically found in theodicies and defenses and accepting a traditional understanding of *poena et culpa*.”¹³⁶

In countering both the perceived tendencies of process thought and the analytic tradition, Tilley contends that this creativity defence doesn’t reduce God to another secondary agent. Similarly to Johnson, he suggests that the development of this thesis could be compatible with some contemporary forms of Thomism.

A “creativity defense” of the compatibility of believing in God with recognizing the reality of evil and evils in the world God created does not reduce God to a “secondary cause” within the world, an agent whose freedom and creativity is somehow commensurable with and in competition with the free (and creative) agency of creatures.¹³⁷

His conception is consonant with commonly used forms of theology and his emphasis is on the world, not on attributes of God. Thus, Tilley provides a pointer toward addressing the problem of suffering and evil, he sketches how a creativity defence can be made; in essence: a guide for an argument for creativity in the universe. Such a developed notion of creativity can add to our understanding and delight in creation and it appears to shed light on aspects of suffering and evil in the world. In essence, Tilley offers a way of thinking differently about the question of evil.

Critique of Theodicy

Let us now turn to a more focussed consideration of theodicy. Tilley has written extensively on theodicy¹³⁸ particularly emphasizing that the practice itself is an evil in

¹³⁶ Tilley, "Towards a Creativity Defense of Belief in God in the Face of Evil," 215.

¹³⁷ Tilley, "Towards a Creativity Defense of Belief in God in the Face of Evil," 202.

¹³⁸ Tilley, "The Use and Abuse of Theodicy; Tilley, *The Evils of Theodicy*; Tilley, "The Problems of Theodicy: A Background Essay." There was a considerable reaction to his *The Evils of Theodicy*, particularly in a Review Symposium published in *Horizons* as "Towards a Creativity Defense", 18/2 (1991), 290-312. Four authors reviewed the book looking at different aspects, but in general all agreed with his contention that theodicy as a practice is evil. Similarly in *CTSA Proceedings* 50 (1995): 192-200, two authors reviewed *The Evils of Theodicy* along with a reply by Tilley.

that it contributes to the problems and not the solution.¹³⁹ “To do theodicy is not to participate in merely an assertive discourse, but to declare that evils are mere abstractions to be dealt with only by theory. ... a practice that creates more evils than it explains.”¹⁴⁰ ‘Evil’ becomes a bloodless abstraction; it ignores the harsh facticity of evil.¹⁴¹ For him, considering the practice of theodicy, the problem can be shaped to “a problem of figuring out what kind of God – *if any* – is plausible as an explanation of the origins of the universe as we find it.”¹⁴² It would appear that theodicy construes the reality of evils as evidence against ‘the God-hypothesis’, as if it were a hypothesis subject to verification or falsification. Clearly, this is a “falsification of the commitment of religious faith and a misconstrual in the basic issues involved in religious commitment.”¹⁴³

Further, with respect to its practitioners, as he has noted, “There is a peculiarity of contemporary theodicy in that theodacists also rewrite the past as if all writings on suffering and sin were not only commensurable, but also contributions to the conversation constituted in the Enlightenment. ... Theodacists mine an earlier author to ‘find’ answers – and then often displace the ‘theodacies’ they ‘find.’”¹⁴⁴ Picking up on the notion of the design argument, he contends that its attraction, particularly to those engaged in the theology and natural science discussions, leads to the notion that evil is in

¹³⁹ Tilley, "Towards a Creativity Defense of Belief in God in the Face of Evil," 195.

¹⁴⁰ Tilley, "The Problems of Theodicy: A Background Essay," 47.

¹⁴¹ Tilley, "The Problems of Theodicy: A Background Essay," 38.

¹⁴² Jeffrey Stout, *The Flight from Authority: Religion, Morality and the Quest for Autonomy* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), 123, as cited in Tilley, "The Problems of Theodicy: A Background Essay," 40. Emphasis in the original.

¹⁴³ Tilley, "Towards a Creativity Defense of Belief in God in the Face of Evil," 197-198.

¹⁴⁴ Tilley, "The Problems of Theodicy: A Background Essay," 47.

some way necessary in the universe for there to be good, a false form of necessity.¹⁴⁵

From his perspective, he has noted that the practice of theodicy can be insidious, particularly for those with a scientific bent.¹⁴⁶

Alternative Possibilities

How have we got here? Are there alternatives? The literature indicates an impasse. On the one hand there are a variety of theodicies,¹⁴⁷ on the other there is serious criticism of the practice of theodicy as such.¹⁴⁸ For example, David Burrell considers that Terrence Tilley “trashes the very idea of theodicy”.¹⁴⁹ Some authors suggest that the notion of theodicy is misplaced¹⁵⁰ and that, rather than trying to give a solution, we should refrain from explanation for other ways of rendering the enigma intelligible.¹⁵¹

In contrast to the theodicy approach, Paul Ricœur’s reflections on the problem of evil in “Evil, a Challenge to Philosophy and Theology,” indicate a turning point that has occurred in a philosophical theology with respect to how the question of evil is currently stated. “What the problem of evil calls into question is a way of thinking submitted to the requirements of logical coherence, that is, one submitted to both the rule of non-

¹⁴⁵ Tilley, "The Problems of Theodicy: A Background Essay," 37.

¹⁴⁶ Tilley, "The Problems of Theodicy: A Background Essay," 47.

¹⁴⁷ A broad cross-section can be found in Barry Whitney, *What Are They Saying About God and Evil?*

¹⁴⁸ See particularly Tilley, "The Use and Abuse of Theodicy," 304-319; Tilley, *The Evils of Theodicy*; Tilley, "The Problems of Theodicy: A Background Essay," 35-51.

¹⁴⁹ Burrell, *Deconstructing Theodicy*, 108.

¹⁵⁰ Michael Vertin, "Philosophy of God, Theology, and the Problems of Evil," in *Lonergan Workshop 3* (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1982), 149-178; Ricœur, "Evil, a Challenge to Philosophy and Theology," Chapter 14, 249-261; Burrell, *Deconstructing Theodicy*.

¹⁵¹ Burrell, *Deconstructing Theodicy*, 123.

contradiction and that of systematic totalization.”¹⁵² In addition, Ricœur calls into question the propositional nature of theodicies.¹⁵³ What seems to be assumed is that the propositional form of the statements of theodicy is never to be questioned nor the requirement of coherence.¹⁵⁴ Further, there is the apparent intertwining, if not conflation, of the notions of evil as wrongdoing and evil as suffering. Is not all suffering “in one way or another the punishment for some personal or collective fault, either known or unknown? It is this dark background of both guilt and suffering that makes evil such a unique enigma.”¹⁵⁵ What Ricœur calls for is a new form of question in the mode of philosophical theology; “Do we find an invitation to think less about the problem or a provocation to think more, or to think differently about it?”¹⁵⁶

As a mode of understanding we have discovered that the scientism arising from the Enlightenment itself is ‘flat’, its presumptions are inadequate. And yet, the challenge remains, the difficulty of holding together of a sound belief in God’s goodness and the goodness of creation in the face of the evils in the universe. Thus there is a need for a way of thinking differently, one that draws on and is informed by the resources of philosophy and an informed understanding of the universe, yet in which it is the theological meaning that holds the promise of opening up horizons for asking the questions and seeking to understand differently.

Thus the impasse between theodicies on the one hand and serious criticism of the practice of theodicy has not closed the door on possible directions that continue to seek a

¹⁵² Ricœur, "Evil, a Challenge to Philosophy and Theology," 249.249. See also Tilley, "The Problems of Theodicy: A Background Essay," 43ff.

¹⁵³ Ricœur, "Evil, a Challenge to Philosophy and Theology," 249.

¹⁵⁴ Ricœur, "Evil, a Challenge to Philosophy and Theology," 249.

¹⁵⁵ Ricœur, "Evil, a Challenge to Philosophy and Theology," 250-251.

¹⁵⁶ Ricœur, "Evil, a Challenge to Philosophy and Theology," 249.

theological understanding of a response to the question of natural evil in the universe, an understanding that draws on the resources of a philosophical reflection. Nevertheless, work remains to be done on elaborating a form of ‘theological’ understanding addressing this question of natural evil, that is, a form addressing the dimension of our cosmic life and order, inviting a mode of understanding informed by the intrinsic intelligibility of the order of creation as an act of God.

Two aspects seem critical. The first concerns the premises regarding God’s action as creator, and hence, implicitly, how an understanding of the nature of the relationship between God and creation is to be conceived. Included in this is the manner in which such references either appeal to, or desire to distance themselves from, the heritage and resources of distinct theological traditions, e.g., classical Thomism, process thought, analytic philosophy. The second concerns the emergence of the meaning or elaboration of a notion of creativity itself as this relates to a notion of a world view that is an intelligibility of cosmic order. These world views or orderings have in large part been informed by developments in modern science. It would appear that today theological reflection should speak about God’s relation to the probabilistic, dynamic, emergent, self-organizing universe described by modern natural and biological sciences,¹⁵⁷ thereby advancing reflection for our times. It should be noted of theological reflection that “[a]t its best it can be faith seeking understanding (*fides quaerens intellectum*), but even this prescind from rational justification of the faith. I would urge that the only defensible theology is one that consists of ‘understanding seeking faith’ (*intellectus quaerens fidem*), in which ‘understanding’ must include that of the natural

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Johnson, "Does God Play Dice?," 4.

and human worlds which the sciences have *inter alia* unveiled.”¹⁵⁸ Still, given developments that reflect on the intelligibility of world order itself, particularly in the area of emergence,¹⁵⁹ there remains the further understanding of how these reflections have a bearing on the question of natural evil itself.

In my view, implied in this understanding is a prior and essential notion of creation, a notion which also addresses such issues as sustaining the universe as well as the originary act of creation. Moreover, a re-examination from this perspective of the theological foundations of a notion of creation can in turn offer a better perspective on the intelligibility of the universe, our notion of world. This in turn should help in rethinking an approach to understanding suffering and natural evil, helping one rediscover the goodness of God and the goodness of creation amid the challenges to such belief. Given the nature of our question on natural evil and its own philosophical exigencies, following Tilley and Johnson’s suggestion I propose the reconsideration of a Thomistic line of thought, to re-examine its resources of meaning and understanding, to let it speak to us today, to help us think differently.

It is the integration of these elements in the work of David Burrell, one of the foremost scholars on the theological topic of creation today that is so attractive. As we shall see, Burrell invites us to think the question differently from the perspective of a philosophical theology; he invites us to examine, address, and revise current presuppositions that have shaped the challenges: a deeper understanding of God as

¹⁵⁸ Arthur Peacocke, "Science and the Future of Theology: Critical Issues," *Zygon* 35, no. 1 (2000), 130-131.

¹⁵⁹ William R. Stoeger, S.J. and Nancey Murphy, *Evolution and Emergence: Systems, Organisms, Persons* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2007).

Creator and, as a consequence, what we mean when we refer to the intelligibility of order in creation; and as a consequence, he opens lines of a new approach to the question of natural evil. His extensive reflections and elaboration of the meaning of God as Creator, creation, and the God world relationship and the critical depth of his understanding of a philosophical theology, all of which introduce critical correctives to our presuppositions, show every promise of taking up Tilley's and Ricœur's challenge to think the question differently.

Hence, this dissertation draws on Burrell's reflections on creation and on God as creator as a foundation to advance the conversations on natural evil. Therefore, the aim of this dissertation is to bring the resources of Burrell's reflection on creation – the language of God as creator and the sense of ordering in the universe – to advance an approach to the question of natural evil.

Summary

We have examined aspects of the question of evil from the ancients to the modern day and found that evil is not a single problem but part of various issues. From this we examined the notion of theodicy, an attempt at explaining evil, particularly attempts at vindication of God in view of evil. We examined various approaches as to their adequacy and found them all lacking in some way or other. The primary argument against theodicy is that it treats evil as an abstraction ignoring its harsh facticity and treating the reality of evils as evidence against 'the God-hypothesis', as if it were a hypothesis subject to verification or falsification. The literature indicates an impasse. There is a need for new ways of looking at the problem of natural evil, a way of thinking differently. As Thomas Tracey has observed, "The tradition has substantive

commitments well worth exploring and refining, resources which merit detailed philosophical scrutiny, and contemporary re-appropriation.”¹⁶⁰

As has been noted, Christian theological history has shown some achievement over the centuries in addressing the challenge of the holding together of a sound belief in God’s goodness and the goodness of creation in the face of the evils in the universe, formulations which can speak to us today but need a fresh examination as to their development and adaptation for our age. My question: in addressing the question of natural evil, can the issues identified by a creativity defence be developed within this long held Thomist understanding?

Wishing to maintain my continuity with the classical Western tradition “while also arguing that the mainstream of that tradition coheres with the emerging worldview so mightily informed by natural science,”¹⁶¹ this dissertation follows David Burrell’s retrieval of Thomism. As was mentioned earlier, Burrell, an excellent modern scholar on the theological topic of creation, is deeply informed in both philosophy and theology and has developed a particular perspective on philosophical theology, one that forms the method for this dissertation.

If the question of natural evil within philosophical theology is to be advanced, the development of implications involved in the notion of God as creator and God’s creation appears promising, implications related to the structural features named above. Therefore, this dissertation attempts to reformulate the question of natural evil, to think

¹⁶⁰ Thomas Tracy, "Introduction," in *Philosophy and the Christian Faith* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), 8.

¹⁶¹ Larson, "Reifying Analogy in Natural Theology," 339; a reference to Schmitz-Moormann, *Theology of Creation in an Evolutionary World*.

differently about the creator and, particularly about God's creation. We will advance and develop its implications by drawing on the work of David Burrell, his own reflections on God as creator and God's creation and their import for addressing the question of natural evil. Hence I turn to an examination of David Burrell's theological understanding and his employment of philosophical theology.

But where shall wisdom be found? And where is the place of understanding? Job 28:12

2. BURRELL AND THEOLOGICAL UNDERSTANDING

As stated, a primary strategy of this dissertation is to bring the resources of David Burrell's reflections on creation, its implications for our language of God as creator, and for our sense of the intelligibility of the universe, to the question of natural evil. The value of Burrell's reflections lies in our appreciation of his understanding to help us think the question of natural evil differently. The aim of this chapter, then, is to explore the basis of this strategy in Burrell and to propose its benefits for a re-thinking of the common approach to the question of natural evil. Important in this is Burrell's perspective on philosophical theology, a perspective which provides the method for this dissertation.

This chapter consists of two major steps. The first step examines Burrell's formation, what were the influences and how did these shape his development of his perspective of what he terms 'philosophical theology'? In addition to his formation as a Catholic philosopher and theologian, I would suggest a seminal influence was his stay in the Middle East where he delved deeply into Aquinas' roots in Jewish and Muslim philosophy. The second major step provides an elucidation of Burrell's approach to theology, in particular philosophical theology. In his hands, the approach of philosophical theology consists of a subtle transposition of the way we are invited to think theologically about the relation between faith and reason. More specifically, the manner in which Burrell conceives of this relationship invites us to undertake the entire enterprise of understanding, and hence our approach to such critical questions as natural evil, from the side of a *confession of faith*. Therefore, the beginning of reflection on

such critical issues does not begin with an articulation of either the more refined notions of God or the world themselves or even the modes of asking questions; rather, the beginning consists of a heightened awareness and attentiveness of the believer him/herself to the dialogical context of the confession of faith itself.

In Burrell's contribution to the question of evil, *Deconstructing Theodicy*, before there is theology there is the Word addressed to the theologian; before there is theology there is the response in the heart of the believer to the Word addressed. That relationship taken up with the heart of the experience, as Tilley has maintained, of the surplus of life as gift, as grace, becomes the starting point. As we shall examine in more detail below, it is precisely this perspective within philosophical theology that will assist us in appreciating the movement within Burrell's reflections on creation.

These reflections, begun earlier in his career, on the theological grammar employed to name God and to name God as creator, have continued through to his recent works. They have assumed their more recent development in Burrell's on-going reflections on God as creator in the context of his investigations and dialogue among the three monotheistic faiths, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. In short, an examination of Burrell's understanding of philosophical theology will set us on the course of exploring how Burrell's work may invite us to think the question of natural evil in a different way.

Burrell's Trajectory

As an introduction to the thought of David Burrell it may be useful to look briefly at his formation, a trajectory revealing a development in thinking.¹ He completed his undergraduate training in 1955 and entered the novitiate of the Congregation of Holy

¹ This is developed from Burrell, *Questing for Understanding* and Burrell, "Brief Bio".

Cross and then off to Rome at the Gregorian where he obtained his licentiate in 1960 and where he was strongly influenced by Bernard Lonergan. Ordained in 1961 he spent a year at Laval immersed in the texts of Thomas Aquinas where he had “the experience of concentrated textual study of Aquinas at Laval, in the wake of the intellectual stimulation afforded by studies with Bernard Lonergan. ... I was then equipped to move beyond a narrowly ‘Thomist’ construal of Aquinas, setting the stage for appreciating his thought in its proper context with its potential reach.”² He then went to Yale where in 1965 received his Ph.D. His early training formed him as a philosopher. His early emphasis was on the use of language, particularly analogy in Thomas Aquinas, and he studied the clash between Aquinas and John Duns Scotus, a clash of the ways that one can speak intelligently of the God one worships, a conflict between analogy as an example of polyvalence in language and that of univocity.³ This resulted in *Analogy and Philosophical Language* (1973) followed by two additional books: *Exercises in Religious Understanding* (1974) and *Aquinas: God and Action* (1979), all influenced by Wittgenstein. He became a member of the faculty of philosophy at Notre Dame in 1964.

In 1971 he took up the position as Chair of the Department of Theology at Notre Dame just at the time the university was instituting an ecumenical orientation, particularly with the establishment of the Tantur Ecumenical Institute in Jerusalem in 1972. Hence, Burrell had the opportunity to acquire broader philosophical references on behalf of developing a substantively enriched theological discourse about God. At the same time, he had to incorporate a Judaica position into the faculty by restructuring the

² Burrell, *Questing for Understanding*, 38.

³ David B. Burrell, *Analogy and Philosophical Language* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1973), x.

studies of Hebrew scriptures, New Testament, and the early church under the heading: Judaism and Christianity in Antiquity,⁴ an endeavour that took him beyond administration to expand his disciplinary horizons which “would soon direct me to explore the fruitful interaction among Jewish, Christian, and Muslim intellectuals in medieval times, a step that would engage both Jerusalem and Cairo.”⁵ In 1980, leaving his position as Chair of the Department of Theology, he served a term as rector of Tantur deepening his understanding of Judaism. This was followed by a further year of Arabic study and intensive reading in Islamic and Jewish philosophies of the medieval period, thereby laying the groundwork for a major shift in his thinking, consolidated in the next four years at the Institut Dominicain d’Études Orientales in Cairo.

As a consequence of his stay in both Jerusalem and Cairo, where he furthered his knowledge of Hebrew and came to be literate in Arabic, Burrell became sensitive to the degree to which Aquinas “found critical inspiration from both Jewish and Islamic thinkers for his sustained project of showing how ‘sacred doctrine’ could be a proper ‘mode of knowing,’” and he began “comparative studies in an explicit way.”⁶ He noticed how students of Aquinas in the West had in fact failed to follow Aquinas’ citation trail to understand the role these Jewish and Muslim thinkers played in Aquinas’ work.⁷ Burrell was fascinated to discover the extent of interaction among these societies at that time, confirming an idea that the classical Christian synthesis of Thomas Aquinas

⁴ David B. Burrell, "The Abrahamic Faiths in their New Context," in *World Christianity in Context and Encounter: Festschrift in Honour of David Kerr*, ed. Stephen Goodwin (London, New York: Continuum, 2009), 84.

⁵ Burrell, *Questing for Understanding*, 48.

⁶ Burrell, "Brief Bio".

⁷ Burrell, "The Abrahamic Faiths in their New Context," 88; Burrell, *Questing for Understanding*, 72.

was an interfaith and intercultural achievement, the fruitful interaction among Jewish, Christian, and Muslim intellectuals in medieval times, and discovering “the effects of Jewish and Islamic thinkers on Thomas Aquinas’ composition of his *Summa Theologiae*. ... The results of that study detail how this recognizably premier synthesis of Christian theology could in fact count as an interfaith, intercultural achievement.”⁸ Thus Burrell further expanded his theological perspective and in turn deepened his philosophical one, thereby helping shape his approach to philosophical theology.

BURRELL’S RETRIEVAL OF AQUINAS AND THE MEDIEVAL PHILOSOPHERS

As Burrell has noted, the appreciation by the medievals of the Hellenic philosophical tradition came through Islamic and Jewish thinkers who profited from the flourishing of knowledge in Baghdad from the 9th cent. The cultural heritage and achievements in “medicine, mathematics, astronomy, as well as the logic, philosophical commentary, translation, and original work in metaphysics begun in the tenth-century represented a legacy coveted by western medieval thinkers.”⁹ There was a profusion of translating due to Caliph al-Ma’amun’s founding of the Beit al-Hikma [House of Wisdom] in Baghdad in 830.¹⁰ Aquinas paid particular attention to the writings of Maimonides (Moses ben Maimon) (1135-1204), a Jew, and Avicenna (Ibn Sina) (980-1037), a Muslim, “as fellow travelers in an arduous intellectual attempt to reconcile the horizons of philosophers of ancient Greece, notably Aristotle, with those reflecting a

⁸ Burrell, *Questing for Understanding*, 54.

⁹ David B. Burrell, "Aquinas and Islamic and Jewish thinkers," in *The Cambridge Companion to AQUINAS* ed. Norman Kretzmann and Eleonore Stump (Cambridge, UK Cambridge University Press, 1993), 61.

¹⁰ Burrell, "Aquinas Appropriation of *Liber de Causis* to Articulate the Creator as Cause-of-Being," 75.

revelation originating in ancient Israel, articulated initially in the divinely inspired writings of Moses. ... With Maimonides and Avicenna his relationship was more akin to that among interlocutors;”¹¹ one finds the traces of what is styled a ‘conversation’ although the interlocutors were of different times but the struggle was the same and the developed understanding was from one to the other, each building upon his predecessor.

As a consequence of his stay in Jerusalem and Cairo, Burrell completed a comparative study of emanation and creation in Avicenna, Maimonides, and Aquinas, a basic notion of creation as act, as they all searched for ways to articulate their understanding of God as a free creator, a study resulting in *Knowing the Unknowable God* (1986) and further in *Freedom and Creation in Three Traditions* (1993). This understanding of the relation between these various philosophers strongly influenced Burrell in much of his further work through extensive reflection and writing on the interrelationships between Judaism, Islam and Christianity.¹² Thus his thinking is broad, modern, yet steeped in the tradition.

AN ORIENTATION

With this background on Burrell’s formation let us begin with our first major step, an elucidation of Burrell’s approach to theology, in particular philosophical theology. I have made frequent use of the expression ‘thinking differently’ and frequent reference to David Burrell as providing a way of thinking differently. As noted in the

¹¹ Burrell, "Aquinas and Islamic and Jewish thinkers," 60.

¹² Aside from his four translations of Islamic works, there are four books directly on the subject: *Knowing the Unknowable God: Ibn-Sina, Maimonides, Aquinas*; *Freedom and Creation in Three Traditions*; *Learning to Trust in Freedom: Signs from Jewish, Christian and Muslim Traditions*; *Towards a Jewish-Christian-Muslim Theology*; as well as deeply influencing numerous papers from 1983 to today, many of which are found in David B. Burrell, *Faith and Freedom* (Malden, MA, Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishing, 2004).

Introduction, it is precisely the deeper meanings that David Burrell's explorations have uncovered of the meaning of God as creator and creation in Christian tradition (in dialogue with other monotheistic traditions) that holds every promise of inviting us to think, to think differently, about God's relation to this world and of natural evil. Therefore, it is now time to give 'thinking differently' some meaning rather than merely as a contrast to the thinking common in scientific circles and, as well, in discussions of theodicy. As said earlier, we need an approach which enables us to consider the question at a theological level.

Burrell invites us to begin with religion.

IT REMAINS A NICE question whether one can treat of God prescinding from any religious tradition, for should one try to do so, the implicit moorings of the discussion may betray the tradition one attempted to leave behind. I prefer to be more straightforward, acknowledging that humankind's primary relations with divinity occur in religious settings, and that the major religious communities have also developed sophisticated patterns of reflection on that interaction. It would be foolish, in the name of a pretended objectivity, to try to proceed in philosophical theology without the intellectual assistance of those traditions of faith.¹³

For our purposes religion is considered as an organized collection of attitudes beliefs and practices, related to someone or something utterly transcendent, what we commonly name as God, and, more particularly, a way of living embodying our understanding of ourselves and our search to respond to that transcendence, a 'form of life'.¹⁴ "Concretely, religion is encountered as a complex set of practices bearing on the relation of man to what is holy, practices which are intricately interrelated with all those other practices the sum of which define human existence."¹⁵ Burrell notes with approbation, and perhaps with appropriation, that in Augustine's time, philosophy itself

¹³ Burrell, *Knowing the Unknowable God*, 1.

¹⁴ David B. Burrell, "Religious Life and Understanding," *The Review of Metaphysics* 22, no. 4 (1969), 699.

¹⁵ C.F. Delaney, *Rationality and Religious Belief* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1979), 6.

entailed a “mode of thinking as involving the entirety of a person’s relation to the universe, and so comprehending not just a ‘set of beliefs’ but a way of life as well: a way of life embodied in a set of practices that embraces one’s life and forms one’s attitudes.”¹⁶ In this sense, his approach follows Wittgenstein. Among these practices one notes: worship, the liturgy, the sacraments, prayer, study, and concern and care for others. Faith is trust in this way of living, of one’s existence. We will return to these notions in Chapter 6.

For Burrell, following from Augustine, “Christian faith differs from ordinary belief in being a response to an utterly gratuitous invitation, which could never be initiated by persons themselves.”¹⁷ As such, it provides the context within which one does theology, within which one tries to understand that in which one believes. This could also be said of Thomas Aquinas.

There is something gratuitous about a religious form of life. And that would be true whatever the prevailing cultural or philosophical assessment of it as a form of life. Gratitude is at the heart of religion in the measure that it embodies men’s response to their God articulated in cult and life. Religion is neither an enterprise nor a duty, though men and nations may press it into either mold. As a response, it retains a measure of freedom, and remains as free as the invitation is gracious.

In that measure, any attempt to insist that men must be religious to experience their full humanity, or conversely to identify the norm of human fulfillment with being religious, subverts what is most precious: grace. ... What religion offers to man is gratuitous, then, yet turns out to be utterly central to his understanding of himself. Hence a religious person is likely to consider religion indispensable to anyone’s becoming what he is to become, because of the role it plays in his own life. Yet were he to do so, he would betray what makes religion so integral to his experience. That is, of course, its very gratuity, which allows him to understand himself as one responding.

What religion offers to understanding, then, is not primarily data, but rather a new light on oneself as responsive.¹⁸

As Burrell observes, given that religious belief is, in fact, belief in God, and God is taken to be “the beginning and end of all things, and of reasoning creatures

¹⁶ David B. Burrell, "Theology and Philosophy," *Lonergan Workshop* 16, (2000), 76.

¹⁷ Burrell, *Learning to Trust in Freedom*, 74.

¹⁸ Burrell, "Religious Life and Understanding," 698.

especially,”¹⁹ then “such belief must constitute an orientation of one’s entire life.”²⁰ Hence, the pursuit of understanding this belief becomes a life-long quest, the basic orientation being that of Anselm’s “faith seeking understanding” found in many of Burrell’s writings. How we understand ourselves and our individual and shared destiny is the perspective we use in understanding “religious accounts of the world.” Those accounts provide the framework shaping that understanding; “there is no independent standpoint from which one can justify a religious belief once we understand the role such a belief plays in shaping our basic intentions toward the world.” However, there are different ways of understanding these basic intentions, and different versions of them. Our capacity to bring different versions to bear on our life in a variety of ways, and so test our versions, as well as to come to a more nuanced understanding of them and their role, will be involved in the continual testing and justification of one’s religious belief.²¹ In our attempts at understanding “we ought not to approach them as though they offer explanations, but rather name them for what they are: convictions – convictions that there is a sense to it all, not that we can make sense of it all.”²² As he notes, this greater richness of understanding is quite different from explanation “even if philosophers tend to equate understanding with explaining.”²³ And for Burrell, as a student of Lonergan, understanding is predicated upon judgement, not certitude. I would assert that such thinking about the universe, i.e., about what is, is a perspective which underlies Burrell’s reflections on God as creator.

¹⁹ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 1, THEOLOGY, 1.2 Intro., extensively cited by Burrell.

²⁰ David B. Burrell, “Religious Belief and Rationality,” in *Rationality and Religious Belief* ed. C.F. Delaney (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1979), 84.

²¹ A paraphrase of Burrell, “Religious Belief and Rationality,” 110.

²² Burrell, *Learning to Trust in Freedom*, 45.

²³ Burrell, *Deconstructing Theodicy*, 117.

Further, in contrast to those who seek assurance that God exists before engaging in religious practices, those who participate in such practices come to understand their inextricable nature with a conviction of the reality of God.²⁴ He notes, seeking truth entails meeting others, journeying with them, for truth is not something we start with but something we discover. “We might say, mimicking Wittgenstein, if truth is to be had, it will only be had in a tradition, within a community, in the company of friends.”²⁵ We will further address such notions of trust, friendship and community later as enriching the framework within which we address our experiences and understandings of the world, all of which have implications for the question of natural evil.²⁶

As a student of Bernard Lonergan,²⁷ David Burrell’s orientation is one of understanding, not logical explanation, referring to Lonergan’s disdain ‘for certitude’.²⁸ For Burrell, if you follow Lonergan you are always asking questions. It’s the search for understanding that matters, not the need for logical certitude. It is the Aquinas less preoccupied with system than with exploration, which Bernard Lonergan tried to convey to his students, that is, “one constantly searching for ways to put the philosophy which the west had so recently inherited at the service of Augustine’s ideal of ‘faith seeking understanding.’”²⁹ Lonergan’s analysis of Aquinas showed “by a careful analysis of

²⁴ Burrell, "Religious Belief and Rationality," 100.

²⁵ David B. Burrell, *Friendship and Ways to Truth* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2000), 1-2.

²⁶ Chapter 6, *infra*, 256.

²⁷ For example, Burrell, *Friendship and Ways to Truth*, 45-50; Burrell, *Questing for Understanding*, 26-34.

²⁸ David B. Burrell, "The New Aquinas," in *God's Advocates* (Cambridge, UK: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2005), 129; Burrell, *Questing for Understanding*, 27. See also David B. Burrell, "Religious Experience and Religious Truth: The Contribution of Philosophy Today," *Irish Theological Quarterly* 62, (1996/1997), 188-191; David B. Burrell, "Philosophy and religion: Attention to language and the role of reason," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 38, (1995), 114-120.

²⁹ Burrell, "Religious Experience and Religious Truth," 189.

Aquinas' way of speaking about concept formation ... that understanding (*intelligere*), not abstraction, dominated Aquinas' epistemology."³⁰ And following Lonergan, rather than automatically assuming abstraction, Aquinas' thinking, his apparent stress on understanding, leads to: "In effect, the Augustinian *lumen interiore Dei* becomes in Aquinas the *intellectus agens*: the operative source of understanding which allows persons to grasp the point and to judge its veracity for themselves."³¹ Burrell refers to Lonergan as opening his eyes to the astuteness of Aquinas.³²

Lonergan was interested in forming people who could think, who were able to take up issues as they arise without any pre-set agenda, who were seeking to understand; that is, in treating these various questions, they were "encouraged to use whatever tools are available— analytic, hermeneutic, phenomenological – without preconceived notions regarding their appropriateness to philosophical inquiry."³³ Thus, Lonergan's mentorship of Burrell introduced him into a life of constant inquiry,³⁴ an inquiry as a quest, a quest which presses onward, "at best asymptotically to its motivating goal."³⁵ Further, "what Lonergan dubbed the 'quest for understanding' inescapably involves translating from one tradition to another, and to realize the delicacy of judgment required for faithful rendering of another's thought,"³⁶ essentially a task in hermeneutics.

³⁰ David B. Burrell, "Linguistic Perspectives," *Listening* 9, (1974), 164. It should be noted that the term 'abstraction' in Lonergan's oeuvre is not abstraction in the logical sense, but rather in terms of understanding.

³¹ Burrell, "Linguistic Perspectives," 165.

³² Burrell, *Analogy and Philosophical Language*, xi.

³³ David B. Burrell, "Lonergan and Philosophy of Religion," *Method* 4, no. 1 (1986), 1-2.

³⁴ Burrell, *Questing for Understanding*, 22, 41.

³⁵ Burrell, *Friendship and Ways to Truth*, 46. One notes that Burrell's autobiography is titled *Questing for Understanding*.

³⁶ Burrell, "Philosophy and religion," 124.

Burrell's approach to understanding, therefore, entails a reserve vis-à-vis a narrow perspective of *simply* reason. In discussing faith as a mode of knowing,³⁷ suggesting that faith and reason might complement one another, Burrell marks a move beyond the thought categories of modernism noting, in particular, Newman's *Grammar of Assent*,³⁸ "composed to counter a set of Cartesian presumptions regarding paradigmatic rational inquiry in the heyday of modernity."³⁹ He speaks of Newman's *Grammar of Assent* "as a powerful corrective to rationalistic accounts of human reasoning in the teeth of an overweening confidence in human progress attributed to context-less reason,"⁴⁰ not denigrating reason but cautioning in its employment. As well, this attitude correlates with the aforementioned 'disdain for certitude'.

As a consequence of this reserve toward rationality as the sole norm, Burrell's view of philosophy is also carefully nuanced. While solidly trained as a philosopher he feels that rather than being primarily theoretical, philosophy is more reflective than that and more fruitfully pursued as ongoing criticism than as theory building:⁴¹

for reason is employed precisely to unravel conundrums, remove obstacles, clear a path to better understanding. Reason is not asked to lead so much as to assess; it is the heart which leads, yet a heart purified by practices and enlightened by discernment. In this respect, Aquinas' treatment of faith becomes particularly relevant to a post-modern exploration of knowledge and truth. For if all inquiry is fiduciary, reason will invariably be led by the heart, as Augustine reminded us at the outset of his Confessions.⁴²

Burrell seeks a way, known in the past, of a concept of philosophy that is not inflated but rather "answers to its originating impulse of wonder while retaining a properly self-

³⁷ David B. Burrell, "Recent Scholarship on Aquinas," *Modern Theology* 18, no. 1 (2002), 110.

³⁸ John Henry Cardinal Newman, *An Essay in Aid of A Grammar of Assent*, Introduction by Nicholas Lash ed. (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1979).

³⁹ Burrell, "The Challenge to Medieval Christian Philosophy: Relating Creator to Creatures," 140.

⁴⁰ Burrell, "Freedom and Creation in the Abrahamic Traditions," 143.

⁴¹ Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action*. 33.

⁴² Burrell, "Philosophy and religion," 113. See also 109-110. The notion of inquiry resting on fiduciary premises is also discussed in Burrell, *Learning to Trust in Freedom*, 3.

critical edge.”⁴³ This orientation, rooted in faith and religious tradition, i.e., a way of being, of living, along with a sense of a world that is intelligible, one that can be understood, such understanding using a variety of approaches such as to expand our philosophical categories, not at the level of explanation alone (i.e., concepts and categories) but at the level of the dynamism of understanding itself, is an aspect of Burrell’s understanding that is critical for our approach to the question of natural evil, to help us ‘think differently’, beyond a narrow ‘conceptualist’ or excessively ‘rationalist’ approach.

A Perspective on Philosophical Theology

At this juncture it is appropriate to consider philosophical theology, whose strategies of investigation this dissertation wishes to explore. Tertullian (*ca.* 160 – *ca.* 225) declaimed, What has Athens to do with Jerusalem? ... or the Academy with the Church?, i.e.,

What indeed has Athens to do with Jerusalem? What concord is there between the Academy and the Church? what between heretics and Christians? Our instruction comes from “the porch of Solomon,” who had himself taught that “the Lord should be sought in simplicity of heart.” Away with all attempts to produce a mottled Christianity of Stoic, Platonic, and dialectic composition! We want no curious disputation after possessing Christ Jesus, no inquisition after enjoying the gospel! With our faith, we desire no further belief. For this is our palmary faith, that there is nothing which we ought to believe besides.⁴⁴

However, to the contrary, the early church used philosophy as appropriate to its needs as an aid in understanding its belief. A salient example is the four-century faith struggle culminating in the development of the so-called Nicene Creed (325, 451).⁴⁵ Further, as

⁴³ Burrell, "Theology and Philosophy," 75.

⁴⁴ Tertullian, *De praescriptione Haereticorum* (*The Prescription Against Heretics*), VII Pagan Philosophy the Parent of Heresies. The Connection Between Deflections from Christian Faith and the Old Systems of Pagan Philosophy.

⁴⁵ Burrell, *Freedom and Creation in Three Traditions*, 61; Burrell, "Creation and ‘Actualism’: The Dialectical Dimension of Philosophical Theology," 77.

Augustine noted: “Therefore do not seek to understand in order to believe, but believe that thou mayest understand; since, ‘except ye believe, ye shall not understand.’”⁴⁶

Anselm (*ca.* 1033 – 1109) originally titled the *Proslogium (A Discourse)* as “Faith Seeking Understanding.”⁴⁷ Thomas Aquinas was not averse to using philosophical methods in his work, reflecting philosophically within a theistic perspective; he made extensive use of Aristotle for example. However, as Quinn and Taliaferro note, “From the Enlightenment on ... philosophy of religion increasingly took the form of philosophical reflection on religion as a cultural phenomenon from an external and sometimes highly critical point of view.”⁴⁸ The emphasis became more on “what can be established about the existence and nature of God by means of human reason unaided by revelation.”⁴⁹ The resistance of philosophy to faith came to a peak during the early analytic phase of philosophy early in the 20th century. As noted in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, “For most of the twentieth century, the vast majority of English language philosophy – including philosophy of religion – went on without much interaction with theology at all.”⁵⁰ However, in recent years there has been a shift in analytic philosophy toward exploring basic Christian doctrines without necessarily presuming faith.⁵¹

⁴⁶ Aurelius Augustinus, *Tractatus in Johannis evangelium* (407-417), *XXIX* on John 7:14-18, 6.

⁴⁷ Anselmus Candiae Genavae, *Proslogium* (1077–78), Preface.

⁴⁸ Philip L. Quinn and Charles Taliaferro, *A Companion to the Philosophy of Religion* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 1999), 1.

⁴⁹ Merold Westphal, “The emergence of modern philosophy of religion,” in *A Companion to the Philosophy of Religion* ed. Philip L. Quinn and Charles Taliaferro (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 1999), 111.

⁵⁰ Michael Murray and Michael Rea, “Philosophy and Christian Theology,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2012), <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2012/entries/christiantheology-philosophy> (Accessed 15 June 2015 26).

⁵¹ Broad overviews, largely from an analytic perspective (vs. a ‘continental’ perspective) can be found in Eleonore Stump, *Reasoned Faith* (Ithica, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993; Brian L. Hebblethwaite, *Philosophical Theology and Christian Doctrine* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005; Peter van Inwagen and Dean Zimmerman, *Persons: Human and Divine* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2007; Oliver D. Crisp, *A Reader in Contemporary Philosophical Theology* (London, UK: T & T Clark, 2009; Thomas P. Flint and Michael C. Rea, *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophical*

By contrast, Burrell commends “Gadamer’s contention that every inquiry rests on fiduciary premises, on trust. In practice, this means that faith may be regarded as integral to knowing, though (like any other contribution to knowing) it will always be subject to critical interpretation.”⁵²

Burrell’s perspective on philosophical theology is given in a number of his works, formally beginning in 1995, but in particular in papers entitled “Philosophy and religion: Attention to language and the role of reason”, “Creation and ‘Actualism’: The Dialectical Dimension of Philosophical Theology”, and “Philosophy” in *The Blackwell Companion to Modern Theology*, and in his books *Freedom and Creation in Three Traditions*, and *Friendship and Ways to Truth*.⁵³ As an example, his perspective is given very clearly in “Creation and ‘Actualism’: The Dialectical Dimension of Philosophical Theology”⁵⁴ where he distinguishes his perspective with that of those who collaborated on *New Essays in Philosophical Theology*⁵⁵ and who coined the term. This latter wished to “bring their philosophical expertise to issues theological, without being thereby constrained to consider the traditional ‘preambles to faith’ that had become the stock in trade of a discipline called ‘natural theology’”.⁵⁶ To the contrary, for Burrell, one thing is beyond discussion: “no tradition of faith can avoid being elaborated from within by

Theology (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2009; Linda Zagzebski and Timothy D. Miller, *Readings in Philosophy of Religion* (Oxford, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 1-2, 5-6.

⁵² Burrell, *Learning to Trust in Freedom*, 3.

⁵³ Burrell, *Freedom and Creation in Three Traditions*, 1-6; Burrell, "Philosophy and religion," 109-123; Burrell, *Friendship and Ways to Truth*; Burrell, "Creation and ‘Actualism’: The Dialectical Dimension of Philosophical Theology; David B. Burrell, "Philosophy," in *The Blackwell Companion to Modern Theology* (Malden, MA, Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2007), 34-46.

⁵⁴ Burrell, "Creation and ‘Actualism’: The Dialectical Dimension of Philosophical Theology," 76-90.

⁵⁵ This book had some impact at its publication (1955) and contains papers by English, largely analytic, philosophers and edited by Anthony Flew and Alasdair MacIntyre in 1955, both noted atheists and skeptics of the time.

⁵⁶ Burrell, *Faith and Freedom*, 76.

metaphysical notions, which alone will be able to capture the transcendent relation of divinity to all-that-is. The criteria of adequacy will always be mutual, as faith seeks understanding, and understanding allows itself to be amplified by revelation.”⁵⁷ As he notes, “the revelational language of both Bible and Qur’an would require, for its elaboration in practice, some clarification employing a philosophical idiom, though each of these faith traditions would count on key thinkers from their midst to render that philosophy complementary to revelation;”⁵⁸ in essence, “using reason to order and clarify the revelational sources, and in turn using those sources to expand standard philosophical categories to negotiate the known perils of discourse regarding divinity.”⁵⁹

This is an important understanding, one involving thinking differently the relationship, within theology itself, between faith and reason. We have to overcome a habitual tendency that implicitly assumes two distinct orders, i.e., faith *and* reason, an assumption that would appear to entail some form of interaction if not contention between them. As was observed earlier, in much of modern thinking about God and the universe there appears to be a presumption of God *and* the universe, in some way seen as in parallel.

Hence, Burrell and some of his colleagues wished to broaden the range of theological topics and to apply the tools of contemporary philosophy in ways that are somewhat more eclectic and dialectical, in order “to challenge the adequacy of current horizons.”⁶⁰ They wished to “direct our attention to the tradition of Christian theology

⁵⁷ Burrell, "Creation and 'Actualism': The Dialectical Dimension of Philosophical Theology," 90.

⁵⁸ Burrell, *Deconstructing Theodicy*, 120.

⁵⁹ David B. Burrell, *Towards a Jewish-Christian-Muslim Theology* (Chichester, Sussex: John Wiley; and Sons Ltd., 2011), 109.

⁶⁰ Burrell, "Creation and 'Actualism': The Dialectical Dimension of Philosophical Theology," 77.

as one in which the community had availed itself of reason from the outset in the elaboration of its faith and its own self-understanding. ... to bring some distinctive critical tools to assessing the larger endeavor of Christian theology and especially adjudicating its claims to truth” and to “show how the criteria of assessment are inherently dialectical”⁶¹ “I want to show how the faith horizon can also exercise a normative role in leading believers to prefer one ontology to another.”⁶²

The crucial difference is whether one insists that a community’s appropriation of revelation must be tailored to a current philosophical scheme or whether one may be licensed to extend philosophical patterns of analysis to allow the ensuing tradition its proper voice. If the latter is the case, can the result continue to be called “philosophy” or must we insist that it has now become “theology”? I offer the descriptive title “philosophical theology” in preference to “philosophy of religion” in an effort to acknowledge that we are indeed now doing *theology*, although we are being urged there by some issues which arise in the course of philosophical inquiry. Yet it is revelation which makes us aware of the new philosophical moves which we must make, so we cannot expect everyone to follow us across the threshold, even if we can hope that the philosophical arguments are cogent enough to lead them all to such a liminal position.”⁶³

In his work Burrell pays particular attention to the way that language is used, particularly the grammar we use and the words themselves, both their use in the past as well as today, an attentiveness as to what really is being said or can be said as a way of bounding inappropriate use of language about God. As part of this, he is careful in the use and understanding of analogy, the way we can talk of God of ‘the unknowable God’, for we cannot “know him as he is in himself,”⁶⁴ all as a way of trying to understand what we cannot state accurately about the transcendent yet can imply the truths of our faith; God is beyond our categories, hence analogical language. In a discussion of the medievals, particularly Thomas Aquinas, Burrell refers to philosophical grammar, the set of related skills that today might be listed under logic, grammar, and criticism – similar to today’s philosophical analysis tools. It would appear that Burrell has

⁶¹ Burrell, "Creation and ‘Actualism’: The Dialectical Dimension of Philosophical Theology," 76-77.

⁶² Burrell, "Creation and ‘Actualism’: The Dialectical Dimension of Philosophical Theology," 78.

⁶³ Burrell, *Freedom and Creation in Three Traditions*, 42-43.

⁶⁴ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 3, THE NAMES OF GOD, 1.13.1.2, often referenced by Burrell.

“apprenticed himself to the master who preceded him.”⁶⁵ In essence, Burrell provides a ‘way of thinking differently.’

Considering philosophical theology, one could argue that philosophical theology belongs to philosophy as a subsection of philosophy of religion. However, for Burrell, surely it is more a sub-discipline of theology for it cannot hope to make any progress without adverting to the religious traditions which underlie its inquiry.⁶⁶ It must consider “the role of tradition in any inquiry, religious or not, especially so in a religious domain, where the faith and practice of a community forms the living context for inquiry.”⁶⁷ For Burrell, the “term ‘philosophical theology’ embraces many of the issues once considered under ‘natural theology’ but with less concern to distinguish between the sources – reason or revelation – and no specific apologetic intent.”⁶⁸ Further, one should be aware also that “traditions can offer unexpectedly fresh perspectives on perennial human questions, particularly when they represent the fruit of reflection over centuries.”⁶⁹

[In] the use of philosophy in theological inquiry: not only are certain philosophical strategies more consonant with one’s faith perspective than others, but philosophical categories themselves may have to be adapted, expanded, and even transformed to do the job required of them in elaborating a doctrine of free creation of the universe. Such is certainly the history of the matter, and this essay relies as much as it does on Thomas Aquinas, precisely because his astute capacity to adapt and transform the Hellenic philosophical tradition transmitted to him through Avicenna and Averroës offers an outstanding working example of philosophical theology in the sense intended.⁷⁰

⁶⁵ Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action*, 4.

⁶⁶ See *supra*, 63, and Burrell, *Knowing the Unknowable God*, 1.

⁶⁷ Burrell, *Freedom and Creation in Three Traditions*, 1.

⁶⁸ Burrell, *Knowing the Unknowable God*, 114n1.

⁶⁹ Burrell, *Freedom and Creation in Three Traditions*, 6.

⁷⁰ Burrell, *Freedom and Creation in Three Traditions*, 5.

This perspective also relates to Lonergan's approach, noted earlier, to using available tools – analytic, hermeneutic, phenomenological – without preconceived notions regarding their appropriateness, now applied to philosophical inquiry.⁷¹

Clearly, it is pointless it is to try to identify the norm in theological matters either with faith or reason; both must be in play.⁷² Further:

An historical-systematic approach to the tradition can help us to mine it for conceptions and distinctions which our age may have obscured. In this way we will not only be alerted to our own preconceptions, but can also work to correct them in the light of a richer range of mentors. That very exercise should allow us to appreciate traditions as vehicles for reflection rather than repositories of opinions, and so free us to pursue our own inquiry in a more self-critical and promising spirit.⁷³

The phrase attributed to Augustine⁷⁴ and used by Anselm – *fides quaerens intellectum* (faith seeking understanding) – gives reason a crucial role of the attempt to make one's faith intelligible.

The quest for understanding formulates Augustine's classical definition of theology as "faith seeking understanding" in an idiom which alludes as well to Aristotle's intellectual virtues, thereby reminding us that understanding *in divinis* will always involve growth in understanding. This idiom also alludes to the fact that faith is ever a journey, and that the propositions which attempt to formulate 'articles of faith' are at best guideposts along that way, which opens as a way to wisdom for those intent upon the quest. In that aspiration to wisdom, of course, reason needs all the help it can get, so pressing the quest for understanding to serve the journey of faith affords philosophy its medieval distinction of being the 'handmaid of theology.'⁷⁵

Having 'faith seeking *understanding*' as a goal allows the manner of argument (along with its governing presuppositions) to be shaped by the subject matter, the object of inquiry. For Burrell, therefore, the use of reason to inquire into the meaning of revelation can "issue in a dramatic to and fro of interpretation which we call theology so

⁷¹ See *supra*, 68, and Burrell, "Lonergan and Philosophy of Religion," 1-2.

⁷² Burrell, "Theology and Philosophy," 70.

⁷³ Burrell, "Theology and Philosophy," 82.

⁷⁴ Commonly cited as "I believe in order that I may understand" from Augustine, "*crede, ut intelligas*" (believe so that you may understand); *Tractatus in epistulam Johannis ad Parthos*, XXIX on John 7:14-18, §6.

⁷⁵ Burrell, "Theology and Philosophy," 73-74.

that this mode of inquiry becomes a quest for understanding not unlike continuing rational reflection on our sense experience;”⁷⁶ hence, it is hermeneutical. As well, “Once the ideal of ‘pure reason’ has lost its allure, however, and all inquiry is recognized as properly carried out within a tradition which embodies a set of presuppositions and dictates a particular manner of argumentation, then the medieval rubric of ‘faith seeking understanding’ fairly describes any human inquiry.”⁷⁷ He sees reason as a “functional notion displayed in practices which cut across traditional boundaries, rather than a set of substantive beliefs which must be adhered to in those very terms before discourse can be undertaken.”⁷⁸

Bringing the foregoing perspective on the role of reason into today, Burrell argues that a “postmodern perspective offers us a fresh appreciation of the medieval proposal that philosophy become a handmaiden of faith. There is, in fact, a mutual normativity at work between reason and faith, with each perspective testing the propriety of the other.”⁷⁹ In essence, the medievals were using a form of philosophical theology without any particular reference to it as such or even explicitly adverting to it. Hence, even though there seems to be a shift on the part of those engaged in ‘philosophy of religion’ towards broadening their approach to rational inquiry to respect the demands of the tradition,⁸⁰ Burrell prefers the expression ‘philosophical theology’ whereby it is clear that the subject is God which makes it theology, and “while the mode is explicitly philosophical, the nature of the subject must guide our inquiry by discerning which

⁷⁶ Burrell, "Philosophy," 35.

⁷⁷ Burrell, "Philosophy and religion," 110-111.

⁷⁸ Burrell, *Friendship and Ways to Truth*, 43.

⁷⁹ Burrell, "Philosophy and religion," 122.

⁸⁰ Burrell, "Philosophy and religion," 111.

categories we find appropriate.”⁸¹ This sense of the ‘object of inquiry’ and the ‘appropriate categories’ and how they shape our understanding are vital to our inquiry. We have seen how these factors can lead in particular ways in the discussion of theodicy. I feel that the perspective, presented in this dissertation, of Burrell’s references to God as creator and creation, given the tradition and given a mode of understanding, have a consequence for the way we discuss the question of natural evil.

In his investigations of the thought of Aquinas, it must be borne in mind that Burrell is engaged in a hermeneutical retrieval of Aquinas and the tradition; what were these masters saying to that audience using those words under the conditions and presumptions of that time, and, in particular, what meaning does that have for us today trying “to understand those who have gone before us in an effort to discover our own ways into the future,”⁸² maintaining a “sense for tradition which theology ought always to be engaged in recovering.”⁸³ All hermeneutical endeavours come to their texts with a certain pre-understanding guiding their interpretive effort and, for Burrell, Wittgenstein provides a key. It is important to assimilate oneself in assimilating a tradition by trying to understand what our forebears were up to, and in doing so being constantly invited to become aware of what one is doing, becoming increasingly aware of what one is up to when one is understanding something to be the case.⁸⁴ As he has noted, “in doing

⁸¹ Burrell, *Friendship and Ways to Truth*, 96. See also David B. Burrell, "Creator/Creatures Relation: 'The distinction' vs. 'Onto-Theology'," *Faith and Philosophy* 25, no. 2 (2008).

⁸² Burrell, *Knowing the Unknowable God*, ix.

⁸³ Burrell, "Incarnation and Creation: The Hidden Dimension," 241.

⁸⁴ David B. Burrell, *Exercises in Religious Understanding* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1974), 2, 4. As a student of Lonergan at the Gregorian, and as the editor of the first English publication in book form (*Verbum: Word and Idea in Aquinas*) of Lonergan’s *Verbum* articles in *Theological Studies*, Burrell is fully aware of Lonergan’s notions of understanding as attentiveness to the *how* of one’s understanding as well as the *what*.

philosophy, we dispense with the practice of hermeneutics at our own peril.”⁸⁵ Burrell is attempting to engage in a kind of reflection which can help an inquiring spirit recover that quality of awareness which incorporates a highly personal understanding of where it is that he himself stands, and where he is going.⁸⁶ He sees his use of a hermeneutical approach as an exercise in understanding, not as an identifiable discipline.⁸⁷

The inspiration of my teaching and writing had been Bernard Lonergan’s reflections on hermeneutics, directing contemporary readers of ancient writers to identify the questions to which these writers’ arguments were directed. This disarmingly simple approach enables readers to connect with texts and authors from the past so as to allow their work to illuminate the way in which contemporary readers would pose these questions, as well as cast light on current ways of answering them. It is ever the questions which engage us, and one can learn rather quickly to distinguish the terms which are translatable from those which are not.⁸⁸

An important attitude underlying Burrell’s thinking is a detachment from, if not disdain for, what he considers narrow conceptualism, an attitude found in many of his papers.⁸⁹ This is the sort of thinking that puts conception before understanding. As noted by Lonergan, “the conceptualist cannot argue from the intelligible unity of this world order, for he acknowledges no such unity but merely a compound of the necessary and the arbitrary,”⁹⁰ and is thus hampered in thinking by the limitations of such a circumscribed ‘procrustean’ perspective.⁹¹ “The conceptualist view is that [the terms of an argument or proposition] are had by an unconscious process of abstraction from

⁸⁵ Burrell, *Faith and Freedom*, 156.

⁸⁶ Burrell, "Religious Life and Understanding," 699.

⁸⁷ Burrell, *Exercises in Religious Understanding*, 238.

⁸⁸ Burrell, *Friendship and Ways to Truth*, 25. See also, Burrell, "Philosophy and religion," 109-110.

⁸⁹ David B. Burrell, "Aquinas on Naming God," *Theological Studies* 24, no. 2 (1963); David B. Burrell, "Reading the The Confessions of Augustine: An Exercise in Theological Understanding," *The Journal of Religion* 50, (1970); Burrell, "Religious Experience and Religious Truth; Burrell, "Theology and Philosophy; Burrell, *Faith and Freedom*.

⁹⁰ Lonergan, *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding*, 717.

⁹¹ Burrell, "Creator/Creatures Relation," 184.

sensible data.”⁹² Particularly in discussions of God, in asserting “that all-that-is is created freely by one God; could we coherently diagram the universe and its creator on the same plane, over against one another?”⁹³ “Yet for those who affirm that the world is freely created by a transcendent divinity, that very claim carries with it the conviction that the world is intelligible while also suggesting that our conceptualities will be inadequate to its primal intelligibility.”⁹⁴ (‘The primal intelligibility’ expresses the relation of creatures to their creator: the very relation which bestows intelligibility in bestowing esse, while itself remaining unknowable to us.) While the ‘scientific’ model of thinking may be adequate in its domain, it is limited. We need a broader horizon for our thinking, for thinking differently.

Hence, for Burrell philosophical theology is not a circumscribed discipline. Rather, as noted earlier, “the crucial difference is whether one insists that a community’s appropriation of revelation must be tailored to a current philosophical scheme or whether one may be licensed to extend philosophical patterns of analysis to allow the ensuing tradition its proper voice.”⁹⁵ Clearly, for Burrell, suitably interpreted, the tradition has had an influence on his thinking; it has become a philosophical and

⁹² Lonergan, *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding*, 717.

⁹³ David B. Burrell, “Maimonides, Aquinas and Ghazali: distinguishing God from world,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 61, no. 3 (2008), 280.

⁹⁴ Burrell, “Philosophy and religion,” 122.

⁹⁵ *Supra*, 74, and Burrell, *Freedom and Creation in Three Traditions*, 42-43. It should be noted in this context that Burrell’s perspective on philosophical theology is considerably freer than that commonly assumed by many practitioners, particularly Burrell’s emphasis on thinking from the side of a *confession of faith*. An examination of the perspective of, and the practitioners in, for example, Flint and Rea, *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophical Theology* indicates the predominance of the thinking of those either styled as philosophers of religion or as analytic philosophers. See “List of Contributors” and “Introduction”.

theological resource for him in addressing contemporary questions, e.g., the God-world relationship.

WITTGENSTEIN'S INFLUENCE

We have made some references to Wittgenstein earlier. His importance for our argument lies in his influence on David Burrell's thinking,⁹⁶ particularly, in Burrell's concept of philosophical theology where both the words we use and the way we use them are of importance. Burrell pays particular attention to language. This has a strong influence in the way Burrell will invite us to rethink the meaning of God as creator, one of the foundations of our approach to the question of natural evil. This will be pursued in Chapter 3.

Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889-1951), was a major philosopher of the 20th century who had a wide influence on philosophical and humanities discussions in the latter half of the twentieth century and, hence, significant consequences for the intellectual consideration of Christianity and Christian theology and, for our purposes, a strong influence on David Burrell. It should be noted that Burrell's early books, *Analogy and Philosophical Language* and *Exercises in Religious Understanding* show many influences of Wittgenstein, but *Aquinas: God and Action* is fundamentally structured on a Wittgensteinian basis. As Burrell notes:

What comes through more clearly in Wittgenstein is the discipline, the self-discipline, required to release ourselves from the pervasive bewitchment that language infected by academic philosophical concerns can work upon us. The frugal structure of the *Tractatus* bespeaks a discipline, and everything Wittgenstein undertook after returning to philosophy displayed that discipline by its relentless questioning form. ... Wittgenstein, whose manner requires us to

⁹⁶ See e.g., Burrell, *Analogy and Philosophical Language*, passim; Burrell, *Exercises in Religious Understanding*, passim; Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action*, passim; Burrell, *Friendship and Ways to Truth*, 19.

become more and more aware of what it is we are after, of how we are undertaking it, and of how little we can say of what it accomplishes for us and in us.⁹⁷

For Wittgenstein, language had a variety of uses embodying what we know of the world.⁹⁸ One needed therefore to look at the specific grammar of our utterances and not assume the grammar of different sorts of statements – grammar being the linkage between the way words and concepts are linked and used in an actual language, the rules of usage. He thought philosophical confusions were the result of philosophy's failure to look at things as they stand and to assume that they must be a certain way. This is the so-called 'linguistic turn', a major development in Western philosophy during the 20th century.

There are a few linked ideas that are important for our purposes. Firstly, there is the notion that a word's, statement's, or concept's meaning is in its use. Secondly, the meaning of words is not merely what they stand for or refer to; words are not just *names*, they also *do* things. There is no 'mentalese' by which we identify and know what a thing is and then use our language equivalent. What we actually do is to pick it out by a concept, and the concept is in the use of the word. Thirdly, one cannot have one word for a word of another language; one has to have several at least, single words are simply borrowings into our language. Fourthly, one cannot assume that words that are homonymous (sound the same) mean the same thing either, or that they have a common essence, there is a polyvalence of meaning. Fifthly, given that what a word means is in its use and not simply in its formal attributes, then the context of its use is crucial as

⁹⁷ Burrell, *Analogy and Philosophical Language*, 4-5.

⁹⁸ This discussion of Wittgenstein is largely based upon Diogenes Allen and Eric O. Springsted, *Philosophy for Understanding Theology*, 2nd ed. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 218-223.

well, leading to Wittgenstein's notion of 'language games'. Languages are like the way we use the word *game*, that is, in widely differing ways that may have no common essence but only a family resemblance and in this sense are communal. A particular context has a distinctive grammar of how questions are asked and answered and of the meaning of terms, the network of rules which determine if what one says is allowed as making sense, and if it is not, and situated within the regular activity within which language-games are carried out. And lastly, Wittgenstein has the notion of 'forms of life,' a person who can understand and use language does so because he or she participates, at least to some degree, in a form of life be it cultural or involving how we are related to the world, a notion congenial, for example, to members of a religious order, or to a society. Forms of life open up some conceptual spaces and close others, the meaning or use of human words and concepts being understood through a knowledge or understanding of a form of life – perhaps even more strongly, through the living of a form of life. Our language and its use reflect our underlying presumptions of world and God, how we think of creation and their relationship.

Burrell appropriated Wittgenstein's thinking in a number of ways. A major aspect was the whole notion of linguistic analysis, particularly viewed as attentiveness to language and our use of it as an approach to understanding in theological inquiry.⁹⁹ Further, his conviction is that "theological (as well as metaphysical) issues inevitably carry one beyond conceptual frameworks to judgment, and that the criteria for judgment

⁹⁹ David B. Burrell, "Theology and the Linguistic Turn," *Communio: International Catholic Review* 6, (1979).

are located in the relation subjects assume towards their world, rather than in an explanatory scheme.”¹⁰⁰

For language is ordinarily learned as a way of negotiating our world, with its accuracy tested as it helps us to do that more successfully. Yet the criteria for successfully negotiating a world gain in complexity as that world unfolds from one focused on personal satisfaction to one focused on general well-being, indeed, on the well-being of the universe. What sort of demands does that put on our use of language? It demands an awareness, I shall suggest, that our speech will never quite be adequate to our quest for understanding; that our analysis of a situation, as we attempt to negotiate it properly, will inevitably leave something unconsidered. This is palpably the case in human affairs, where our initial orienting judgments tend to reduce another person to two dimensions, and so will betray us unless we leave them open to generous revision.¹⁰¹

From an examination of a number of modern thinkers¹⁰² Burrell finds three overlapping characteristics evidenced in varying degrees by each of them: “(a) care with and attentiveness to the uses of language, (b) near-complete diffidence regarding revisionary metaphysical proposals, (c) a focus on the individual and the inner criteria of judgment which inquiry demands each person develop.”¹⁰³ From this examination, Burrell finds it clear that logical and linguistic methods do not offer a new and comprehensive decision procedure for trying theological issues; however, to the extent they are faithful to the originating impetus in Wittgenstein, they can transfer the criteria of judgment from an overarching system to the search for an appropriate idiom and its self-correcting use. The emphasis is on the response which proposals receive, rather than in the internal coherence of the proposals; coherence is a necessary condition for any elucidation, but never sufficient. For Burrell,

This style of thinking is especially apt for articulating a quality of reflection which unites ‘theory’ with ‘practice.’ Indeed, the more we attend to the capacity of our native tongue to articulate the

¹⁰⁰ Burrell, "Theology and the Linguistic Turn," 100.

¹⁰¹ Burrell, *Friendship and Ways to Truth*, 20.

¹⁰² Burrell mentions Ian Ramsay, I.M. Crombie, D.Z. Phillips, Donald Evans, Jerry Gill, James McClendon, Brian Wicker, Michael Novak, Sebastian Moore, John Dunne, Stanley Hauerwas, Rosemary Haughton, William O'Brien, Thomas Merton; see Burrell, "Theology and the Linguistic Turn," 98.

¹⁰³ Burrell, "Theology and the Linguistic Turn," 99.

situations in which we are actually engaged, the less of a divide there is between our practice and our thought.” ...

One area of promise for theological inquiry of this sort is liturgical activity. Such activity is already laden with “theory” if you will, and yet is carried out as much in gesture and posture as in words. Learning how to assess the appropriateness of these to the aim intended – worship – should tax one’s linguistic and theological skills, as well as display the participatory dimensions of language.¹⁰⁴

Hence, for Burrell, one can learn, from Wittgenstein, Lonergan, and others, to avoid general theories of interpretation, instead paying careful attention to language, the language one is analyzing and the language one employs, trusting “in the self-corrective power of discourse.”¹⁰⁵ One must go beyond merely conceptualist approaches and expand our understandings, to think more widely. As Burrell notes:

Language clearly reflects the bearings we have taken as well as it reveals how aware we are that we have taken them. *The language he uses not only shows us where someone stands but also lets us in on the extent to which he understands where he stands. ... And if the expressions we are prepared to utter are so revealing about our position in the world, perhaps the language we use can also reveal some basic facts about the world itself – or the world-as-we-most-basically-see-it.* Language would then prove a valuable key to that style of question long called metaphysical. In fact, the very structure of our language – the way we say whatever it is we say – has long been recognized to be the most available if not the only way of adjudicating questions in metaphysics.¹⁰⁶

Let us now move from language writ broadly to some details. From a sympathetic study of the medieval approach to theology, particularly that of Aquinas, Burrell notes that the very close attention all medievals paid to language, both remind us of what we can use it to say as well of the ways we can use it “to show what cannot be said.”¹⁰⁷ Associated with this is a special attention to grammar something he calls ‘philosophical grammar’ following Wittgenstein’s aphorism: “‘theology as grammar’:

¹⁰⁴ Burrell, “Theology and the Linguistic Turn,” 109.

¹⁰⁵ Burrell, “Theology and the Linguistic Turn,” 112.

¹⁰⁶ Burrell, *Analogy and Philosophical Language*, x, emphasis added.

¹⁰⁷ Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action*, 11.

‘Grammar tells us what kind of object anything is.’”¹⁰⁸ He notes that the medievals were well versed in formal logic; any argument worthy of the name could not contravene them. However, for the medievals, this was not enough, there remained the principles proper to the domain under consideration; dialectical skills were not enough, they were very attentive to words. After all, after centuries of being steeped in the Word they well knew that “the Scriptures used language in many different ways. The task of classifying these uses and registering the responses appropriate to them generated a skill which came to be known as ‘philosophical grammar,’”¹⁰⁹ the set of related skills that today might be listed under logic, grammar, and criticism – similar to today’s philosophical analysis tools.¹¹⁰ As Burrell observes, “Extensive work in philosophical grammar had prepared Aquinas for a view not unlike that adopted by Wittgenstein in the *Tractatus*: the very structure of a well-formed sentence reflects the formal or constitutive features of the object spoken about.”¹¹¹ He notes that Aquinas’ account, early in the *Summa Theologiae*, lays out “the grammar of ‘God.’ And grammar reveals the nature of things.”¹¹² As noted earlier, this is part of Burrell’s drawing on tradition, a philosophical and theological resource in addressing contemporary questions. Bruce Ashforth observes that “Burrell is famous for linking Wittgenstein’s concept of family resemblance with Aquinas’s doctrine of analogy and for arguing that theologians should

¹⁰⁸ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *The Philosophical Investigations*, trans., G.E.M. Anscombe, 2nd ed. (Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishing, 1967), #373; cited in Burrell, *Freedom and Creation in Three Traditions*, 208n10.

¹⁰⁹ Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action*, 4. See also *Exercises in Religious Understanding*, 125-126.

¹¹⁰ As cited earlier, *supra*, 75.

¹¹¹ Burrell, *Exercises in Religious Understanding*, 87.

¹¹² Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action*, 84.

stop searching for foundations and neutral languages and should rather embrace theology as grammar.”¹¹³

Burrell sees the potential of linguistic strategies for philosophical theology,¹¹⁴ the need for “careful attention to religious uses of language pressed upon us by followers of Wittgenstein.”¹¹⁵ Therefore, more than grammar, there is the whole question of how we use words and our judgement in their use. As noted earlier, words do not have simple meanings, usage is very important. A very important aspect of the use of language is that of analogy, the set of expressions which, as Aquinas noted, can be used in a fashion neither univocal nor equivocal, but somewhere in between. Judgement is the key element in the use of analogy: citing Wittgenstein: “If language is to be a means of communication there must be agreement not only in definitions but also (queer as this may sound) in judgments. This seems to abolish logic, but does not do so.”¹¹⁶

Burrell observes that Aquinas used Aristotle’s rough split between univocal and equivocal for expressions and their meanings, but that there were some which could be used neither univocally nor equivocally but rather in between and which he called ‘analogous’. Aquinas cited two specific usages of analogy: by reference to one focal meaning (attribution) and by an ordered relationship among different uses (proportionality), letting the context suggest how to trace the reference or display the relationship. However, for Burrell, contrary to much opinion, Aquinas never had a theory of analogy. As he notes somewhat ironically: “Aquinas is perhaps best known

¹¹³ Bruce R. Ashford, "Wittgenstein's Theologians? A Survey of Ludwig Wittgenstein's Impact on Theology," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 50, no. 2 (2007), 366.

¹¹⁴ Burrell, *Questing for Understanding*, 86.

¹¹⁵ Burrell, "Philosophy and religion," 109.

¹¹⁶ Wittgenstein, *The Philosophical Investigations*, #242, cited in Burrell, *Exercises in Religious Understanding*, 40n2.

for his theory of analogy. On closer inspection, it turns out that he never had one.

Rather, he made do with a few vague remarks and that grammatical astuteness which I have suggested as replacement for intuition.”¹¹⁷

The notion of analogy is widely reflected in Burrell’s oeuvre. His doctoral dissertation was published as *Analogy and Philosophical Language* and he returns, in much of his writings, to this aspect of language in our understanding, particularly in our discussion of God. We also shall return to it later, particularly in Chapter 5. However, it should be noted that a major influence on Burrell in developing his understanding of analogy in Aquinas was Ralph McInerny’s *Logic of Analogy*¹¹⁸ “which carried the issue more resolutely into a linguistic forum.”¹¹⁹ McInerny “managed to argue persuasively that this linchpin of Thomistic metaphysics has to do with the use of terms, and so represents a logical, not a metaphysical discussion.”¹²⁰ Following Aquinas, Burrell sees three areas in which Aquinas’ manner of using philosophy in developing doctrinal positions made significant and lasting advances in philosophical theology: “the analogical character of language and especially of religious discourse and expression, the centrality of creation and of divine practical knowing, and the inner compatibility of divine providence with human freedom.”¹²¹

Thus, we can see part of the extensive influence of Wittgenstein, particularly in the way we use words and in the words we use, and in the way he provided new insights

¹¹⁷ Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action*, 63.

¹¹⁸ Ralph McInerny, *Logic of Analogy* (The Hague, NL: Martinus Nijhoff, 1961). Burrell makes his case against the theory builders in pp 63-66.

¹¹⁹ Burrell, "Linguistic Perspectives," 165-166.

¹²⁰ Burrell, "Linguistic Perspectives," 166.

¹²¹ David B. Burrell, "Aquinas’ Debt to Maimonides," in *Faith and Freedom* (Malden, MA, Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 64.

into the relations between world, thought, and language, and thereby into the nature of philosophy and theology. We will pursue this topic of analogy further in Chapter 5.¹²²

Summary

Let us summarize the main points in Burrell's thinking as we have encountered them. Firstly, while not being a 'traditionalist', Burrell has engaged in a hermeneutical retrieval of Aquinas (and the origins of his thought) and of the tradition, all for its meaning for us *today*. As was observed, "Traditions need always to be recovered, it seems, as fresh perspectives emerge to make traditional inquiries relevant, while critical reflection unveils obstacles that have helped deny us access to those very resources."¹²³ In particular, Burrell has retrieved key notions of existence, creation, and creator to which we shall return in the next two chapters, notions which are key to our arguments for examining the question of natural evil. Secondly, as some insight into his intellectual posture, we noted his training under Lonergan's tutelage, one which developed in him a life of constant inquiry, a lifelong quest for understanding and its concomitant, judgement, coupled with a reserve vis-à-vis a narrow perspective of simply reason and narrow conceptualism; for him, faith and reason complement one another. This perspective will guide us in this dissertation. Further, from this perspective, we examined his perspective of what he terms 'philosophical theology', a perspective used as the methodology of this dissertation. As he has stated, "no tradition of faith can avoid being elaborated from within by metaphysical notions, which alone will be able to capture the transcendent relation of divinity to all-that-is. The criteria of adequacy will

¹²² Chapter 5, Analogy, *infra*, 201ff.

¹²³ David B. Burrell, "Creatio ex Nihilo Recovered," *Modern Theology* 29, no. 2 (2013), 5.

always be mutual, as faith seeks understanding, and understanding allows itself to be amplified by revelation.”¹²⁴ Hence, for him, philosophical theology must consider how one uses the tradition in inquiry, “where the faith and practice of a community forms the living context for inquiry.”¹²⁵ For Burrell, ‘philosophical theology’ captures many of the issues once considered under ‘natural theology’ however with less concern in distinguishing between either reason or revelation. As noted, Burrell’s perspective is looser than many of his contemporary ‘philosophical theologians’ and his scope is much broader, his categories are richer. Finally, given his sensitivity to language we considered the influence of Wittgenstein on him and his concept of philosophical theology where both the words we use and the way we use them are of importance. For our purposes this is highlighted by the way Burrell will invite us to rethink the meaning of God as creator, one of the foundations of our approach to the question of natural evil.

With this orientation into Burrell’s theological understanding we are ready to go to a re-examination of the theological foundations of the notion of God, God’s creation, and God’s action in creation, such a re-examination being necessary to provide a foundation for the arguments in Chapters 5 and 6 where we engage the question of natural evil. Therefore, following David Burrell, let us begin in Chapter 3 where we develop an understanding of God, particularly God as creator and from this, a deeper understanding of creation as a relation and perspectives on this relation. Then, in Chapter 4 we turn to an understanding of God’s action. From these all of this we will be

¹²⁴ Burrell, "Creation and ‘Actualism’: The Dialectical Dimension of Philosophical Theology," 90.

¹²⁵ Burrell, *Freedom and Creation in Three Traditions*, 1.

prepared for considerations of the understanding of the question of natural evil..

Therefore, we begin with Chapter 3, Burrell's guidance on God's creator.

3. GOD AS CREATOR IN BURRELL

As noted earlier, in our discussion of God and natural evil, we seem to be at an impasse, there appears to be an obstacle to our thinking; we need new ways of looking at the problem of natural evil, a way of thinking differently. Using Burrell’s approach to philosophical theology I wish to examine how his reflections on creation retrieve critical features in our understanding of the relationship between God as creator and the world, the universe, as created. As has been shown earlier¹, on-going efforts to approach the question of natural evil incorporate implicitly or explicitly an understanding of the relationship between God and the world. Indeed, this was evident in the very nature of the defence strategy proposed by Tilley and in his own diagnosis of where the difficulty resided in addressing natural evil. The question is: how may we recover a perspective that crosses that barrier in our thinking? I suggest that at root, aggravated by modes of modern scientific thinking, we still carry a conception of God and the universe as two things, things in some way parallel and hence in some way comparable, a conception that is implied in much of our discussion of these matters and, because implicit, rarely noticed or challenged. Hence, how does Burrell’s strategy of a philosophical theology invite us to retrieve a mode of re-thinking the distinction between creator and creation on behalf of advancing our theological mode of understanding? We shall see that Burrell’s own appreciation of creation as relation, an understanding that draws on his own retrieval of critical insights of the work of St. Thomas, will set the scene for the further elaboration of a comprehension of the God–world relationship. I would contend

¹ Chapter 1.

that this strategy can assist us in offering a new direction in reflection on the question of natural evil, a way of thinking differently.

The reflections on philosophical theology found in Chapter 2 are intended to invite us to reconsider some of the most common presuppositions underlying current reflections on natural evil which consist largely of beginning with the integrity of creation itself and then asking about the relationship of God, particularly God as creator, to the world. Underlying a rather ordinary, even innocent, distinction, that of God and the world, is a tacit presumption of the two in parallel and somehow in competition. As long as this implicit perspective persists there are questions, particularly addressing natural evil, that assume an order or a structure of the universe in relation to which God acts or does not act. Burrell, as we have seen, has invited us to think otherwise.

In Chapter 2, the first step in challenging this presumption consisted in bringing forward Burrell's understanding of philosophical theology, an understanding which involved thinking differently the relationship within theology itself between faith and reason. We were challenged to overcome a habitual tendency that at its own level assumes two distinct orders, i.e., faith *and* reason, which if given a prior distinction then come into some form of interaction if not contention. In the modern thinking about God and the universe there appears to be a presumption of God *and* the universe, in some way they are seen as in parallel. Further,

A theme common to attempts to convey the secular ethos of our time, especially by contrast to that of "pre-modern" times, highlights the absence of an enveloping tapestry in which we can locate ourselves. It is precisely the shift from a cosmology accessible to imagination – and rendered fruitfully present, say, by Dante – to one which leaves the imagination with a vast emptiness. ... In any case, the "crisis in meaning" which secularity represents, embodies a crisis

of imagination which only dawns upon most of us when the events of our time cumulate to challenge our capacity to imagine evil.²

However, Burrell recommends that we consider this distinction as one stemming from a prior unity, namely, a faith seeking understanding, a faith drawing on all the available resources inherent in the integrity of reason itself in order to advance in our comprehension of Christian faith.

Such considerations assist in overcoming two basic obstacles associated with constructing theodicies. The first obstacle is that of seeking 'explanation', an attempt common in theodicies, which is thereby superseded by an act of understanding, one that does not anticipate any order of reasoning demanding an account of God's action. In short, there is no reason, no world, no creation, no order to be understood outside that very order for whom God is the universal and efficient cause of all that is. This in no way collapses reason into some form of fideism; rather, it offers a framework within which reason itself, and a faith employing reason, can reach toward acts of understanding; there is something, i.e., a universe, to be understood. As Burrell observed, in inquiry into revelation one uses reasoning in its quest for understanding which issues into "a dramatic to and fro of interpretation, which we call theology", which for him, is "a picture [which] best reflects the work of the great spirits who have shaped the discipline of theology, and who have given us the working definition of 'faith seeking understanding.'"³ Further, The criteria of adequacy will always be mutual, as faith seeks understanding, and understanding allows itself to be amplified by revelation.⁴

² Burrell, *Knowing the Unknowable God*, 6-7.

³ Burrell, "Theology and Philosophy," 68.

⁴ Burrell, "Creation and 'Actualism': The Dialectical Dimension of Philosophical Theology," 90.

The second obstacle is that of any form of thinking that considers God's action and the inherent intelligibility in world order, conceived on the basis of developments in the laws and intelligibilities of modern science, to be a zero sum game. Thus, we need a perspective in which the world and God do not stand over and against one another. The integrity of the ordering of the universe cannot be a prior limit to an understanding of God's action; the laws of the order of the universe, theologically grounded in the autonomy of creation as a real relation with God, do not thereby become a basic given in view of assessing God's action, the scope of that action, or the possibilities of that action. Rather, the integrity of a Christian belief in creation honors the integrity of a world to be understood.

Once the nature of these presuppositions as obstacles have been exposed as, in my judgment, Burrell's reflections on a philosophical theology can do, what alternate direction remains possible for understanding that does not succumb to theodicy or modes of explanation? The second step, the aim of this chapter, is to show how Burrell crafts such an alternative in his mode of philosophical theology. To do this I shall firstly give a perspective on our thinking about God, something which will be taken up more fully later in the chapter. Then I shall provide a broad perspective on creation and from this discuss the notion of existence, how can we understand existence, particularly in light of our understanding of creation. The notion of our being created, given existence, raises the question of how we understand our relation to the creator. As part of this, and completing a rather broad survey, we address the issue of why we exist; colloquially, why did God bother? This sets the stage for the next chapter, an emphasis on God's acting, where we will examine certain characteristics of our creator and the creation.

A Perspective on God

Turning to the second major step, as was noted earlier in the discussion of natural evil, how do we retrieve the virtues of a longer theological tradition of the God-world relationship? how do we get God as an integral part of the discussion? how do we understand God's role both in the initial act of creation and in continuing creation? what are the implications of creation and sustaining of the universe? all part of our exploration of natural evil.

It is clear that free creation is a major explicit element in Burrell's thinking in much of his writing, in particular, creation. He turns again and again to this theme as important for a right understanding of creation. As he notes, faith in the free creation of the universe is an underlying premise and if creation is free, then it cannot be demonstrated.⁵ This perspective, God as *free* creator, is fundamental to Burrell's thinking and appears again and again in his writings. As he noted in recounting a meeting with a leading mullah, when asked if one can prove free creation from reason, he was startled and replied spontaneously "No, because it is free."⁶

Associated with this is the notion of the utter otherness of God beyond any of our categories. Burrell makes frequent reference to Sokolowski's distinction,⁷ "what Kierkegaard called 'the infinite qualitative difference', the distinction of creature from creator"⁸ "thereby to distinguish God from everything else that is, in such a way that

⁵ Burrell, "The New Aquinas," 132.

⁶ Burrell, *Questing for Understanding*, 110. See also Burrell, *Learning to Trust in Freedom*, 1-2.

⁷ Robert Sokolowski, *The God of Faith and Reason* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1995). From his reading of the manuscript of the original version while in Tantur and its publication in 1982, Burrell has made very frequent reference to this book in his writings. See Burrell, "The Christian Distinction Celebrated and Expanded," 217ff.

⁸ Burrell, *Friendship and Ways to Truth*, 78.

God is the source of all-that-is,”⁹ that is, it shows the unique mode of causality required by free creation. Burrell insists on this distinction though it is strictly inconceivable without properly conceiving its more fundamental term, ‘God’, yet the ‘distinction’ offers the best way we have for not misconceiving God as another item in the universe. Circular? Yes, but intrinsic to our discourse of God, our God-talk, because “otherwise our discourse about God will not be about God but about some substitute, an idol,”¹⁰ that is, “‘the distinction’ offers the best avenue we have for not misconceiving God as one more item in the universe.”¹¹ Burrell considers that Aquinas’ transformation of the “philosophy which he found so useful answered to ‘the distinction’ of creator from creation – a distinction utterly unlike any of those which philosophers find so useful in their attempts to find the ‘true joints’ of the world. For it cannot be found in the world which lies exposed to human reason, but is only ‘glimpsed on the margin of reason’, or ‘at the intersection of faith and reason’, announcing as it does the inexpressible relation of free creator to creation.”¹² As noted earlier, the factors, of which the ‘distinction’ is one, entail a degree of circularity, a circularity intrinsic to our talk of God.¹³ I would suggest that where ‘creation’ is considered the underlying theme in Aquinas, the ‘distinction’ along with free creation are underlying themes in Burrell’s oeuvre.

It must be noted that this ‘distinction’ does not imply God as remote from the creation. Rather, “God produced creatures not because He needed them, nor because of

⁹ Burrell, *Friendship and Ways to Truth*, 93.

¹⁰ Burrell, *Friendship and Ways to Truth*, 95.

¹¹ Burrell, *Friendship and Ways to Truth*, 95.

¹² Burrell, "Religious Experience and Religious Truth," 190.

¹³ Burrell, *Friendship and Ways to Truth*, 95.

any other extrinsic reason, but on account of the love of His own goodness.”¹⁴ We will discuss this later in a discussion of providence. Free creation in turn carries the notion that God is so independent of the world that God creates the world out of sheer generosity, not out of any sort of need. This notion, in turn, is bolstered by the notions of simplicity and eternity.

In Burrell’s thought there are a few factors which seem to underlie his thinking about God and creation, a number of factors that seem to form a scheme of recurrence,¹⁵ or a Mobius strip whereby coming around one sees the item from a new side, or better yet, a nexus of notions inextricably interrelated in his argument. This knot of notions encompasses free creation, transcendence, God’s simplicity, and God’s eternity. Given a basic belief in God, Burrell uses these notions to assure that God is God and not the ‘biggest thing around’. However, it must be stressed that Burrell, with his hermeneutical perspective, is not stuck in the past; in particular, he is not entertaining what has been called ‘classical theism’.¹⁶ Rather, as said earlier, Burrell is engaged in a hermeneutical retrieval of Aquinas and of the tradition for its meaning for us today. “Traditions need always to be recovered, it seems, as fresh perspectives emerge to make traditional inquiries relevant, while critical reflection unveils obstacles that have helped deny us access to those very resources.”¹⁷

As a way of avoiding the narrowness of the notion of ‘classical theism,’ for Burrell these terms, simplicity and eternity, are ‘formal’ terms; that is, as ‘formal

¹⁴ Burrell, *Freedom and Creation in Three Traditions*, 166, citing Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 6, THE TRINITY, 1.32.1.3.

¹⁵ A implies B which implies C which implies D which implies A, etc.

¹⁶ See Preface, iv n4

¹⁷ Burrell, "Creatio ex Nihilo Recovered," 5.

features' they are not attributes or characteristics. As Burrell states, "Formal features concern our manner of locating the subject for characterization, and hence belong to a stage prior to considering attributes as such."¹⁸ A 'formal feature,' in contrast to an ordinary feature, does not purport to describe the thing in question, rather "it attempts to locate it ontologically,"¹⁹ that is, formal features 'are not so much said of a subject as they are reflected in the subject's mode of existing and control the way we say something of the subject.'²⁰ As noted by Innis, "Burrell is attempting to apply some of the lessons we have learned from *both* of Wittgenstein's major works: the emphasis on formal grammatical features from the *Tractatus* and the emphasis on conceptual corollaries – or perspicuous examples and representations – from the *Philosophical Investigations*."²¹ And, as 'formal features,' they assure the distinction of God from the world, this distinction being necessary for our understanding of creation.²² As well, "simpleness and eternity belong together as away of identifying the subject of the inquiry, and thereby setting God off from anything else by setting the parameters for discourse about divinity. They offer semantic analogues for 'the distinction' by showing that whatever is said of God ('divine names') cannot be said of divinity as is said of anything else."²³ We will further examine these notions later in Chapter 4.

Thus, we see how Burrell, is beholden to Aquinas' more formal treatment of what we can say of God yet at the same time be fully aware that we cannot know what

¹⁸ Burrell, *Faith and Freedom*, 5-6.

¹⁹ Burrell, *Friendship and Ways to Truth*, 104.

²⁰ Paraphrasing Burrell, *Knowing the Unknowable God*, 47.

²¹ Robert E. Innis, "Aquinas' God and the Linguistic Turn: A Review Discussion," *Thomist* 45, no. 4 (1981), 588. Emphasis in the original.

²² Burrell, "Distinguishing God From the World," 4.

²³ Burrell, *Friendship and Ways to Truth*, 104.

our expressions mean fully when speaking of God, we cannot know what God is.

However, by attending closely to what Aquinas does, we can see that he is scrupulously faithful to that limitation (our being unable to know what God is) and therefore, “what God is like is treated in the most indirect fashion possible, the only one available to an inquiry by one of God’s creatures.”²⁴

The Context: Creation

Creation is a basic notion in our theology. Josef Pieper considers creation to be the hidden element in the philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas:

In the philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas, there is a fundamental idea by which almost all the basic concepts of his vision of the world are determined: the idea of creation, or more precisely, the notion that nothing exists which is not *creatura*, except the Creator Himself; and in addition, that this createdness determines entirely and all-pervasively the inner structure of the creature. ... the notion of creation determines and characterizes the interior structure of *nearly all* the basic concepts in St. Thomas’s philosophy of Being. And this fact is *not* evident; it is scarcely ever put forward explicitly; it belongs to the unexpressed in St. Thomas’s doctrine of Being.²⁵

Further, as Burrell observes, “creation not only comes first, as it were, in our God’s transactions with the world; it is also true that the way we understand that founding relation will affect our attempts to articulate any further interaction.”²⁶

“Moreover, an adequate treatment of the unique activity which constitutes creating, as well as the quite ineffable relation between creatures and creator which it initiates, will tax one’s philosophical resources to the limit.”²⁷ However, by a focus on God to be the free creator of all-that-is, we may be able to finesse the zero-sum presumptions of the divine human encounter; clearly the two protagonists are of decidedly different orders:

²⁴ Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action*, 15.

²⁵ Josef Pieper, *The Silence of St. Thomas*, trans., S.J. John Murray and Daniel O’Connor (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine’s Press, 1957), 47-48. Frequently cited as “creation is the hidden element in the philosophy of Aquinas.” Emphasis in the original. Burrell makes frequent use of this citation.

²⁶ David B. Burrell, “The act of creation with its theological consequences,” in *Creation and the God of Abraham*, ed. David B. Burrell et al. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 41.

²⁷ Burrell, *Towards a Jewish-Christian-Muslim Theology*, 10.

the one creature, and the other, the creator who can hardly be considered simply as another ‘person’ on the scene.

Fundamental to any discussion of God is the very fact of existence – in essence, the age-old questions: why is there something rather than nothing? for what reason do we exist? and, how can we understand creation? from what perspective? The creation stories in the Hebrew Scriptures, particularly Genesis 1, are considered myths, powerful symbolic stories conveying the idea of a total dependence of the creation upon its creator and, remarkably, the sevenfold reiterated message that all is ‘good.’ In the most general terms, myth is a way of talking about an overarching reality of which the experience of, or belief in, a god or gods, is a part; it is a religious statement designed to show God’s glory and greatness, the result of theological reflection. There are varieties of views of creation. From a narrow perspective, creation is that activity of God whereby everything that is not God is made to exist; thus, creation refers only to the beginning of the relationship between the God and the world, the continuation of which is called conserving or preservation. However, more widely and beyond a beginning, creation establishes a distinction and a relationship that remains after the beginning, one that abides.

Given that there is creation, in Christian belief the world is understood as possibly not having been at all, it is understood as existing in such a way that it might not have existed, it is utterly contingent. Yet, in Christian understanding, if the world had not been God would still be. Hence, God did not create out of any need but out of the overflowing of God’s love, for God made the one world “from love of His own

goodness.”²⁸ From this perspective, creation is that which defines how we are to understand God, the world, the relationship between the world and God, and thus, the way we discuss God as creator and the world as created. As Sokolowski observes, such a teaching about creation opens up logical and theological room for other Christian beliefs.²⁹

One such idea would seem to be that once there was nothing and then there was something, that is, an absolute beginning. At least that seems to be the understanding of *creatio ex nihilo*. It could be argued, consistent with revelation, that there was no beginning to the universe. However, given the stress in Genesis of a temporal beginning makes creation that much more dependent on the creator and, even more, a free initiative on the part of God; as Burrell observes, “if the universe were without beginning, it would be more natural to think of it as the necessary concomitant of its creator.”³⁰

Creation means the free origination of all from the one God, who gains nothing thereby. Moreover, what the notion of *free* primarily concerns is the lack of any constraint, even a *natural* constraint; so it need not involve *choice*, as it spontaneously tends to do for us, except quite secondarily. That creating fills no need in God and so is an utterly spontaneous and gracious act: that is the cumulative message of scriptures appropriated by Maimonides and Aquinas. Everything else, including the apparent description in Genesis of an initial moment for the created universe, is secondary to that assertion.³¹

Thus we have the ontological import of Sokolowski’s ‘distinction;’ we have the notion of “God’s freedom: *not* primarily in the sense that God might have created things differently and thus had choices in the matter, but more radically in that God *need* not

²⁸ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 6, THE TRINITY, 1.32.1.ad. 2, as cited in Burrell, *Freedom and Creation in Three Traditions*, 19.

²⁹ Robert Sokolowski, "Creation and Christian Understanding," in *God and Creation*, ed. David B. Burrell and Bernard McGinn (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990), 179.

³⁰ Burrell, *Freedom and Creation in Three Traditions*, 7-8.

³¹ Burrell, *Freedom and Creation in Three Traditions*, 8. Emphasis in the original.

have created at all, so the act of creating offers a kind of paradigm for divine gratuity.”³² This is a radical notion of God’s freedom; creation is a gift. This simple faith assertion, perhaps even seemingly banal, has profound consequences, it is the foundation of one’s worldview; for a Christian it is existential. Burrell gives an example of the profundity of the perspective of creation as gift, as freely created by God, by noting that those who believe this “have at least the chance of seeing their lives as a vocation, while those bereft of such an abiding personal source can at best struggle with a career,” in essence, for believers, a ‘form of life’. This is illustrated by an anecdote wherein Burrell describes a discussion with a well known philosopher of language and mind who, “himself an outspoken advocate of intentionality in opposition to materialist accounts of human beings, gave indirect testimony to the potency of this distinction (in a personal exchange at a conference) when he found himself unable to recognize any difference between *vocation* and *career*.”³³ This gives us echoes of Burrell’s approach to understanding steeped in the service of life, a radical openness described as religious faith,³⁴ described earlier.³⁵ Further, this personal perspective is in stark contrast to that of the scientist theologians discussed earlier, their perspective seemingly abstract, somewhat theoretical, and propositional.³⁶ This *is* a way to think differently.

This Christian understanding of the freedom of God and our dependence provides a new context for the modes of possibility, actuality, and necessity, each of these being understood in a new way. The being of things, their *being*, has a new setting

³² Burrell, *Freedom and Creation in Three Traditions*, 12. Emphasis in the original.

³³ Burrell, *Learning to Trust in Freedom*, 21. Emphasis in the original.

³⁴ Burrell, "Religious Life and Understanding," 678, 699.

³⁵ Chapter 2, *supra*, 66.

³⁶ See the introductory discussion of Creativity, Chapter 1, *supra*, 38.

not only in the potentialities of what already is and always has been but, more importantly, in the power of God to make them be, the “God whose choice is the source of everything else that is, everything that is now understood as not having to have been.” Such a sense of creation provides a different “slant on being, on what it is to exist, and on all the modalities of being.”³⁷ This is the perspective of understanding of the creator of all-that-is and of the creation that will be used in the discussions of the God-world relationship, itself fundamental to our discussion of natural evil. Let us now turn to a consideration of creation in more depth.

Creation, A Perspective

It would appear that for Burrell, a basic issue, that of *being* and of how we understand materiality and their distinction, has deep roots culminating in the work of Thomas Aquinas whose solution to this question provides the basis for a solid understanding of creation and gives us insight as to how we can grasp aspects of the creator.³⁸ Aquinas’ solution provides the foundation for our examination of God *and* creation. To provide us with this understanding it is useful to first examine Burrell’s presentation of the background against which this solution was developed.

For Burrell, there are the basic issues of conceptual clarification where one seeks to know what it is one is speaking of in speaking of God and God’s relation to whatever else we may know, and how to handle the religious traditions’ avowal that God lies beyond our understanding. For we are “inquiring into ... the God of Abraham: of Isaac and Jacob as well as of Jesus, and of Muhammad” all followers of whom avow “the one

³⁷ Sokolowski, "Creation and Christian Understanding," 182-183.

³⁸ See particularly Burrell, *Knowing the Unknowable God* and Burrell, *Freedom and Creation in Three Traditions*.

God, creator of heaven and earth, and Lord of all.” As Burrell notes, “it was the intellectual intermingling of these three traditions which made possible the medieval synthesis which has served as the baseline for western theology ever since.” The drama of the self-understanding and clarifying the grammar of divinity and the disciplined use of human language in speaking of God was formed in interaction with Judaism and Islam and the central figure was Thomas Aquinas for his use of Maimonides and Avicenna.³⁹ The basic upshot of this for our purposes can be elaborated more fully when we turn to the question of why there is something rather than nothing, or more basically, how can existence be understood?

EXISTENCE⁴⁰

Burrell traces this question back to Plato and Aristotle as they struggled with trying to understand ‘what is’ and the associated linguistic and logical issues. While Plato gave a perspective on creation in the *Timaeus*, for Aristotle the world simply was, the origins were merely assumed as eternal. The important question was the quiddity, the ‘whatness’ of things.⁴¹ As Charles Khan states: “in Greek ontology, from Parmenides on, the question of Being is a question as to what reality must be like – or what the world must be like – in order for knowledge and true (or false) discourse to be possible,”⁴² which gives rise to the quandary in Aristotle between the individual thing and the use of general terms or ‘forms’. As Burrell notes, we need a new level of

³⁹ Burrell, *Knowing the Unknowable God*, 1-2.

⁴⁰ This section draws heavily upon Burrell, *Knowing the Unknowable God*, particularly Chapters 2, 3, pp 19-50.

⁴¹ See David B. Burrell, "Essence and Existence: Avicenna and Greek Philosophy," *MIDEO (Melanges Institut dominican d'études orientales du Caire)* 17, (1986).

⁴² Cited in Burrell, "Essence and Existence: Avicenna and Greek Philosophy," 55.

understanding.⁴³ One such approach is developing the appropriate conceptual tools; and for Burrell the necessary tool is the “distinction between essence and existence” as we shall see.⁴⁴ As a perspective on what follows, I can do no better than reference Charles Kahn, as cited by Burrell.

My general view of the historical development is that existence in the modern sense becomes a central concept in philosophy only in the period when Greek ontology is radically revised in the light of a metaphysics of creation: that is to say, under the influence of Biblical religion. As far as I can see, this development did not take place with Augustine or with the Greek Church Fathers, who remained under the sway of classical ontology. The new metaphysics seems to have taken shape in Islamic philosophy, in the form of a *radical* distinction between necessary and contingent existence: between the existence of God, on the one hand, and that of the created world, on the other. The old Platonic contrast between Being and Becoming, between the eternal and the perishable (or, in Aristotelian terms, between the necessary and the contingent), now gets reformulated in such a way that for the contingent being of the created world (which was originally present only as a “possibility” in the divine mind) the property of “real existence” emerges as a new attribute or “accident,” a kind of added benefit bestowed by God upon possible beings in the act of creation. What is new here is the notion of radical contingency, not simply the old Aristotelian idea that many things might be other than they in fact are – that many events might turn out otherwise – but that the whole world of nature might not have been created at all: that it might not have *existed*.⁴⁵

However, the notion of ‘attribute’ or ‘accident’ is confuted by Aquinas as seen below.

The approach to the question of existence, of creation and of God as Creator, and, implicitly, their connection, has had many variations. In particular, in the 3rd cent. CE, Plotinus (*ca.* 205-270), a Neoplatonist philosopher, along with other Neoplatonists developed a system called ‘emanation’, a cosmological notion of creation of the world by a series of radiations, or emanations, originating in the godhead, an explanation of the relation of a totally transcendent god to a finite and imperfect world whereby the world is the result of a chain of emergence through emanations,⁴⁶ a notion which has its roots

⁴³ Burrell, "Essence and Existence: Avicenna and Greek Philosophy," 56.

⁴⁴ Burrell, "Essence and Existence: Avicenna and Greek Philosophy," 56-57.

⁴⁵ Charles Kahn, "Why Existence Does not Emerge as a Distinct Concept in Greek Philosophy," in *Philosophies of Existence: Ancient and Medieval*, ed. Parviz Morewedge (New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 1982), 7-8. Cited in Burrell, "Essence and Existence: Avicenna and Greek Philosophy," 57. Emphasis in the original.

⁴⁶ Plotinus, *The Enneads* (c. 4th cent. CE), partic. *Ennead* 5.1.6.

in Plato's *Timaeus*. As Burrell observes, this notion is a "neo-platonic harmony of Aristotle and Plato legitimized by passing on Books I-II of the *Enneads* of Plotinus as the 'Theology of Aristotle.'"⁴⁷ From god (the One, or the Absolute), the one prime principle, flows the divine substance, a diffusion from the One, of which there are three primary hypostases, the One, the Intellect/will (*nous*), and the Soul (*psyche*), thus giving a god that is remote and impersonal; there is no real relation between god and the world.

The emanation concept, in modified form, had an influence on Augustine and influenced the development of medieval Christian theology through the writings of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite (c. 500). However, Christian philosophers never adopted Platonism wholesale; at numerous points their commitment to biblical texts contravened Platonism, especially their understanding of creation in time as a gratuitous and willed act of God. "In the medieval discussion, the operative counterpoint was the scheme of necessary emanation from the One, in which all-that-is flows from that source in much the same way as many premises may be deduced from a single axiom."⁴⁸ This notion is that which exercised the medievals. By contrast, Burrell, in the Preface to *Knowing the Unknowable God*, notes that the aim of his study is to show how Avicenna, Maimonides and Aquinas – the three Abrahamic faiths: Islam, Judaism and Christianity – "conspired to fashion a doctrine of God by transforming classical philosophy to display divine transcendence,"⁴⁹ and thereby God's relation to the creation. The notion of emanation challenged their perspectives, derived from their respective revelations, of how one could understand God and God's relation to the creation.

⁴⁷ Burrell, *Knowing the Unknowable God*, 9.

⁴⁸ Burrell, "Creation and 'Actualism': The Dialectical Dimension of Philosophical Theology," 77.

⁴⁹ Burrell, *Knowing the Unknowable God*, ix.

Let us follow Burrell's uncovering of this development. The emanation scheme was attacked by various writers, e.g., the Muslim al-Ghazali (*ca.* 1058–1111) and Maimonides, from a variety of perspectives, particularly as it implied that God is only indirectly involved with individuals whereas revelation implied a direct relationship.⁵⁰ This scheme also implied that creation is effected through intermediaries, i.e., a 'demiurge', a notion which compromises the gratuity and intentionality of the very activity of God, not as prime mover or first being, but as creator; hence, an important need for conceptual clarification for Aquinas.⁵¹ As Burrell notes, creation as a necessary emanation from God compromises God's transcendence and can lead us astray in our attempts at a sound understanding of divinity.⁵² Pursuing the emanation scheme leads to the notion of a first in a sequence giving rise to the things we see, implying God is a thing; yet God is beyond our categories. Aquinas showed that the emanation scheme was both false and redundant as an explanatory scheme. It was false because its logic ensured "the First in such a scheme could not adequately be distinguished from the premises which followed from it." It was "redundant, because the act of creation must be the act of a cause of being whose effect follows immediately from it, absent any motion or mediation."⁵³ It should be noted that a "'cause of being' can't align with any of Aristotle's four causes, and that a free creator can only be vaguely approximated by a

⁵⁰ See Burrell, *Knowing the Unknowable God*, 12 ff. See also Burrell, "Essence and Existence: Avicenna and Greek Philosophy," 59.

⁵¹ Burrell, *Knowing the Unknowable God*, 14–15.

⁵² Burrell, "The Unknowability of God in al-Ghazali," 30.

⁵³ Burrell, "From Analogy of 'Being' to the Analogy of Being," 115. See also Burrell, *Knowing the Unknowable God*, 33, 49.

philosophical scheme of origination which would have to be necessary.”⁵⁴ Thus, underlying Aquinas’ response was the need to assure the gratuity and intentionality of God as creator. What is it that a free creator *does* in creating? The issue is how to obtain a clear insight into the difference between creation and emanation,⁵⁵ and this entails the ‘distinction’.

As Burrell observes, there is a pervasive underlying tendency in our attempts at distinguishing God from the world; we seem to treat this distinction as if it is *in* the universe. For example, we can treat the distinction as though it were merely another one in the universe – like every other distinction we make. We tend to focus on ‘what is it?’ rather than adverting to the fact that ‘it is’.⁵⁶ However, such a tendency has two quite opposite effects: we can denigrate the world we know for another (or a god) which we feel truly is, or contrariwise find a system which comprehends the whole – including God. An alternative is to assert God simply to be *other* than the world, keeping our mind firmly on the reality of the world in which we live.

However, we find that God cannot be simply *be other* if we are to use the name *creator*. Both fail. What we need, then, is a way to articulate the distinction between God and the world in such a way as to respect the reality appropriate to each, a distinction within the world we know. Such a distinction would have to be of a logical type appropriate for expressing the relation of creator to creation, a connection which

⁵⁴ David B. Burrell, "Beyond Onto-Theology: Negative Theology and Faith," in *Lonergan Workshop 15* (1999), 9.

⁵⁵ Burrell, *Knowing the Unknowable God*, 15. In this context it is interesting to note Burrell’s struggle with these notions. He notes his 20 year opposition between ‘necessary emanation’ and ‘free creation’ until he understood Aquinas’ use of the term emanation was sensible in that “what it is that a free creator *does* in creating will require elements from the emanation scheme as well.” Burrell, "Aquinas Appropriation of *Liber de Causis* to Articulate the Creator as Cause-of-Being," 77-78.

⁵⁶ Burrell, *Knowing the Unknowable God*, 36.

must exhibit ‘the distinction’. As Burrell observes, the West found the necessary concepts in “Ibn-Sina’s observation that *existence* is not included in *what* we understand of things – their essence (or quiddity) – but can only be said to ‘happen to’ them.” Aquinas uses this distinction as the “key to conceiving created beings in relation to their creator, as well as articulating what distinguishes the source of all that is from everything else which is, in short, ‘the distinction’ we are in search of.”⁵⁷

Nevertheless, we find this distinction is not quite enough. For Burrell, Avicenna observed, “nature which is proper to each thing (*haqiqa*: lit., its truth) is other than [its] existence (*al-wujud*), which is synonymous with affirming it to be the case (*al-ithbat*),”⁵⁸ the first clear statement of the distinction between existence and essence. However, Ibn-Sina’s account of God’s necessity and the world’s contingency was plagued by two interrelated factors: firstly, his way of characterizing existing as ‘what comes to something’ – therefore an ‘accident’, and secondly, the identification of existing with the ‘necessity’ that things get by their emanation from God.⁵⁹ Yet Avicenna’s distinction provided Aquinas the framework for his early discussion of this in *De ente et essentia* during his first stay in Paris (1252-1256).⁶⁰ But this is still Aristotelian realism, i.e., existence is synonymous with assertion, in that Aristotle presumed the world as the eternally given context.

⁵⁷ Burrell, *Knowing the Unknowable God*, 17-18. See also Burrell, "Essence and Existence: Avicenna and Greek Philosophy," 57.

⁵⁸ As cited by Burrell, *Knowing the Unknowable God*, 19.

⁵⁹ Burrell, "Creation and ‘Actualism’: The Dialectical Dimension of Philosophical Theology," 81. See also David B. Burrell, "Creation, Metaphysics, and Ethics," *Faith and Philosophy* 18, (2001), 212.

⁶⁰ As cited by Burrell, *Knowing the Unknowable God*, 19. See also Burrell, "Essence and Existence: Avicenna and Greek Philosophy," 60.

Burrell notes that this created a problem for Maimonides, it ignored revelation's insistence of God's providential concern and care for individuals; his problem, what is created individual life, so vulnerable and yet of such great value?⁶¹ For us, today, the question is difficult being "bereft of the background tapestry of the great chain of being," our loss of the picture in which we can place ourselves. To pose the question more starkly, how can we formulate that which our ordinary forms of knowing take for granted, the very 'fact of existence', for "existence does not mark a division within our world so much as something which *happens* within it." This is the very distinction we are looking for, i.e., "one which makes its appearance in our world yet does not distinguish kinds within it." However, facts and formulations are used for kinds of things so we have great difficulty formulating the 'fact of existence'.⁶² This suggests attempting to distinguish the *to-be*, existence, from the *what*; that is, existence is *not* a property. As Burrell observes, "'existence' is not a predicate."⁶³ This was emphasized by Maimonides who capitalized on Avicenna's distinction by insisting that in God "essence and existence are perfectly identical."⁶⁴ The next step, that of removing existing, *esse*, from the table of Aristotelian categories was begun by Aquinas in *De ente et essentia*⁶⁵ proposing that "it be understood in terms of the master analogy of actuality/potentiality."⁶⁶

⁶¹ Burrell, *Knowing the Unknowable God*, 20-21.

⁶² Burrell, *Knowing the Unknowable God*, 21-22.

⁶³ Burrell, *Knowing the Unknowable God*, 22.

⁶⁴ Burrell, *Towards a Jewish-Christian-Muslim Theology*, 19; referring to Moses Maimonides, *The Guide for the Perplexed* (12th c., tr. into Hebrew 1204), 1.57.

⁶⁵ Thomas Aquinas, "De ente et essentia," (c. 1256).

<http://dhspriory.org/thomas/english/DeEnte&Essentia.htm> (accessed 15 June 2015); Internet., 4.5.

⁶⁶ Burrell, "Aquinas and Islamic and Jewish thinkers," 69.

Burrell notes that Aquinas moved beyond Avicenna to formulate clearly the distinction between the existence of something and its nature, its essence, and “toward subsequent development of existence as *actus essendi* (the act of being). For it will be this latter formulation which offers a way of characterizing divinity, and of delineating the properly divine activity of creation.”⁶⁷ For Aquinas these two aspects are related. Considering divinity as “simply the One whose essence is simply ‘to-be’ will allow him to delineate creation as ‘producing to-be as such’. So clarifying the distinction will help us formulate the connection.”⁶⁸

Let us examine how Burrell suggests Aquinas did this. Aquinas started from a perspective of creation *and* existence. That is, we are faced with a God whom we can perceive but only understand dimly, at the edges as it were. He began with the existing thing making being (*esse*) “what is most intimate and profound *in* this thing.”⁶⁹ The relation of being to essence is not a relation between two things of the same order, of an accident to a substance, but rather, considered through using the Aristotelian notions of the relation of act to potency, two very different viewpoints. “Beginning with the existing individual already insinuates that the primacy should go to existence (in the spirit of Aristotle), and reduplicating the act/potency distinction offers a neat formulation for that primacy,”⁷⁰ that is, the object of human understanding is “the

⁶⁷ Burrell, *Knowing the Unknowable God*, 28.

⁶⁸ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 8, CREATION, 1.45.5, as cited in Burrell, *Knowing the Unknowable God*, 28.

⁶⁹ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 2, EXISTENCE AND NATURE OF GOD, 1.8.1.4, as cited in Burrell, *Knowing the Unknowable God*, 29. Emphasis added.

⁷⁰ Burrell, *Knowing the Unknowable God*, 29.

‘quiddity or nature existing in a material body’;⁷¹ just as the primary candidate for substance is the individual existing thing.”⁷²

As Burrell depicts it, Aquinas transformed Aristotle, recasting Avicenna’s primal distinction between *essence* and *existing* by raising *existing* from that of an accident, i.e., property, to that of *act*. This is not a description but a formal fact.⁷³ Existing will now be a primary example “in the created order of acts as we know them, since only existing things can act.” Hence, this philosophical strategy helped “identify a trace of God’s creative activity in creatures, as each participates in the gift of existing as it comes forth from the creator” identified as ‘existing itself’ (*ipsum esse*).”⁷⁴ By removing existence from the Aristotelian categories⁷⁵ Aquinas effectively ‘gutted’ the emanation scheme although he continued to use the term.⁷⁶ Again, we encounter the distinction. We can no longer think of “the creator as ‘over against’ the created universe, as though it were a separate being, since every creature exists only by participating in the inexhaustible act of existing which is the creator. That is, no creature can be without its inherent link to the creator, so these ‘two’ can never be separate from one another, as individual creatures are from each other.”⁷⁷ This gives us a sense of the immanence of God while respecting God’s transcendence. From this we see that the nature of the God-world

⁷¹ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 12, HUMAN INTELLIGENCE, 1.84.7, as cited in Burrell, *Knowing the Unknowable God*, 30.

⁷² Burrell, *Knowing the Unknowable God*, 30.

⁷³ David B. Burrell, "God's Eternity," *Faith and Philosophy* 1, (1984), 393.

⁷⁴ Burrell, *Towards a Jewish-Christian-Muslim Theology* (Chichester, Sussex: John Wiley; and Sons Ltd., 2011), 21-22.

⁷⁵ Burrell, "Aquinas and Islamic and Jewish thinkers," 69.

⁷⁶ Burrell, "Aquinas Appropriation of *Liber de Causis* to Articulate the Creator as Cause-of-Being,"

⁷⁶.

⁷⁷ Burrell, *Towards a Jewish-Christian-Muslim Theology*, 21-22.

relation is such that the distinction gives us a very different perspective from that commonly assumed in discussions of theodicies and the ‘problem of natural evil’.

For Burrell, Aquinas does not question the reality of the created essence, even though it is conceived in potency to *esse*; what exists is the subject, and the subject has being by its essence. But its *being*, its very existence, is the gift of the creator. We cannot denigrate created things in order to show the glory of the creator, rather “it amounts to an even greater praise to affirm a creator able to constitute creatures to function as agents in their own right, having existence as a gift.”⁷⁸ Burrell further cautions that the “intelligibility proper to *esse* must remain metaphorical, as a sign of the transcendence of the relation which it helps to formulate: that of creator to creature.”⁷⁹

There are two metaphors involved here. The first stems from the analogy of potency to act: *actus essendi*, the act of being; the second evocative of the emanation scheme: *ens per essentiam/per participationem*, participation.⁸⁰ As Burrell notes, citing Aquinas:

Esse (to-be) itself is the ultimate act in which everything can participate while it itself participates in nothing. Whence we say: if there be anything which is subsistent *esse* itself – as we say God is – then that one participates in nothing at all. Other subsistent forms, however, must participate in *esse* as potency to act, so given that they are to this extent in potency, they can participate in something else.⁸¹

Thus the being subsistent or existent in divinity is to be taken to mean as though it were an act, one in which created things participate as “having *esse* rather than being their

⁷⁸ Burrell, *Knowing the Unknowable God*, 30.

⁷⁹ Burrell, *Knowing the Unknowable God*, 30.

⁸⁰ Burrell, *Knowing the Unknowable God*, 30-31.

⁸¹ Thomas Aquinas, "Quaestiones disputatae de Anima," (1267).

<http://dhsprory.org/thomas/QDdeAnima.htm> (accessed 15 June 2015); Internet., 1.6.2, as cited in Burrell, *Knowing the Unknowable God*, 31; emphasis in Burrell.

own to-be”.⁸² The analogy of Aquinas’ choice of *act* to render *esse* intelligible to us is appropriate because, following Lonergan, for Burrell the act of understanding, and in particular the act of *judgment*, provides the rationale for this analogy; “it is through the judgment of truth that we attain to what is the case, when we assert things in fact to be such-and-such; ... [truth] results from an activity called judging; a second-order activity in the realm of knowing which completes the inquiry by ascertaining whether what we maintain is in fact the case,”⁸³ contending “if essence is in potency to an act of existing, then *what* can be said about a thing will be subordinate to something else: the act of judgment – or, in more colloquial speech, *how* it is said, or the manner in which what is said is put forth.”⁸⁴ This attitude toward reality, toward the world, becomes our approach to understanding existence “not as something ‘coming to’ a nature, but as that nature’s graciously being made present.”⁸⁵ Therefore, “*Esse*, the act of existing determines the individual *to be*, as its essence determines it to be *what it is*”⁸⁶ and provides the basis for the intelligibility of what is, the universe. Further, tying this to our discussion of creation leads us to consider that God desires the universe to be, a moral act on God’s part. We note, ‘moral’ here refers to God as free creator and not as we would consider other moral agents. There is no necessity in God as often implied.

⁸² Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 2, EXISTENCE AND NATURE OF GOD, 1.3.4, as cited in Burrell, *Knowing the Unknowable God*, 31.

⁸³ Burrell, *Knowing the Unknowable God*, 31-32.

⁸⁴ Burrell, *Knowing the Unknowable God*, 37.

⁸⁵ Burrell, *Knowing the Unknowable God*, 32.

⁸⁶ Burrell, *Knowing the Unknowable God*, 43, emphasis added.

RELATION – A PERSPECTIVE

In the discussion of God and the creation Burrell cautions us that before examining the distinction of God from the world we would be better advised to consider the connection, the relation.

[It would appear to be] true that the vast majority of endeavors in philosophy of religion over the past few centuries in the west have been devoted to ways of confirming creation. That is, for the most part, what arguments purporting to exhibit God's existence intend. Even those which pretend to proceed not from effect to cause but from interior analysis of the notion of divinity will not only begin with beings as we find them, but must conclude to a being whose very being gives existence to all that is. ... Yet for all these efforts, the connection turns out to be less something we can establish than it is something which imposes itself on us.⁸⁷

In the past, particularly in Augustine and Aquinas, the notion of creation as relation appears frequently. In Thomas Aquinas, the notion is there but the language is more austere than in the case of Augustine who is pouring out his soul in a confession. For Aquinas, by asserting that God is "the beginning and end of all things, and of reasoning creatures especially,"⁸⁸ that is, God is the source of all-there-is, implies that "God is the end or goal of all creatures."⁸⁹ Burrell notes the emphasis is on "the creator as cause-of-being".⁹⁰

However, as Burrell observes, in considering the relation between God and the world we have to take care in respecting the reality of each such that the distinction, "does not express a division within that world."⁹¹ This notion of the 'distinction', as emphasized constantly by Burrell, is the ground of our understanding of the notion of the relation between God, the creator, and God's creation. As well, creation is a key notion,

⁸⁷ Burrell, *Knowing the Unknowable God*, 5.

⁸⁸ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 1, THEOLOGY, 1. 2. Prologue.

⁸⁹ David B. Burrell and Elena Malits, *Original Peace: Restoring God's Creation* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1997), 72-73.

⁹⁰ Burrell, "Aquinas Appropriation of *Liber de Causis* to Articulate the Creator as Cause-of-Being," 76.

⁹¹ Burrell, *Knowing the Unknowable God*, 17.

and showing how the relation is incomparable with any relation between two things we know will require “special metaphysical resources, while failing to advert to that fact will inevitably involve ‘associating’ the creator with creatures.”⁹² Thus, we have the three notions: the relation, the distinction, and the creation. For Burrell, stemming from his sensitivity to the distinction, creation is primary in our thinking, it comes first, it is what we know.⁹³ This implies that we need be careful of how we speak of the relation. The notion of relation is subtle, “not properly an accident for its being is not *in* but *ad*,” which is to say that it does not exist in another so much as ‘between’ the *relata*.⁹⁴ Thus the difficulty we have in discussing God and the notion of God’s relation to creation. Yet how can we talk of two things without contrasting them? Given that one of those things is the creator of all the others, everything else is what it is in relation to that One. Thus, as Aquinas noted, “creation in the creature is left just as a relation to the creator as the origin of its existence,”⁹⁵ the relation is non-reciprocal, i.e., the creature is related to the creator; the creator, as such, is not related to the creature. This gives us the notion that creatures must always be discussed as created by, and never apart from, their direct relation with their creator.⁹⁶

For Burrell, it follows that if the creator and the creature were distinct in an ordinary way, the relation – even one of dependence – could not be non-reciprocal because in an ordinary way dependence marks a difference in the agent. But we are not

⁹² Burrell, "Creator/Creatures Relation," 178.

⁹³ David B. Burrell, "The act of creation with its theological consequences," in *Creation and The God of Abraham*, ed. David B. Burrell, Carlo Cogliati, Janet M. Soskice, William R. Stoeger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 41.

⁹⁴ Burrell, *Knowing the Unknowable God*, 23.

⁹⁵ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 8, CREATION, 1.45.3, as referenced in Burrell, "Incarnation and Creation: The Hidden Dimension," 237.

⁹⁶ Burrell, "Incarnation and Creation: The Hidden Dimension," 237.

talking in an ordinary way, we are talking of a creator which gives existence itself; God is our creator and not an entity that we can describe independently of this relation. However, this seemingly austere notion, “the fact that a cause of being, properly speaking, is not affected by causing all-that-is does not imply remoteness or uncaring; indeed, quite the opposite. For such a One must cause in such a way as to be present in each creature as that to which it is oriented in its very existing.”⁹⁷ Thus, the creator is not in parallel or over against the creation; we remember the distinction – God’s transcendence, “since every creature exists only by participating in the inexhaustible act of existing which is the creator.”⁹⁸ Burrell notes: “Without discriminating any feature of the universe, we are asked to think of it and of each thing and situation in it as dependent for existence on a first existent: God the Creator.”⁹⁹ However, all creatures have an intimate relation *to* the creator. While two creatures are separate from each other, creator and creature are never separate, the one from the other; as Aquinas observed, God is more intimately and profoundly interior to things than anything else.¹⁰⁰

In a number of articles on creation, Burrell, following Sara Grant, has insisted on the notion of ‘non-dualism’. He cites from Sara Grant’s Teape Lectures.

In India as in Greece, the ultimate question must always be that of the relation between the supreme unchanging Reality and the world of coming-to-be and passing away, the eternal Self and what appears as non-Self, and no epistemology can stand secure as long as this question remains unanswered. ... A systematic study of Sankara’s use of relational terms made it quite clear to me that he agrees with St. Thomas Aquinas in regarding the relation between creation and the ultimate Source of all being as a non-reciprocal dependence relation, i.e., a relation in which subsistent effect or ‘relative absolute’ is dependent on its cause for its very existence as a subsistent entity, whereas the cause is in no way dependent on the effect for its subsistence,

⁹⁷ David B. Burrell and Isabelle Moulin, "Albert, Aquinas, and Dionysius," *Modern Theology* 24:4, (2008), 645; Burrell, "The act of creation with its theological consequences," 51.

⁹⁸ Burrell, *Towards a Jewish-Christian-Muslim Theology*, 21-22.

⁹⁹ Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action*, 160.

¹⁰⁰ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 2, EXISTENCE AND NATURE OF GOD, 1.8.1 as referenced in Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action*, 38.

though there is a necessary logical relation between cause and effect; i.e., a relation which is perceived by the mind when it reflects on the implications of the existence of the cosmos.¹⁰¹

He concludes that alternative images: emanation, pantheism, panentheism, do not help us; rather, Sankara's notion of 'non-duality' (as interpreted by Grant and Burrell) underlines the absolute uniqueness of the distinction between God and God's creation.¹⁰² This notion of non-duality implies that there is no contrastive picture available to us; God is transcendent, beyond our created categories, no comparability.

We have considered existence earlier and one way of illuminating what we mean by existence is that of relationship which in turn links to the notion of creation. Burrell quotes approvingly Ibn-Sina's delineation of creation:

This is what it means that a thing is created, that is, receiving its existence from another. ... As a result, everything, in relation to the first cause, is created. ... Therefore, every single thing, except the primal One, exists after not having existed with respect to itself.¹⁰³

While this clearly shows the distinction between essence and existence, what is present in things is a real relation to the creator by each individual being by the very fact of its existence: "in each existing thing in its ontological constitution by essence and existence ... Aquinas' recasting of Avicenna's distinction of existence from essence (as something happening to it) finds its proper vindication."¹⁰⁴ As Burrell observes, Aquinas' distinction provides a response rather than a reaction to our common tendency; it starts with the existing thing and, as has been said, shifts us from our pervasive emphasis on 'what is it?' by giving preference to essence, toward 'is it?' thereby directing our

¹⁰¹ Sara Grant, *Towards an Alternative Theology: Confessions of a Non-dualist Christian* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001). Burrell's expansion of this notion can be found in Burrell and Malits, *Original Peace: Restoring God's Creation*, Chapter 7, The Creator and Creation, 72-79.

¹⁰² Burrell and Moulin, "Albert, Aquinas, and Dionysius," 644; Burrell, "Creatio ex Nihilo Recovered," 9; Burrell, *Deconstructing Theodicy*, 135-136.

¹⁰³ Burrell, *Knowing the Unknowable God*, 33.

¹⁰⁴ Burrell, *Knowing the Unknowable God*, 34.

thought to the very existence of something.¹⁰⁵ Such a distinction will also provide a fresh way of conceiving the nature of divinity.

CREATION AS RELATION

Let us now turn to *what is*, to the creation, as a perspective on the notion of relation. As Burrell observes, "The act of creation will be located not in the category of act or passion, but in that of relation."¹⁰⁶ This perspective of creation as relation has, as an essential element in its understanding, that of creation as a free gift as has been noted earlier; it appears frequently in the classical literature. Further, Burrell adds that Aquinas' emphasis is on the creator as cause-of-being.¹⁰⁷ In discussing the way in which God acts, Burrell notes that "the creator ever acts by constituting the order which inheres in each existing thing, in the measure that it is"¹⁰⁸ He states that we can never adequately articulate the uniqueness of the creator-creation relation.¹⁰⁹ However, Burrell notes Aquinas' ability to characterize the creator as *ipsum esse subsistens* (subsistent being itself) which allows him to offer a way of articulating the singularity of the relation of creator to creation, one of a 'non-reciprocal relation of dependence.'

Now since God is altogether outside the order of creatures, since they are ordered to him but not he to them, it is clear that being related to God is a reality in creatures, but being related to creatures is not a reality in God, we say it about him because of the real relation in creatures.¹¹⁰

Burrell further observes that while creatures have their very being from God, God in no

¹⁰⁵ Burrell, *Knowing the Unknowable God*, 36-37.

¹⁰⁶ Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action*, 157.

¹⁰⁷ Burrell, "Aquinas Appropriation of *Liber de Causis* to Articulate the Creator as Cause-of-Being," 76.

¹⁰⁸ Burrell, "Aquinas Appropriation of *Liber de Causis* to Articulate the Creator as Cause-of-Being," 82.

¹⁰⁹ Burrell, "Aquinas Appropriation of *Liber de Causis* to Articulate the Creator as Cause-of-Being," 83.

¹¹⁰ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 3, THE NAMES OF GOD, 1.1.13, a7, as cited in Burrell, "The Challenge to Medieval Christian Philosophy: Relating Creator to Creatures," 134.

way depends on the creatures being, i.e., on creating.¹¹¹ The creator to creation relationship has the latter in a non-reciprocal relation of dependence. Creatures have their very being from God; God in no way depends on the creatures being, i.e., on creating. Thus, the notion of creation as relation is clear. The relationship is one of utter dependence and is unilateral, all dependence being that of the creature t, yet more fully, for “fully intentional and free agents whose freedom can be expressed as a ‘hunger for the good’ ... best seen as a response.”¹¹² I am aware of some of the controversy surrounding the issue of non-reciprocal relation of dependence, e.g., Elizabeth Johnson in *She Who Is*,¹¹³ these reflections, as we shall see later, will have some bearing on the way we understand the meaning of a *real* relationship between God and the world (creation) and why Burrell, drawing on Aquinas, will emphasize the non-reciprocal character of the relationship.

The notion of the relation of God and the creation has led to a variety of interpretations. In particular, while I, based on Burrell, have described the relationship as ‘non-reciprocal’, a difficulty arises because of the flexibility of Aristotle’s category of relation. We must be careful not to treat in the same manner the relation *of* creatures to their creator and the relations *among* creatures to their creator, in case we fail to distinguish the creator from creatures. Aquinas insists on the *esse* of creatures as an *esse-ad* (their to-be is to-be-towards-the-creator). We must keep in mind that being created *is* to be a creature, and to be a creature is foremost *to be*. Yet Burrell notes that

¹¹¹ Burrell, "The Challenge to Medieval Christian Philosophy: Relating Creator to Creatures," 134.

¹¹² Burrell, "Aquinas Appropriation of *Liber de Causis* to Articulate the Creator as Cause-of-Being," 80.

¹¹³ Elizabeth Johnson, *She Who Is* (New York, NY: The Crossroads Publishing Company, 1992), 224-225.

as God is the source of a thing's being, "God remains the very source of anything's being, anything's to-be (*esse*) is at once a participation in the very being of God and 'more intimate to things than anything else.'"¹¹⁴

Yet this notion that God is not really related to what is created is often misinterpreted. Burrell contends that a better reading is the "fact that God's creating is an intentional activity of divinity, and not one which inherently relates God to creation in such a way that God could not be God without being creator as well;"¹¹⁵ creation is not *necessary* to God but God *did* create, and as we have noted, out of love of his own goodness; pure gift.

Given the nature of our understanding of creation as relation, let us now consider a few aspects of note to illumine this notion. We will firstly consider redemption, an aspect of God desiring that we be and God's care for us. We will then consider the notion of creation as gift, as the base of our freedom, as an understanding of our intimacy with our creator, and an example of that intimacy. Such notions are used in our discussion of how we can respond to natural evil.

AS REDEMPTION

Burrell presents a very profound perspective on creation and its relationship to its creator, the intimate relation between creation and redemption, the relation between creation and the Incarnation.¹¹⁶ This perspective is found in the Nicene Creed in the link between

¹¹⁴ Burrell, *Faith and Freedom*, xx-xxi.

¹¹⁵ Burrell, *Friendship and Ways to Truth*, 102.

¹¹⁶ Burrell, "Incarnation and Creation: The Hidden Dimension."

We believe in one God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible.

and

in one Lord Jesus Christ, ... being of one substance with the Father by whom all things were made; who for us men, and for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary, and was made man ...

coupled with the Definition of Chalcedon (451 CE), in particular,

He is of the same reality as God as far as his deity is concerned and of the same reality as we ourselves as far as his humanness is concerned; thus like us in all respects, sin only excepted;

the reading of the one in light of the other.¹¹⁷ As the logic for each of these is similar, a fuller understanding of the one could lead to a fuller understanding of the other.¹¹⁸

Past distinctions have led us to consider the natural order not as gift or grace, grace being identified with the supernatural order, but rather as a given thereby separating nature from salvation, the supernatural order. However, we have been emphasizing the need to think differently and in a 'whole sense', not as disparate notions of reason for the natural order *and* belief in the supernatural order or as science and faith but rather together locating God and God's action in history, in salvation history. Hence, creation, the natural order, *is* grace, *is* gift. Burrell asks us to consider redemption as a *new* creation restoring the original ordering of the universe, the initial gift, *creatio ex nihilo*.¹¹⁹ Further, he considers that the themes of creation and salvation act as two poles, or as two foci as in an ellipse, of the relationship of God and the creation, the universe of all that is. These two themes are necessary to a sound understanding of "creation-*cum*-redemption", the double gift of creation and Incarnation,

¹¹⁷ Burrell, "Incarnation and Creation: The Hidden Dimension," 234.

¹¹⁸ Burrell, "Incarnation and Creation: The Hidden Dimension," 237.

¹¹⁹ Burrell, "Incarnation and Creation: The Hidden Dimension," 235.

but together necessary for understanding either, not as separate notions.¹²⁰ He observes that the emphasis shifted from the first, based in the Jewish roots of Christianity and the Sabbath, toward the second, the observance of Sunday as the Feast of the Resurrection and our redemption. They must be brought together in some way.¹²¹

Burrell uses these definitions to clarify our understanding of Jesus, the ‘Word’ as “the singular point where God and God’s creation meet,”¹²² as a part of our understanding of the relationship between creator and creation, the Word ‘through whom all things were made’ and ‘for our salvation’. As he notes, “for Aquinas, the sending of the Word ‘for our salvation’ is in strict continuity with the eternal generation of that same Word, so creation and incarnation follow a parallel logic.”¹²³ Thus, considering the very fact of our existence, we see how intimate the relation is. Jesus who came for our salvation is also the one “in him we live and move and have our being”. (Acts 17:28) Chalcedon was the attempt by the early Church to bring together two aspects of revelation, creation, *and* redemption, which imply an intimacy, may I say friendship, with God and as noted earlier, we *can* respond. As Burrell indicates, while difficult to express, each of these two themes presumes the other and is grounded in revelation.¹²⁴

¹²⁰ Burrell, "Incarnation and Creation: The Hidden Dimension," 236. Emphasis in the original. He also addresses this notion in Burrell, *Freedom and Creation in Three Traditions*, 176-177. See also, Burrell and Malits, *Original Peace: Restoring God's Creation*, 4-5, which introduces the theme of the elliptical foci and which is used throughout the book.

¹²¹ There is a different opinion of this perspective of Burrell, found in a work which appeared during my work. Poulson, in Martin G. Poulson, *The Dialectics of Creation* (London, UK: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2014), sub-titled “Creation and the Creator in Edward Schillebeeckx and David Burrell”, sees these two elements from a perspective of dialectic seeking a new synthesis and using Burrell to highlight his examination of Schillebeeckx. See e.g., pp 51-63.

¹²² Burrell, "Incarnation and Creation: The Hidden Dimension," 236.

¹²³ Burrell, "Incarnation and Creation: The Hidden Dimension," 237.

¹²⁴ Burrell, "Incarnation and Creation: The Hidden Dimension," 240.

In summary,

For the intent cannot be to eclipse the drama of redemption with a more primordial one of creation, or even more outrageously, to presume that we might be able to recover that original order, for ourselves or our world, by our own efforts in “new age” fashion. The point is rather to begin to see how the redemptive drama, both in its goal (restoring the original order) and its means (suffering the effects of sin), is linked stereoscopically with the original order of creation, in a dual focus which will offer us a picture of our relationship with God as ennobling as it is humbling.¹²⁵

This notion of redemption will be revisited in Chapter 5.

AS GIFT

This notion of gift as an aspect of creation is enhanced by the notion of *dabar*, God speaking but in a strong active sense, as an event whereby something happens. We find “And God said, ... And it was so.”¹²⁶ This notion is found throughout the Scriptures particularly in the Wisdom literature, e.g., “The earth is full of the steadfast love of the Lord. By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, and all their host by the breath of his mouth. ... For he spoke, and it came to be.” (Ps. 33:5, 6, 9) This is an extraordinary overwhelming gift, “infinitely more than we can ask or imagine,”¹²⁷ the creation, existence itself. This sense of gift calls for a response and again the Wisdom literature gives examples, e.g., “The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims his handiwork.” (Ps. 19:1) All of creation raises its voice praising God. We ourselves can respond to this love shown us by God in a loving response on our part.

One possible outcome of the flexibility of the notion of relation is that of considering the relation like many others in the universe and considering this intimate

¹²⁵ Burrell, "Incarnation and Creation: The Hidden Dimension," 243.

¹²⁶ A reiterated theme in Genesis 1.

¹²⁷ Part of the doxology at the end of the Canadian Anglican Eucharist Rite in *The Book of Alternative Services* (Toronto, ON: Anglican Book Centre, 1985), 214, 260; Ephesians 3:20.

relation as God interpenetrating the universe though being greater than it, in short, either pantheism or panentheism, stemming from a desire to have a reciprocal relationship between God and humankind.¹²⁸ However, these approaches do not work, they confuse the distinction, and, in a sense, God becomes the ‘biggest thing around’.¹²⁹ This also ties us back to an explanatory mode which, following Burrell, I have been contending against.

AS FREEDOM

It should be noted that this notion of relation leads to the whole notion of human freedom. As Burrell observes:

attention to creation and the unique relation of creator to creatures can eliminate the tendency to structure divine and human freedom as a zero-sum game, for that very structure simply presumes that the creator is an actor along with others, as does language of “concurrence.” Yet if we take as axiomatic that whenever God acts, God acts as creator; and when ever we act, we act as creatures, a fresh scenario emerges. As the “cause of being,” the creator need not “fiddle” nor “intervene,” which would be unseemly because it involves a crude category mistake. This grounding relation also implies that creatures need not be “prime movers” when it comes to their free acts, in order for the acts to be free. Nor does the creator’s activity stand over against that of the creature, as when one creature pushes or blocks another, for the creator is not so related to creatures.¹³⁰

He points out that such a perspective obviates the need to consider the notion of libertarian freedom, it simply overlooks creation,¹³¹ it is embedded in the view of the universe as essentially self-constituting much as the view of modern ‘commonsense’ or materialistic view. He adds, “it is not necessary for creatures to be free, that they

¹²⁸ This issue has been discussed by many people, as an example, Johnson, *She Who Is*, 224-245 who is a strong proponent of a reciprocal relationship between God and humankind. Johnson has, for her part, it should be clear, maintained the radical distinction between God and world, e.g., her article “Does God Play Dice?” 10-14, 16-17.

¹²⁹ Burrell, “Incarnation and Creation: The Hidden Dimension,” 237-238.

¹³⁰ Burrell, “Creator/Creatures Relation,” 184.

¹³¹ Burrell, “Creator/Creatures Relation,” 184.

somehow be removed from the activity of the creator. In fact, such a proposal would be incoherent in a metaphysics of creation.”¹³²

AS INTIMACY

There is a further aspect of the notion of relationship, that of the intimacy between two entities and their interaction, for example, the sayings in the New Testament of our value; e.g., “But even the hairs of your head are all counted. Do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows.” (Matt. 10:29-31; Luke 12:7) So, while the notions of relationship between people and God may seem very austere, “What is present in things, however, is a real relation to the creator – ‘already alluded to in the term ‘creature’ (*De. Pot.* 3.3) – which is displayed in the ontological unity possessed by each being by the fact of its existence.”¹³³ As Aquinas observes:

God exists in everything; not indeed as part of their substance or as an accident, but as an agent is present to that in which its action is taking place. For unless it act through intermediaries every agent must be connected with that upon which it acts, and be in causal contact with it: ... Now since it is God’s nature to exist, he it must be who properly causes existence in creatures. ... Now existence is more intimately and profoundly interior to things than anything else, for everything as we said is potential when compared to existence. So God must exist and exist intimately in everything.¹³⁴

Hence, we must be aware and careful of the sense of God’s intimate presence to each individual, we must be aware and careful of the sense of God’s creating and conserving individual things, particularly when we “add a good dose of chance-luck, good and bad.”¹³⁵ This intimate relationship will be explored later in Chapter 4 when I discuss God’s providence for God’s creation, and even further in Chapter 6.

¹³² Burrell, "Creator/Creatures Relation," 185.

¹³³ Burrell, *Knowing the Unknowable God*, 34.

¹³⁴ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 2, EXISTENCE AND NATURE OF GOD, 1.8.1, Reply; titled “God’s Existence in Things” as implied in Burrell, *Knowing the Unknowable God*, 34, and in Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action*, 38.

¹³⁵ Burrell, *Knowing the Unknowable God*, 93.

AS CONVERSATION

This leads us finally to another aspect of the relation between God and creatures which is of great importance. As Burrell notes in *Deconstructing Theology*, Job talks to God while his friends talk *about* God, a strong contrast of perspectives.¹³⁶ It is not that God commends Job's speeches, rather that Job *talks to* God. Even more striking, *pace* Tilley, God *talks to* Job.¹³⁷ And, as Burrell notes, creating is basic to God's address to Job and his 'friends'. This further implies that the nature of the creator-creature relationship goes beyond our dogmatic explanations such as offered by Job's 'friends'; it is personal.¹³⁸ As Burrell states toward the end of his study: "Speaking about something veers toward explaining, while speaking to someone can engage both in a relationship of exchange open to yet other forms of understanding."¹³⁹ Talking to God is, of course, a natural aspect of prayer and liturgy and this includes 'hearing what God is saying' through revelation. One's response to God may also be an aspect of 'hearing God', i.e., where did that notion come into my head? Those steeped in liturgy and community are well aware of this; God does speak to us and we can "dare to enter into this founding relation with our creator who gives each of us our very being."¹⁴⁰ As noted earlier, we can also respond with praise and trust. God talks to us and we can talk to God. After all, there is no 'distance' between creator and creature, God being 'more intimate to things than anything else'¹⁴¹ as noted earlier. This implies that "relating is not so much a task as it is a surrender to the 'facts of the matter,' a letting-go of a posture of 'existential

¹³⁶ Burrell, *Deconstructing Theodicy*, 108ff.

¹³⁷ Burrell, *Deconstructing Theodicy*, 115.

¹³⁸ Burrell, *Learning to Trust in Freedom*, 19-30.

¹³⁹ Burrell, *Deconstructing Theodicy*, 124.

¹⁴⁰ Burrell, *Deconstructing Theodicy*, 110.

¹⁴¹ Burrell, *Faith and Freedom*, xx-xxi.

autonomy' (or separateness) to submit to the innate desire toward 'the Good' that spells our fulfillment."¹⁴² The very nature of the dialogue reminds us that

a keen sense of the uniqueness of the One about whom one is attempting to speak, or to whom one is daring to address oneself, will doubtless help to eliminate much nonsense of the 'why is God doing this to me?' variety. For while the 'why' makes eminent sense as a plea or even a complaint, it does not as a request for an explanation. For the action of a creator God simply will not fit into anticipated explanatory frames, any more than the activity of creating can be parsed as a process."¹⁴³

Theodicy simply will not work! Our modes of inquiry run up against God's addressing us! Existence *is* the theological philosophical reply to explanation.

In summary, we have considered the notion of existence, what we understand of what-is, going well beyond the Plotinian emanation scheme to understanding the notion that God's to-be is to be, God's essence is God's existence, all of which preserves God as the free creator of what is, the universe. From this we came to the understanding that existence is pure act leading to a further understanding that creation is producing to-be as such. We further considered some implications, particularly the intimate link between creature and creator. This led us to consider the nature of the relation finding that God is 'more intimate to things than anything else'. The notion of creation as relation is, thus, very rich and will be an underlying aspect of our further considerations in discussing natural evil.

Why Creation?

Finally, for this chapter, how we can understand God's actually creating the universe. To put it colloquially, "Why did God bother?" Clearly, if we say that God is complete in Godself then there is no 'need' in God.

¹⁴² Burrell, *Deconstructing Theodicy*, 133.

¹⁴³ Burrell, *Deconstructing Theodicy*, 121-122.

A key insight of Aquinas to which Burrell makes frequent allusion is:

To know the divine persons was necessary for us for two reasons. One in order to have a right view of the creation of things. For by maintaining that God made everything through his Word we avoid the error of those who held that God's nature compelled him to create things. By affirming that there is in him the procession of Love we show that he made creatures, not because he needed them nor because of any reason outside himself, but from love of his own goodness.¹⁴⁴

From this Burrell derives the following perspectives. The act of creating cannot be a simple overflow (emanation) from God whose very nature is to be, rather it is intentional and hence a gracious gift. However, "the mode of action remains utterly consonant with the divine nature, hence the natural metaphor of emanation."¹⁴⁵ Further, this concise summary of the "Trinitarian structure inherent in creation properly conceived" enables us to have a right conception of the universe, "creating is a fully gratuitous act, operating out of a fullness that needs no further completion."¹⁴⁶

As well, this has an influence on our reflection on the 'distinction', the distinction of God from the universe. We may use Aquinas' perceptive statement (above) about the knowledge of divine trinity being necessary for the right idea of creation, that is, God did not produce things of necessity nor for "any reason outside himself, but from love of his own goodness. Our knowing "that the divine goodness is inherently generative in itself, ... obviates any need on God's part to originate a universe in order that divinity might be complete." But as Burrell notes, even more so, Aquinas' is stating: "*not* that 'God produced creatures ... on account of ... God's own goodness, but 'on account of *the love of* God's own goodness.' The "Word by which God made all things" is indeed a '*procession of love*' and so inherent to divinity, yet the act of creating

¹⁴⁴ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 6, THE TRINITY, 1.32.1. ad. 3.

¹⁴⁵ Burrell, *Learning to Trust in Freedom*, 34.

¹⁴⁶ Burrell, "The Challenge to Medieval Christian Philosophy: Relating Creator to Creatures." 137-138.

by that Word is a free act of love. How can we know that? Only because we have been told that the God whose very essence is to-exist so exists as to be inherently knowing and loving.”¹⁴⁷ As Burrell observes, if ‘free’ in free creation were to mean arbitrary this would hardly be appropriate to our God. The best non-necessitating reason is love.¹⁴⁸ As noted earlier, this is a moral act on the part of God; God desired that the universe be. This notion of God’s love for God’s creation will be pursued further in the next chapter.

Recapitulation

This chapter has presented a broad overview of creation as a prelude to a more specific consideration of both God and God’s creation. In particular, we have examined some of the metaphysical thinking underlying the approach in this dissertation, all as a prelude to an examination of some of the things we can say of God, both formal features and other characteristics germane to this dissertation.

From this perspective, creation is that which defines how we are to understand God, the world, the relationship between the world and God, and thus, the way we discuss God as creator and the world as created. Further, there is integrity of the world to be understood, creation implies intelligibility. The order of the universe is grounded in the autonomy of creation, it is contingent, it might not have been. As noted earlier, this Christian understanding of the freedom of God and our dependence provides a new context for the modes of possibility, actuality, and necessity, each of these being understood in a new way. Existence has meaning, it is intelligible.

¹⁴⁷ Burrell, *Freedom and Creation in Three Traditions*, 165-166, emphasis in the original and citing Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 6, THE TRINITY, 1.32.1.3.

¹⁴⁸ Burrell, *Freedom and Creation in Three Traditions*, 166.

Yet, we are not seeking explanation, rather, we are seeking understanding and have alluded to the need for judgement. Following Lonergan, for Burrell our acts of understanding and, in particular, the act of judgment, provides the basis for our grasp of the intelligibility of things since it is through the judgment of truth whereby we understand what is the case. This notion also will be expanded upon later as we address an understanding of the universe, particularly as related to natural evil.

We have also discovered that God creates out of love, it is intentional. However, if from love, the dilemma still presses itself; why natural evil? The point of this is to lay the groundwork for looking at the goodness of God and God's creation in spite of natural evil. The next question to be asked then is, how does God act? Given the elaboration in this chapter on creation and existence, Burrell invites us to respond by affirming that God acts in a way that is unique to God, namely, eternally. Clarifying this insight and elucidating its import for our question of natural evil will be the subject matter of the next chapter.

Ever since the creation of the world his eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things he has made. Rom. 1:20

4. ON GOD'S ACTION IN BURRELL

As originally proposed, we are engaged in rethinking the question of natural evil in light of insights on creation from David Burrell. While underlying the enigma of evil are implicit references to divine creative action and the goodness of creation, it is not immediately evident, even theologically, what we mean today when we refer to God's action. Yet, it is important to observe that the question of natural evil is, at root, the question of how we can understand God's acting in the world.

Heretofore in this examination we have been engaged in thinking the meaning of God and of our world differently, challenging the tacit presumption of God and the world in parallel and somehow in competition. We have looked at a broad perspective on creation and from this have discussed the notion of existence; how can we understand existence, particularly in light of our understanding of creation and of our relation to the Creator. As was noted, the point of this is to lay the groundwork for looking at the goodness of God and God's creation in spite of natural evil. The next question to be asked then is, how does God act? Burrell invites us to respond by affirming that God acts in a way that is unique to God, namely, eternally. Clarifying this insight and elucidating its import for our question of natural evil will be the subject matter of this chapter.

As a first step, in considering how we can understand God's action in the world and because what one understands about God is at the root of the 'problem of evil', let us further examine aspects of God germane to this inquiry, God's formal features and

particularly simplicity and the notion of eternity; not that we can say anything directly but at least have some notion as to how we can understand God. This encompasses the notions of God's 'perfections', i.e., the formal features, particularly God's simpleness, goodness, existence in things, and especially God's eternity, the latter being of importance because, aside from being seriously misunderstood,¹ not only does it dissociate the neoplatonic notion of 'emanation' from God but it supports both the distinction of God from the world and helps us conceive divinity as "neither parallel to nor in opposition to the universe."² As well, consideration is given to God's knowing, both what God is doing in creation and the various issues associated with eternity, e.g., God's knowledge of the 'future'.

As a second step we examine certain aspects of God's action, particularly the notions of providence and causation, and a revisiting of creation under the notions of free creation, *Creatio ex Nihilo*, *Creatio Continua*, along with considerations of the ordering of the universe. The underlying contention is that God *is* involved in the universe. Through this we are enabled to see aspects of the ordering of the universe, an expression of God's goodness and the goodness of creation. The aim is to bring the resources of Burrell's reflections on creation (the language of God as creator) and the sense of ordering in the universe to advance an approach to the question of natural evil, the subject of the next chapter.

¹ Burrell, *Freedom and Creation in Three Traditions*, 104. Burrell notes the arguments against so-called 'classical theism'. See *supra*, iv, 'Preface,' note 4.

² Burrell, *Freedom and Creation in Three Traditions*, 102.

God Talk

As our first step, given the understanding of the connection and relation of the universe to God that was developed in the previous chapter, we can now return to our question of God, i.e., “figuring out what *kind* of God ... is plausible as an explanation of the origins of the universe as we find it.”³ To begin with, we are trying to know what it is we are speaking of when we speak of God, how to relate this to whatever else we may know, “and how especially to handle the religious traditions’ avowal that God lies beyond our ken.”⁴ The matter is both metaphysical, as we have seen, and linguistic, our use of language and revelation. Given that we say God is unknowable, what *can* we say? As Burrell notes, while “philosophical theologians have to say that God is utterly simple, believers have to say that God is just, faithful, compassionate and the like.”⁵ A question is the relation of these two perspectives and of them to the wider discussion of God. Let us begin then with consideration of what we can understand about God and from this move to how we can understand God’s action in the world.

Can we conceive of the nature of divinity? Following Burrell, as we have seen,⁶ Aquinas considered God as the One whose essence is simply to-be. Indeed, Aquinas introduces the term God as “the beginning and end of all things, and of reasoning creatures especially”⁷ and this descriptive definition reminds us that the beginning is not

³ Stout, *The Flight from Authority: Religion, Morality and the Quest for Autonomy*, 40, as cited in the Introduction to this dissertation, *supra*, 38; emphasis added. It should be clear at this point in the dissertation that the term ‘explanation’ is NOT our direction, rather we are seeking understanding, explanation at this level being beyond our knowledge.

⁴ Burrell, *Knowing the Unknowable God*, 1.

⁵ Burrell, *Knowing the Unknowable God*, 51.

⁶ Chapter 3, *supra*, 105ff.

⁷ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 2, EXISTENCE AND NATURE OF GOD, 1.2, Prologue.

contained in what is, in the set of things;⁸ clearly God as the origin of the world cannot be one of those things.⁹ And since God is the origin of all things, God's proper effect is the *esse* of the cosmos. As stated by Burrell, divine simpleness assures God's distinction from all things as well as providing the ground for asserting the gratuity of creation and, further, gives assurance "that we are talking about divinity."¹⁰

This "is 'the distinction' for which we have been seeking a proper formulation."¹¹ We couple this with the notion of existence as the primary ontological constituent of an existing thing, not as something which 'happens to' an essence but rather the primacy of 'is it?' over 'what is it?' This demands we reorient our thinking. We have to remind ourselves that essences, properties, and the like, cannot be the bases of our inquiry; they are not things but rather the constituents of things.¹² Further, influenced by Wittgenstein,

what can be said about a thing will be subordinate to something else: the act of judgment – or, in more colloquial speech, *how* it is said, or the manner in which what is said is put forth. Following this lead, we will forebear asking *whether* our concepts apply to the subject in question, but rather ask *how* they might be used to elucidate it.¹³

Now, as Burrell has noted, Aquinas completed what others had begun.¹⁴ He established a way of uniquely fixing the reference for God the Creator without trying to characterize God in terms appropriate to creatures. He did this through the use of a set of 'formal features' – simpleness, goodness, limitlessness, and unchangeableness, all culminating in a characterization of God as one; "for what clinches divine simpleness

⁸ Burrell, *Knowing the Unknowable God*, 35.

⁹ Burrell, "Distinguishing God From the World," 6.

¹⁰ Burrell, "Distinguishing God From the World," 6.

¹¹ Burrell, *Knowing the Unknowable God*, 35.

¹² A paraphrase of Burrell, *Knowing the Unknowable God*, 36.

¹³ Burrell, *Knowing the Unknowable God*, 37, emphasis in the original.

¹⁴ Burrell, "Distinguishing God From the World," 6. This aspect is noted in much of Burrell's oeuvre subsequent to his stay in Jerusalem and Cairo.

(and so intrinsic unity) is the identification of the divine nature with existence.”¹⁵ Thus we see how Burrell uses Aquinas’ more formal treatment of what we can say of God, whilst at the same time being fully aware that we cannot know what our expressions mean fully when speaking of God, we cannot know what God is. Further, when speaking of God we should be mindful of Aquinas’ statement:

Now God is both simple, like the form, and subsistent, like the concrete thing, and so we sometimes refer to him by abstract nouns to indicate his simplicity and sometimes by concrete nouns to indicate his subsistence and completeness; though neither way of speaking measures up to his way of being, for in this life we do not know him as he is in himself.¹⁶

As Burrell notes, we do well to follow Aquinas closely and his care in paying heed to our inability to know what God is and hence Aquinas’ use of an indirect approach, “the only one available to an inquiry by one of God’s creatures.”¹⁷

FORMAL FEATURES¹⁸

Let us pursue further our consideration of the formal features.¹⁹ Firstly, let us examine some preliminaries in order to situate our use of these terms.

Two features have shaped philosophical considerations of divinity, God’s *simpleness* and God’s *eternity*, but these features have been subject to severe questioning and understanding, particularly in recent times, leading, for example, to process theology. However, as noted above, they are necessary to accentuate the distinction of

¹⁵ Burrell, *Freedom and Creation in Three Traditions*, 31-32. See also Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action*. Chapter 2, 13-47. See also the introduction to Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 2, EXISTENCE AND NATURE OF GOD, Question 3, God’s Simpleness, Prolog, where Aquinas distinguishes between “secondly, of the ways in which we know him” and “thirdly, of the ways in which we describe him,” thereby giving force to the distinction between formal features and attributes. See also Burrell, “Distinguishing God From the World.” 5, and Chapter 2, *supra*, 98ff,

¹⁶ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 3, KNOWING AND NAMING GOD, I.13.ad 1, ad 2; as cited in David B. Burrell, “Beyond Idolatry: On ‘Naming’ the One – God,” in *Finding God in All Things* ed. Michael J. Himes and Stephen J. Pope (New York, NY: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1996), 29.

¹⁷ Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action*, 15.

¹⁸ This section relies heavily on Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action*, Chapter 2, 13-47.

¹⁹ See *supra*, 98.

God from the creation, they have a central role to play in philosophical theology. These ‘formal features’ secure the distinction of God from the world, a distinction necessary for our understanding of creation.²⁰

As a preliminary to the discussion of simpleness and eternity let us consider the careful attention Burrell pays to the use of language in discussing God since “we cannot know what God is, but only what he is not,”²¹ frequently referred to by Burrell, not necessarily as a preamble to negative theology but as a warning that we must be careful in our use of language. This is exemplified by the attention paid to ‘Philosophical Grammar’ both by the medievals but also the demand placed upon us today in retrieval of their insights and the attention to carefulness in use of language since Wittgenstein.²² As Burrell observes, what we can say about something is very much beholden to how we say it. Hence, it is how our concepts are used to explain something that is important and if to things then assuredly to matters of divinity.²³ We cannot assert any straightforward descriptive fact about God. Therefore, these formal features are not descriptions; they are logical statements within the bounds of what one can say constrained by the grammar of discourse.

We use a variety of terms of God, e.g., ‘good’, ‘wise’, ‘immortal’ but these terms used of God carry the sense of completeness of these notions or fullness far beyond our normal use and understanding, hence negative in this sense. Burrell contends that this practice of Aquinas is a meta-linguistic practice, “mapping out the grammar appropriate

²⁰ Burrell, "Distinguishing God From the World," 4. See also the introduction to these terms in Chapter 2, *supra*, 98ff.

²¹ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 2, EXISTENCE AND NATURE OF GOD, 1.3 Prologue, as cited in Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action*, 14.

²² Burrell devotes the opening chapter of Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action* to this topic.

²³ Burrell, *Knowing the Unknowable God*, 37.

in divinis.”²⁴ He notes that the conciseness of the argument for God’s simpleness shows a pattern for the more positive considerations of what are commonly called attributes of God or the ‘divine names’; the two sets of terms, formal terms and attributes, belong to two different ontological levels, the formal features defining the *manner* in which such attributive terms may be ascribed to God.²⁵ As has been noted, these latter terms will be considered in the next chapter. Here we are concerned with the formal features.

In order to avoid the narrowness of the notion of ‘classical theism’,²⁶ for Burrell these terms, simplicity and eternity, are ‘formal’ terms; that is, as ‘formal features’ they are not attributes or characteristics. As he states, “Formal features concern our manner of locating the subject for characterization, and hence belong to a stage prior to considering attributes as such.”²⁷ A ‘formal feature,’ in contrast to an ‘ordinary feature’, does not claim to describe the thing in question, rather “it attempts to locate it ontologically,”²⁸ that is, formal features “are not so much said of a subject as they are reflected in the subject’s very mode of existing” and they control the way we say something of the subject.²⁹ “They offer semantic use for ‘the distinction’ by showing that whatever is said of God (‘divine names’) cannot be said of divinity as is said of anything else.”³⁰ We will examine further the approach taken to these ‘divine names’ in Chapter 5.

²⁴ Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action*, 19, emphasis in the original.

²⁵ Burrell, *Knowing the Unknowable God*, 47.

²⁶ As noted, Burrell contends against the characterization of the formal features as a paradigm of ‘classical theism’, in a variety of places, see Preface, iv n4.

²⁷ Burrell, *Faith and Freedom*, 5-6.

²⁸ Burrell, *Friendship and Ways to Truth*, 104.

²⁹ Burrell, *Knowing the Unknowable God*, 47.

³⁰ Burrell, *Friendship and Ways to Truth*, 104.

Burrell notes that Aquinas used the notion of 'perfection'; God's to-be is the perfections.³¹ His arguments for the formal features of simpleness, perfection, limitlessness, unchangeableness, and oneness are expressed in negative terms:

Now we cannot know what God is, but only what he is not; we must therefore consider the ways in which God does not exist, rather than the ways in which he does. We treat then first, of the ways in which God does not exist, secondly, of the ways in which we know him, thirdly, of the ways which we describe him.³²

This approach is referred as apophatic or negative theology, a way of approaching God by denying that any of our concepts can be affirmed properly of Him, human categories are incapable of encompassing the ineffable, an assertion of the inadequacy of human understanding in matters divine, and therefore, a corrective within theology; hence the use of negative terms to indicate indirectly how we may understand the nature of God. It stems from Pseudo-Dionysius (c. 500) and in his use is coupled with cataphatic or positive theology. It is part of the way of analogy, an approach considered a characteristic of the Western Church as contrasted with its more fundamental use in the Eastern Church.³³ Burrell, referring to God's formal features, concurs with Aquinas; in trying to say something about God we are compelled to say what God is not, we cannot confuse God with creatures.³⁴ Aquinas used this approach in his discussion of the existence and nature of God as noted in the above citation. With these preliminary remarks out of the way we are now in a position to engage in the examination of the

³¹ Burrell, *Knowing the Unknowable God*, 42, a gloss on Thomas Aquinas, "Disputed Questions on the Power of God (Quaestiones disputatae de potentia Dei)," (1259-1268).

<http://dhspriority.org/thomas/QDdePotentia.htm> (accessed 15 June 2015); Internet., 7.2.9. See also Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 2, EXISTENCE AND NATURE OF GOD, 1.4: God's Perfection, as discussed in, e.g., Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action*, 51ff.

³² Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 2, EXISTENCE AND NATURE OF GOD, 1.3, Prologue.

³³ *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 88.

³⁴ Burrell, *Friendship and Ways to Truth*, 105-106; Burrell, "From Analogy of "Being" to the Analogy of Being," 125-126.

formal terms. This is done in order to clarify our thinking about God and the universe, what can be said and how it can be said. These features are part of the background for our examination of natural evil in Chapters 5 and 6.

SIMPLENESS

Let us start by examining how Burrell addresses simpleness. In his thinking, simpleness secures the distinction of God from the world. For him, Aquinas' arguments for simpleness were more secure than arguments from necessity, the term 'necessary' being multivocal, and Aquinas used instead Avicenna's notions of essence and existence, as discussed in the previous chapter. "What gives divinity the necessity peculiar to it is the formal fact that God's nature is nothing other than its own existence: to be divine is (simply) to-be. That is what *simpleness* means for Aquinas, at any rate, who uses it principally and essentially (*primo et per se*) of God alone."³⁵ From this perspective there is the distinction of what is utterly without composition (simple) from everything in the world, such things being composed of essence *and* existence.³⁶

Burrell offers an approach which begins with the question (in the thinking of Avicenna and Maimonides) of whether or not God has a nature, the question arising from the considerations that there is no quiddity or whatness in God, rather God's essence is simply to-be. Further, al-Farabi (c. 872-c. 951) argued that God having no cause for God's existence implied that God could not be composed of parts else this would imply formal causes, yet God is uncaused. Hence God's indivisibility implied God is one. However, the point of asserting simpleness in God must be more than

³⁵ Burrell, "Distinguishing God From the World," 7-8, referring to Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 2, Existence and Nature of God, 1.3.7.

³⁶ A paraphrase of Burrell, "Distinguishing God From the World," 6.

simply that there are no distinctions in God. Simplesness in common usage implies a defect, a lack. This is the issue addressed by Aquinas.³⁷

As Burrell observes, Aquinas opens his discussion of God's simplesness with:

The ways in which God does not exist will become apparent if we rule out from him everything inappropriate, such as compositeness, change, and the like.³⁸

While he discusses some eight aspects of the notion of simplesness,³⁹ the heart is the discussion of article 4, consideration of the question: "can one distinguish in God nature and existence?" This takes us back to the previous chapter on existence where we discovered that very simply, God's to be is to-be; God is not only God's own essence, God is also God's own existence.

Very briefly,⁴⁰ for Burrell, Aquinas shows that God lacks the composition of a body (1) and of 'form' and 'matter' (2) in that these imply potentiality and God is pure act in which there is no potentiality; there is no identity with God's own essence or nature with that which makes God God (3) because God lacks matter; one cannot distinguish in God nature and existence (4) due to the identity of essence with existence in God and the notion of *esse* in God as pure act, not as potency and as well, God being without cause; one cannot distinguish genus and difference in God (5) in that being is unspecified and not a genus; God lacks substance and accidents (6) in that "nothing need be added to nor can 'happen' to God;"⁴¹ there is no way in which God is composite (7)

³⁷ Burrell, *Knowing the Unknowable God*, 38-41.

³⁸ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 2, EXISTENCE AND NATURE OF GOD, 1.3, Prologue, as cited in e.g., Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action*, 16.

³⁹ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 2, EXISTENCE AND NATURE OF GOD, 1.3. See Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action*, 16ff.

⁴⁰ This discussion is based upon Burrell, *Knowing the Unknowable God*, 48 and the *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 2, EXISTENCE AND NATURE OF GOD, 1.3.

⁴¹ Burrell, *Knowing the Unknowable God*, 48.

in that he is altogether simple; nor does God enter into composition with other things (8) in order to obviate the notions of God being the ‘soul of the world’ or the form of all things or the unformed matter of all things.⁴² As Aquinas states as his conclusion: “God then is essentially form and not composed of matter and form.”⁴³ With respect to matter, it must be appreciated that there is no matter in God, God *created* matter.

OTHER PERFECTIONS

From the lack of compositeness and the identification of essence and *esse* in God, Burrell, following Aquinas, discusses God’s perfection, his limitlessness, his unchangeableness, and his oneness,⁴⁴ in such a manner that implies that simpleness is the beginning of our understanding, the others follow from the discovery that God has no structure,⁴⁵ God is not a thing in the normal sense. As Burrell observes, these additional topics are addressed to preclude any misunderstanding about God’s lack of compositeness.⁴⁶ These formal features have to be considered together, the argument building from the discussion of simpleness, these “features’ following from the identity of essence with existence in God and the notion of *esse* in God as pure act, not as potency.⁴⁷ From this these formal features must be understood from the perspective of God being ever in act and, hence, do not apply to *a part* of God but, rather, to God’s *whole self*. As Burrell notes: “Not that we can clearly know what we intend to say by

⁴² This precludes the notions of pantheism and raises questions in Burrell’s thinking as to the notions of panentheism, and those of process thought. On this latter see for example, Burrell, “Distinguishing God From the World,” 3-4.; Burrell, “Incarnation and Creation: The Hidden Dimension,” 240-241; Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action*, Chapter 6, 89-103.

⁴³ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 2, EXISTENCE AND NATURE OF GOD, 1.3.2 as referenced in Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action*, 23-24.

⁴⁴ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 2, EXISTENCE AND NATURE OF GOD, 1.3, Prologue.

⁴⁵ Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action*, 29.

⁴⁶ Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action*, 17; Burrell, *Knowing the Unknowable God*, 38, 49.

⁴⁷ Burrell, *Knowing the Unknowable God*, 49.

that assertion; it is rather that we have no warrant for asserting otherwise, since what is in act has no *powers* by which it acts.”⁴⁸ Burrell adds⁴⁹ that he feels Aquinas addresses these questions as part of countering the perspective that simpleness “implies imperfection and incompleteness” which leads these questions beyond simpleness to “God’s perfection, thirdly, about his limitlessness, fourthly, about his unchangeableness, fifthly, about his oneness.”⁵⁰ It should be noted that Aquinas actually addresses (in order) God’s Perfection, The General Notion of Good, and The Goodness of God, God’s Limitlessness, God’s Existence in Things, God’s Unchangeableness, The Eternity of God, and The Oneness of God (in questions 4 through 11). I shall defer the discussion of God’s Goodness, God’s Existence in Things, and Eternity until a bit later as they are particularly germane to this inquiry.

In discussing the ‘perfection’ of God,⁵¹ Burrell notes that for Aquinas, since God is “not primordial matter ... God is the most perfect of things.” Further, “just as matter as such is potential, so an acting thing as such is actual.” Being the primary operative cause of things, God is the “most actual, and therefore the most perfect, of all things.” Further, “The perfections of everything exist in God” for two reasons, “any perfection found in an effect must be found also in the cause of that effect; and ... Since God then is the primary operative cause of all things, the perfections of everything must pre-exist in him in a higher manner” and “because as we have seen God is self-subsistent being

⁴⁸ Burrell, *Knowing the Unknowable God*, 56, emphasis in the original.

⁴⁹ Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action*, 29.

⁵⁰ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 2, EXISTENCE AND NATURE OF GOD, 1.3, Prologue. See Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action*, 29-30.

⁵¹ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 2, EXISTENCE AND NATURE OF GOD, 1.4. See Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action*, Chapter 3, 48-62.

itself, and therefore necessarily contains within himself the full perfection of being.”⁵²

Burrell observes that this question illuminates Article 4 of Simpleness, that is, the identity of essence with existence in God and the notion of *esse* in God as pure act, not as potency and, citing Aquinas, “the most perfect thing of all is to exist.”⁵³

Considering the Limitlessness of God, Burrell notes that on the surface it would seem a deficiency, what is limitless lacks form and identity.⁵⁴ However, he notes that Aquinas, using his philosophical grammar, states: “Matter however does not perfect a form but rather restricts its full scope, so that the limitlessness of a form undetermined by matter is perfect in character” and adds: “Now the notion of form is most fully realized in existence itself, as we showed above. And in God existence is not acquired by anything, but, as we saw earlier, God is existence itself subsistent. It is clear then that God himself is both limitless and perfect,”⁵⁵ thereby transcending everything material or material constraints. This notion of transcendence is further reinforced by “The very fact that God’s existence itself subsists without being acquired by anything, and as such is limitless, distinguishes it from everything else, and sets other things aside from it.”⁵⁶ Burrell couples his exposition with the treatment of the next question, God’s Existence in Things, as parallel to Limitedness.⁵⁷ We will defer this consideration.

⁵² Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 2, EXISTENCE AND NATURE OF GOD 1.4.

⁵³ Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action*, 30; referring to Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 2, EXISTENCE AND NATURE OF GOD, 1.4.1.3.

⁵⁴ Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action*, 35-36.

⁵⁵ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 2, EXISTENCE AND NATURE OF GOD, 1.7.1 Reply. See Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action*, 35ff.

⁵⁶ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 2, EXISTENCE AND NATURE OF GOD, 1.7.1.3.

⁵⁷ Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action*, 36.

Addressing the Unchangeableness of God, Burrell again notes the negative overtones but, as before, directs us to the usage, formal features, not ordinary features.⁵⁸ He further links the notion of unchangeableness to the notion of simpleness as in the discussion of limitlessness.⁵⁹ A key observation countering normal usage is the citation: “Augustine is here using a Platonic way of speaking ... meaning by ‘movement’ any operation at all, even understanding, willing, and loving; ... not however meaning as we are doing at the moment, the movement and change of something potential,”⁶⁰ God being in pure act and hence without potential. Burrell makes the point that unchangeableness requires us to consider God’s activity differently, not as “those associated with striving and achieving,”⁶¹ such ideas implying potentiality. He observes that Aquinas offers the meaning of unchangeableness:

In all creatures then there exists potentiality of change, either substantially as with perishable bodies, or in place as with the heavenly bodies, or in orderedness to a goal and application of power to different things as with the angels. And in addition there is a changeableness common to the whole universe of creatures, since whether they exist or not is subject to the creator’s power. So, because God cannot change in any of these ways he alone is altogether unchangeable.⁶²

As Burrell summarizes it, and this ties back to simpleness, “God is simply what he is.”⁶³

The culmination of the discussion of the formal features is the Oneness of God. For Burrell, as Aquinas states it, “Oneness adds nothing real to any existent thing, but

⁵⁸ Again Burrell presents arguments against the theological attitude toward so-called ‘classical theism’, Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action*, 41. See Preface note 4.

⁵⁹ Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action*, 41.

⁶⁰ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 2, EXISTENCE AND NATURE OF GOD, 1.9.1.1. See Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action*, 35ff.

⁶¹ Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action*, 42.

⁶² Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 2, EXISTENCE AND NATURE OF GOD, 1.9.1.2.

⁶³ Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action*, 43.

simply denies division of it”⁶⁴ which follows from the utter simplicity of God and corresponds to the ancient declarations “Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone ...,” “We Believe in One God ...,” “there is no god but Allah”,⁶⁵ for “to be one means no more than to exist undivided.”⁶⁶ For Burrell, Oneness completes what was begun with Simpleness, it doesn’t add anything particular but does carry notions of wholeness and completeness. However, oneness is pre-eminently attributed to God, “He exists supremely, because he ... is subsistent existence itself, in no way determined. He is also supremely undivided, because ... he is altogether simple.”⁶⁷ God’s to be is to-be; or very simply, God is God.

Let us now turn to the three formal features not yet discussed, the Goodness of God, God’s Existence in Things, and the Eternity of God.

*GOODNESS*⁶⁸

There are two aspects in the discussion of the Goodness of God: goodness in general, in particular the grammar to be used, and then the question directly. It would appear that this strategy is to avoid a direct confrontation with the question of evil.⁶⁹ How can we say that God is good or goodness? From our perspective something has to be done to be considered good or not, our common proclivity to morality, duties, and obligations. For Burrell, Aquinas detours around this. The first issue is the question of

⁶⁴ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 2, EXISTENCE AND NATURE OF GOD, 1.11.1. See Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action*, 45ff.

⁶⁵ Burrell, *Knowing the Unknowable God*, 50; Hebrew - Shema Yisrael Deut. 6:4, Christian - Nicene Creed, Muslim - Shahada.

⁶⁶ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 2, EXISTENCE AND NATURE OF GOD, 1.11.1.

⁶⁷ Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action*, 46-47, Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 2, EXISTENCE AND NATURE OF GOD, 1.11.4.

⁶⁸ This discussion largely follows Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action*, 30-35.

⁶⁹ Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action*, 30.

whether being good is the same as existing.⁷⁰ As he points out, the words have different meanings, goodness consists in being desirable, desirability following upon perfection; we desire perfection and perfection depends upon the degree of actuality in the thing. But it is by existing that something achieves actuality and hence something “is good inasmuch as it exists,”⁷¹ the word good then expressing desirability a connotation not expressed by existing; the words cannot be used interchangeably. This also reflects the Creation Narrative, “And God saw that it was good.”⁷² From this we can conclude that the creation is good, God desires that it be. Burrell notes that Aquinas does argue that “Existing is a more fundamental idea than being good,”⁷³ and concludes that “The primary sense of ‘good’ is worthy, the second delightful, and the third useful.”⁷⁴

Now that we have considered goodness in general, the question to address is that of the goodness of God; how can we assert that God is good and without getting embroiled in the problem of evil; as noted by Burrell, we are after all engaged in philosophical grammar – analysis, not theory building, that is, ‘philosophy as therapy,’⁷⁵ and hence discussing the logic of the situation, not God’s way of being; good is not being used here as an assessment term.⁷⁶ God does not have to do anything admirable; put quite simply: God alone is good by nature, God has no added ‘accidents’ these

⁷⁰ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 2, EXISTENCE AND NATURE OF *God*, 1.5.1.

⁷¹ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 2, EXISTENCE AND NATURE OF GOD, 1.5.1.

⁷² Genesis 1.

⁷³ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 2, EXISTENCE AND NATURE OF GOD, 1.5.2, as referenced in Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action*, 31.

⁷⁴ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 2, EXISTENCE AND NATURE OF GOD, 1.5.6, as referenced in Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action*, 32.

⁷⁵ Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action*, 17. See also Burrell, "Linguistic Perspectives," 165; Burrell, *Exercises in Religious Understanding*, 1-6, 238-240; Burrell, "Philosophy and religion," 110. In the latter Burrell refers to philosophy’s role as one of “unraveling difficulties along the path to understanding.”

⁷⁶ Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action*, 34.

belonging to him by nature (see the previous discussion on the perfections of God), and God is not oriented toward some extrinsic goal being the ultimate goal of all things.⁷⁷ Burrell ties this back to existing because what is proper to a thing is its being in act but God alone is in act with no potential to realize.⁷⁸

However, Burrell goes beyond this by developing an interpretation of Aquinas rooted in Aristotle's notion of good being what things desire. Instrumental goods are desired for the sake of an ultimate good, such good being the goal of our desire. However, our deliberation about ultimate goals turns them into means. Deliberation being involved in choice, our values are rather taken than chosen, they are consented to; they reflect one's inherent orientation toward whatever is good, whatever is true. Such an orientation is the presumption of one's thinking, and hence, when one thinks of God, God "can be recognized as the name we give to whatever is the origin and the goal of this inbuilt orientation."⁷⁹ God is good, the good being referred to being "the source and goal of all things, which is logically even if not consciously desired in desiring whatever one desires."⁸⁰

*EXISTENCE IN THINGS*⁸¹

As Christians, we often talk of God being with us. Burrell observes that Aquinas posits that God is more intimate to us than any thing else.⁸² We even have from Scripture: "And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age." (Matt. 28:20)

⁷⁷ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 2, EXISTENCE AND NATURE OF GOD, 1.6.3.

⁷⁸ Burrell, *Knowing the Unknowable God*, 60.

⁷⁹ Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action*, 34-35.

⁸⁰ Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action*, 35.

⁸¹ This discussion is based primarily on Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action*, 38-40.

⁸² See e.g., Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 2, EXISTENCE AND NATURE OF GOD, 1.8.1.

On the other hand we have the notion of God being utterly transcendent. How can we understand this?

For Burrell, this stems from the singular aspect of God's limitlessness, God alone is limitless. As was noted above, "The very fact that God's existence itself subsists without being acquired by anything, and as such is limitless, distinguishes it from everything else."⁸³ Yet, from God's being to-be, we get:

God exists in everything; not indeed as part of their substance or as an accident, but as an agent is present to that in which its action is taking place. For unless it act through intermediaries every agent must be connected with that upon which it acts, and be in causal contact with it: ... Now since it is God's nature to exist, he it must be who properly causes existence in creatures ... [and] existence is more intimately and profoundly interior to things than anything else, for everything as we said is potential when compared to existence. So God must exist and exist intimately in everything.⁸⁴

For us, an important aspect is "God exists in everything ... as an agent is present to that in which its action is taking place,"⁸⁵ which will be addressed more fully later. As Burrell observes, "This argument turns on the fact that God's way of being is simply to be, and on the axiom that one's characteristic way of acting is congruent with his manner of being (*actio sequitur esse*)."⁸⁶ The effect of this is the to-be of things, and thus we can talk of God being with us; for Burrell, "God is said to exist in things ... Firstly, as an operative cause, and in this way he exists in everything he creates," but further "Secondly, as an object attained by some activity exists within the acting subject, and this applies only to mental activities where the known exists in the knower, and the

⁸³ Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action*, 38; Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 2, EXISTENCE AND NATURE OF GOD, 1.7.1.3, *supra*, 146.

⁸⁴ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 2, EXISTENCE AND NATURE OF GOD, 1.8.1, as referenced in Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action*, 38.

⁸⁵ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 2, EXISTENCE AND NATURE OF GOD, 1.8.1, as referenced in Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action*, 38.

⁸⁶ Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action*, 38.

desired in the one who desires,”⁸⁷ implying an intimacy with those who can reason.

Burrell cautions us that while we can state that God’s presence exists in everything, we have no idea how this presence can be understood, we are dealing with the grammar of the situation.⁸⁸ “For precisely what we do not (and apparently cannot) know is ‘the way in which a thing possess its existence.’”⁸⁹

*ETERNITY*⁹⁰

Eternity is a term subject to many interpretations and presumptions. Aquinas (and hence Burrell) links the notion to unchangeableness; as Aquinas says, “we must consider God’s unchangeableness and consequent eternity.”⁹¹ How can we understand this formal feature? From Burrell’s perspective, we can add nothing beyond what we found in the examination of unchangeableness; as was noted there, “God is simply what he is.”⁹² Just as Burrell considered that the discussion of unchangeableness was to offset misunderstandings about that term and, tying it in with simpleness, so this discussion was to offset the idea that simpleness somehow was a deficiency in God as well as furthering the discussion of unchangeableness.⁹³

Burrell notes that Aquinas states that “we can only come to know eternity by way of time; which is merely the numbering of before and after in change.”⁹⁴ Aquinas refers to Boëthius’ definition: “eternity is the instantaneously whole and perfect

⁸⁷ Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action*, 38; Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 2, EXISTENCE AND NATURE OF GOD, 1.8.3.

⁸⁸ Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action*, 38-39, 41.

⁸⁹ Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action*, 40.

⁹⁰ This discussion is based primarily upon Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action*, 43-45.

⁹¹ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 2, EXISTENCE AND NATURE OF GOD, 1.9, Intro; Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action*, 43.

⁹² Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action*, 43.

⁹³ Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action*, 43.

⁹⁴ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 2, EXISTENCE AND NATURE OF GOD, 1.10.1.

possession of unending life.”⁹⁵ Given our inherent sense oriented nature, and the inherent tensedness in our thinking, this is a source of difficulty for us. The source of the difficulty to modern minds is the issue of simultaneity and our rooted sense of past, present, and future, which could imply considerations of middle knowledge (does God have knowledge of the future?) which will be discussed later, and of God’s relation to the world.

Burrell notes how Aquinas characterizes eternity: “First, anything existing in eternity is *unending*, that is to say, lacks both beginning and end (for both may be regarded as ends). Secondly, eternity itself exists as an *instantaneous whole* lacking successiveness”⁹⁶ which, as Burrell notes ties it back to both limitlessness and unchangeableness, and to simplicity, the first two due to our understanding that God is beyond potency, God *is* in act, and hence beyond temporality implying change and measurement; and to “simpleness in temporal terms.”⁹⁷ As Burrell observes, for Aquinas, “God is his own eternity, whereas other things, not being their own existence, are not their own duration.” Further, “God ... is his own invariable existence, and so is identical with his own eternity just as he is with his own nature”⁹⁸ This is further stressed by “Eternity, in the true and proper sense, belongs to God alone, for eternity, we said, follows upon unchangeableness, and God alone, as we showed, is altogether

⁹⁵ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 2, EXISTENCE AND NATURE OF GOD, 1.10.1. Burrell cites this as a gloss. Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action*, 44. There are variations on the Internet, e.g., “eternity is the possession of endless life whole and perfect at a single moment” (Adelaide Books); “Eternity is the simultaneous and complete possession of infinite life” (CCEL); all referring to Anicius Manlius Severinus Boëthius, *The Consolations of Philosophy* (c.524), Book V, Chapter VI.

⁹⁶ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 2, EXISTENCE AND NATURE OF GOD, 1.10.1. Emphasis in the original translation.

⁹⁷ Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action*, 44.

⁹⁸ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 2, EXISTENCE AND NATURE OF GOD, 1.10.2; Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action*, 44.

unchangeable,”⁹⁹ all of which brings us back to what has been said earlier and to the basic perspective given here in this discussion of the formal features of God.

For Burrell, in considering time and eternity, Aquinas states “For just as we become aware of time by becoming aware of the flowing instant, so we grasp the idea of eternity by grasping the idea of an abiding instant.”¹⁰⁰ However, “time and eternity clearly differ, ... eternity is an instantaneous whole whilst time is not, eternity measuring abiding existence and time measuring change.”¹⁰¹ Further, “eternity is properly the measure of existence as such, so time is properly the measure of change.”¹⁰² This is the logic of the situation. As Burrell observes, we cannot really understand this saying that “eternity is properly the measure of existence as such” but, also, we can’t really conceive either existence or eternity.¹⁰³

Yet the question arises, how can the eternal be related to the temporal, God to God’s (temporal) creation? In addressing this Burrell makes reference to Aquinas question on theological language: “since God is altogether outside the order of creatures, since they are ordered to him but not he to them, it is clear that being related to God is a reality in creatures, but being related to creatures is not a reality in God,”¹⁰⁴ a relatedness on God’s part of causal dependence; as has been noted, unchangeableness requires us to consider God’s activity differently, not as e.g., aspirational.¹⁰⁵ Thus ‘the beginning and

⁹⁹ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 2, EXISTENCE AND NATURE OF GOD, 1.10.3.

¹⁰⁰ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 2, EXISTENCE AND NATURE OF GOD, 1.10.2.1.

¹⁰¹ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 2, EXISTENCE AND NATURE OF GOD, 1.10.4.

¹⁰² Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 2, EXISTENCE AND NATURE OF GOD, 1.10.4.3.

¹⁰³ Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action*, 44.

¹⁰⁴ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 2, EXISTENCE AND NATURE OF GOD, 1.10.4.3.

¹⁰⁵ *Supra*, 146.

end of all things' is not even temporally related.¹⁰⁶ However, Burrell observes that there can be a relationship beyond that of dependence, a relationship we cannot really understand, but as he notes, Aquinas does provide a suggestive metaphor in "his eternity comprehends all phases of time"¹⁰⁷ by analogy with "as the soul contains the body."¹⁰⁸ Burrell further argues that the activity of God is what makes things to be and "since 'what is' is *now*, the One who makes things to be will be primarily and essentially (*primo et per se*) present. The metaphor of presence can be a useful one to flesh out this analogy to present existence."¹⁰⁹ We will pursue this metaphor further in Chapter 6.

In his paper "God's Eternity,"¹¹⁰ Burrell examines Stump and Kretzmann's paper on eternity¹¹¹ raising an objection to their attempt to show that the charge of incoherence in the concept of eternity as commonly understood is misplaced. They examine Boëthius' definition from a variety of perspectives in an attempt to make it intelligible. Burrell argues, from roots in Anselm, with their contention that "Eternity, not time, is the mode of existence that admits of fully realized duration" and their consideration of the term "atemporal duration" to be at "the heart of the concept of eternity."¹¹² Burrell's argument, in part, refutes the use of 'atemporal', reserving this for things to which time is irrelevant, e.g., many aspect of mathematics and necessary truths which are always true, in that "past, present, and future are irrelevant to their truth-value; they do not

¹⁰⁶ Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action*, 45.

¹⁰⁷ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 2, EXISTENCE AND NATURE OF GOD, 1.10.2.4.

¹⁰⁸ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 2, EXISTENCE AND NATURE OF GOD, 1.8.1; Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action*, 45.

¹⁰⁹ Burrell, "Distinguishing God From the World," 9. Emphasis in the original.

¹¹⁰ Burrell, "God's Eternity," 394ff.

¹¹¹ Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann, "Eternity," *The Journal of Philosophy* LXXVII, no. 8 (August 1981) (1981), 429-458.

¹¹² Stump and Kretzmann, "Eternity," 444-445; Burrell, "God's Eternity," 394.

intend reference to events.”¹¹³ As he notes, a major difficulty for many was their apparent use of duration with respect to eternity.¹¹⁴ Burrell also shows that the term ‘timeless’ is equally inappropriate.¹¹⁵ Further he examines their attempt at considering simultaneity which argues that “eternity and temporality are ‘two separate modes of existence.’”¹¹⁶ Stump and Kretzmann’s argument hinges on an analogy with an aspect of Einsteinian relativity, the Lorentz transforms which relate measurements between things in two (or more) inertial frameworks in motion relative to each other, in an attempt at understanding simultaneity, that is things *in* the world, yet we are discussing God who is *beyond* the world. Further, Burrell concludes that their attempts do not help us understand “*how* it is that a temporal event is present to the Eternal in such a way that *every* such event is, and so eternity can be said to embrace time.”¹¹⁷ He makes reference to Aquinas’ *De Veritate* where we find:

Therefore, since the vision of divine knowledge is measured by eternity, which is all simultaneous and yet includes the whole of time without being absent from any part of it, it follows that God sees whatever happens in time, not as future, but as present.

...

From this it is clear that a contingent can be known as future by no cognition that excludes all falsity and the possibility of falsity; and since there is no falsity or possibility of falsity in the divine knowledge, it would be impossible for God to have knowledge of future contingents if He knew them as future. Now, something is known as future when an order of past and future stands between the event and the knowledge. This order, however, cannot be found between the divine knowledge and any contingent thing whatsoever; but the relation of the divine knowledge to anything whatsoever is like that of present to present.

...

The difficulty in this matter arises from the fact that we can describe the divine knowledge only after the manner of our own, at the same time pointing out the temporal differences. For

¹¹³ Burrell, "God's Eternity," 395.

¹¹⁴ Burrell, *Freedom and Creation in Three Traditions*. See the discussions 103, 201n18, 126, 205n57.

¹¹⁵ Burrell, "Distinguishing God From the World," 9; Burrell, *Freedom and Creation in Three Traditions*, 102.

¹¹⁶ Burrell, "God's Eternity," 397; Stump and Kretzmann, "Eternity," 434, 443.

¹¹⁷ Burrell, "God's Eternity," 398. Emphasis in the original.

example, if we were to describe God's knowledge as it is, we should have to say that God knows that this is, rather than that it will be; for to Him every thing is present and nothing is future.¹¹⁸

And he concludes "So one can say (now) that a future event (say, my death) *is present to* the Eternal; not that God *sees it before* it happens, but that it – not yet, though certain to me – is eternally present to God."¹¹⁹

Let us now turn from considerations of God's formal features, which were discussed so that at least we have some notion as to how we can understand God, i.e., "figuring out what *kind* of God ... is plausible as an explanation of the origins of the universe as we find it,"¹²⁰ to how we can understand God's action in the world, step two.

God's Action

As was noted earlier, underlying a rather ordinary, even innocent, distinction, that of God and the world, is a tacit presumption of the two in parallel and somehow in competition" and "the integrity of the ordering of the universe cannot be a prior limit to an understanding of God's action."¹²¹ This is the insidious presumption that has been contended against in this dissertation, one which seems to creep in our thinking at any opportunity. Further, arising from the formal features and, in particular, the notion of

¹¹⁸ Thomas Aquinas, "Disputed Questions on Truth (Quaestiones disputatae de Veritate)," (1256-1259). <http://dhsprory.org/thomas/english/QDdeVer.htm> (accessed 15 June 2015); Internet., 2.12.

¹¹⁹ Burrell, "God's Eternity," 398. What is curious is that what Burrell seems to ignore in Stump and Kretzmann's paper is that their analogy is applying measures in the world to Divinity. Yet as Burrell noted, God *is* in act, and hence beyond temporality which implies change and measurement. (Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action*, 44. See *supra*, 151ff.)

¹²⁰ Stout, *The Flight from Authority: Religion, Morality and the Quest for Autonomy*, 40, as cited in the Introduction to this dissertation, *supra*, 38; emphasis added. It should be clear at this point in the dissertation that the term 'explanation' is NOT our direction, rather we are seeking understanding, explanation at this level being beyond our knowledge.

¹²¹ Chapter 3, *supra*, 93ff

eternity, is that of God's doing, of God's action. Therefore, in such an examination, following Burrell, we could do worse than follow Aquinas' lead:

Having considered what belongs to the divine substance, we have now to treat of God's operation. And since one kind of operation is immanent, and another kind of operation proceeds to the exterior effect, we treat first of knowledge ... and afterwards of the power of God, the principle of the divine operation as proceeding to the exterior effect¹²²

all of which, therefore, leads us to a consideration of God's acting. We begin with both the interior and exterior effects, knowing and providence. The latter leads us to consider ordering as part of God's providence for us. However, the sense of ordering raises the question of the freedom of things and hence, causality. Thus we examine the notion of agency, both primary and secondary causality, leading into consideration of our freedom, a notion that underlies our actions, particularly our response to natural evil. To complete our consideration of God's action we consider loving. As Burrell stated, the only way God can relate to the world is through knowing and loving.¹²³ Therefore, in this we will bracket the notions of providence and agency between knowing and loving. Let us "treat first of knowledge."

KNOWING

To begin with, our understanding of knowledge is derived from what we know about creatures; hence, we must remember that when we talk about the knowledge of God we're talking analogously. As has been alluded to in our discussion of the formal features, such things are in God in a super-eminent way and only imperfectly in creatures. Hence in thinking of God's knowledge we must remember that God is *actus purus*; therefore, "God has knowledge, and that in the most perfect way. ... (and) in the

¹²² Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 4, KNOWLEDGE IN GOD, 1.14, Prologue.

¹²³ Burrell, *Knowing the Unknowable God*, 72.

highest degree.”¹²⁴ Aquinas adds, “knowledge in God is not a quality nor an habitual capacity, but substance and pure actuality,”¹²⁵ all of which implies that God knows everything all at once; God’s knowledge does not come to be, it always *is*.

The issues arising from God’s knowing come about because everything is *present* to God, that is, God sees everything because what is, is present to God eternally and, hence, God knows everything there is to know, the notion of omniscience. The notion is pushed farther: does God know what could happen? does God know the future? does God know what I might do or say? does God know the outcome of contingencies? a modern perspective on omniscience. Burrell does not use this notion of omniscience, subsuming it in discussion of the question of middle knowledge;¹²⁶ he does observe, however, that the use of the term arises from ignoring issues of the creator/creature relation in presuming God as merely an all-knowing observer.¹²⁷ The other issue emerging from this is that of God’s knowing what God is doing in creation, God’s choice of the created universe. This latter issue (along with omniscience) is used, often indirectly, in the discussions on the ‘problem of evil’,¹²⁸ i.e., why is the universe the way it is? why didn’t God ...? I would suggest that these arise as issues because of our inherently tensed thinking, an impediment to our ‘thinking differently’.

Burrell contrasts the austere notions of the formal features to the challenge of discussing the positive side of the creator/creature relation, and in particular as a further

¹²⁴ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 4, KNOWLEDGE IN GOD, 1.14. 1.

¹²⁵ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 4, KNOWLEDGE IN GOD, 1.14. 1.1.

¹²⁶ Burrell, "Aquinas and Scotus: Contrary Patterns for Philosophical Theology," 106-107.

¹²⁷ Burrell, "Distinguishing God From the World," 5n8.

¹²⁸ See Chapter 1 of this dissertation, particularly ‘The Problem of Evil’, *supra*, 14ff.

clarification of the notion of relationship.¹²⁹ For Burrell, the approach in this discussion of God's 'powers' stems from God's simpleness, the One who "is not only his own essence, but also his own existence," that is, God's to-be is simply to-be.¹³⁰ Knowing and loving are the only ways intrinsically in which God can relate to God's creation without any notion of reciprocity, the issue which was mentioned earlier.¹³¹ Further, the relation cannot be tied to the causal notions *in the world as such*, as we have been contending, but rather, based upon the notion of God's intentionality. One such way would be to avoid speculative knowing in preference to the notion of practical knowledge, doing and making, "God saw that it was good", practical reasoning resulting in action, in doing.¹³²

We cannot assume that God's knowledge is like ours; as was discussed earlier, we can only talk of things we attribute to God negatively, anything else is inherently unstable in confining the relation of Creator to creature in a scheme rooted in logical consequence.¹³³ As Burrell observes, when considering Maimonides' struggles with the issue of God's knowledge, Maimonides concludes that "There is a great difference between the knowledge which the producer of a thing possesses concerning it, and the knowledge which other persons possess concerning the same thing,"¹³⁴ a notion which applied to God puts forth an intentionality to the activity of creation. As Burrell notes,

¹²⁹ Burrell, *Knowing the Unknowable God*, 71. See also Chapter 3, *supra*, 116.

¹³⁰ Burrell, *Knowing the Unknowable God*, 72, referring to Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 2, EXISTENCE AND NATURE OF GOD, 1.3.4.

¹³¹ Burrell, *Knowing the Unknowable God*, 72; Chapter 2, *supra*, 116.

¹³² Burrell, *Knowing the Unknowable God*, 73-75.

¹³³ Burrell, *Knowing the Unknowable God*, 86.

¹³⁴ Maimonides, *The Guide for the Perplexed*, 3.21, as cited in Burrell, *Knowing the Unknowable God*, 87. See also Burrell, "Why not Pursue the Metaphor of Artisan and View God's Knowledge as Practical."; David B. Burrell, "Creation or Emanation: Two Paradigms of Reason," in *God and Creation* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990), 32-36.

God's knowledge of things comes from God creating them, citing Aquinas, "the single knowledge whereby God knows himself and the things he makes"¹³⁵ but adds that while we cannot say how this is so, we "know that if God knows things other than himself in his essence, then his essence must comprehend whatever comes into existence through him – and not merely in their universal natures but in their individuality."¹³⁶ This notion Aquinas "adopted whole-cloth", a notion which also got rid of any traces of the logical emanation scheme, a speculative model implying necessity in God.¹³⁷

In a number of places, Burrell considers Aquinas' use of the model of artist or artisan as a way of thinking about God's creating.¹³⁸ A very explicit form of this notion in Aquinas is "His knowledge may be compared to the things themselves, as the knowledge of art to the objects of art."¹³⁹ A fuller statement is found in:

God's knowledge is the cause of things. For God's knowledge stands to all created things as the artist's to his products. But the artist's knowledge is the cause of his products, because he works through his intellect; and so the form in his intellect must be the principle of his activity, ... But we may note that a natural form, merely as the form remaining in the thing to which it gives existence, does not indicate a principle of activity; it does so only in so far as it has an inclination towards producing an effect. And similarly an intelligible form does not indicate a principle of activity merely as it is in the knower, unless it is accompanied by an inclination towards producing an effect; this is supplied by the will. A knowledge-form is indifferent to opposite courses since one and the same knowledge covers contraries, therefore the form would not produce a determined effect if it were not determined to one course by desire, as we read in the *Metaphysics*. Now it is clear that God causes things through his intellect, since his existence is his act of knowing. His knowledge, therefore, must be the cause of things when regarded in conjunction with his will.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁵ Burrell, *Towards a Jewish-Christian-Muslim Theology*, 84n6, citing Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 1, THEOLOGY, 1.1.4.

¹³⁶ Burrell, *Deconstructing Theodicy*, 102.

¹³⁷ Burrell, *Knowing the Unknowable God*, 87-88. See also Burrell, "Why not Pursue the Metaphor of Artisan and View God's Knowledge as Practical," 40.

¹³⁸ Burrell, "Maimonides, Aquinas and Gersonides on Providence and Evil; Burrell, "Why not Pursue the Metaphor of Artisan and View God's Knowledge as Practical; David B. Burrell, "Divine Practical Knowing: How an Eternal God Acts in Time," in *Divine Action* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1990); Burrell, *Freedom and Creation in Three Traditions*, 105. This topic is pursued further in Chapter 5, God as Artist, *infra*, 217.

¹³⁹ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 5, GOD'S WILL AND PROVIDENCE, 1.22.2.

¹⁴⁰ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 4, KNOWLEDGE IN GOD, 1.14.8.

For Burrell, this amounts to God knowing what God intends to do without overtones of speculative knowledge.¹⁴¹ Burrell particularly examines the expression of this model by Dorothy Sayers,¹⁴² wherein one finds an analogy which, while imperfect,¹⁴³ can help us engage with our sense of time and eternity.¹⁴⁴ Her perspective is that of a novelist and the novelist's relation to their characters, what Burrell terms the author-character analogy.¹⁴⁵ This analogy relies on our understanding of the lack of contradiction entailed in the author creating a character which, in the work, acquires a life of its own. Further, this creative activity of the author is fully intentional; the author knows what he or she *is* creating. As Burrell notes, taking divine knowing to be practical, i.e., that of an artisan, offers a defence against the objections with respect to God's knowledge of the temporal realities God has created and the integrity of that creation. As well, this perspective is not impersonal, but intentional, a notion to be returned to shortly. "God, who knows eternally and who knows by a practical knowing *what* God is doing, knows all and only what *is*, that is, what God brings into being. Yet by that knowledge, like an artist, God also knows what could be, although this knowing remains penumbral and general, since nonexistent 'things'; are explicitly *not* constituted as entities."¹⁴⁶ Hence, God knows particulars.

As Burrell observes, the distinction of essence from *esse* is similar to the distinction of considering a state of affairs and asserting it, i.e., the distinction between a

¹⁴¹ Burrell, "Why not Pursue the Metaphor of Artisan and View God's Knowledge as Practical," 40.
¹⁴² Dorothy Sayers, *The Mind of the Maker* (New York, NY: Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc., 1941, 1987).

¹⁴³ See Burrell, *Freedom and Creation in Three Traditions*, 80 and 197n14; Burrell, "Maimonides, Aquinas and Gersonides on Providence and Evil," 60-62.

¹⁴⁴ See also Chapter 5, God as Artist, *infra*, 217.

¹⁴⁵ Burrell, "Maimonides, Aquinas and Gersonides on Providence and Evil," 61.

¹⁴⁶ Burrell, *Freedom and Creation in Three Traditions*, 105, emphasis in the original.

thought in propositional terms and the judgement of the truth of that thought. The mode of God's knowledge is that of artisan, God knows what God is doing which precedes things coming to being, but this does not mean that God has no speculative knowledge. "[A]n artist has two kinds of knowledge about something that can be made: speculative and practical," the artist knows first what the artist wants to make and such knowledge becomes practical "when by his intention he ordains the principles of the work to operation as an end."¹⁴⁷ Hence, creating the universe is thoroughly practical yet with a speculative component. This leads into the next topic, a consequence of speculative knowing.

The issue: does God know what could happen? does God know the future? does God know what I might do or say? does God know the outcome of contingencies? The issue is tied up with the relation of God to temporal affairs; the issue, for us, of contingency given our tensed time oriented being and living.¹⁴⁸ Further, this is an issue that has occupied many minds for many years with a variety of outcomes. For Burrell, if God knows future events, God must know them as *present*, otherwise they would be determined because God's knowledge is true, (and if determined then we have no freedom which is another issue to which I will return¹⁴⁹). As he states, "Only if the future event can somehow be a present event to God can He be said to know it truly

¹⁴⁷ Aquinas, "Disputed Questions on Truth (Quaestiones disputatae de Veritate)", 2.8; and Burrell, *Knowing the Unknowable God*, 96.

¹⁴⁸ This notion is also related to the notion of eternity. See *supra*, 151.

¹⁴⁹ *Infra*, 173ff.

without necessitating it. For in that case, He will know it in such a way that it cannot be otherwise, but only because He knows it *on the present condition*.¹⁵⁰

To establish his case, Burrell refers to Aquinas:

He knows some things by ordaining by a decree of His will that they come into existence at a certain time, of these things He has actual practical knowledge. Moreover, He knows other things which He never intends to make, for He knows those things which do not exist, have not existed, and never will exist, as we said in the preceding question of these things. He has actual knowledge, not actually practical knowledge, however, but merely virtually practical.¹⁵¹

observing that this does not permit us to think of God surveying a number of possibilities in order to choose one to bring into existence. Rather, the speculative knowledge is at the service of the artist in the practical, in service of what God *is* doing. From this, let us consider contingencies.¹⁵²

The root of the difficulty *for us* is in ascribing knowledge in God after the fashion of our knowledge.¹⁵³ Burrell again cites Aquinas:

[I]t would be impossible for God to have knowledge of future contingents if He knew them as future. Now, something is known as future when an order of past and future stands between the event and the knowledge. This order, however, cannot be found between the divine knowledge and any contingent thing whatsoever; but the relation of the divine knowledge to anything whatsoever is like that of present to present.¹⁵⁴

In summary: "if we were to describe God's knowledge as it is, we should have to say that God knows that this is, rather than that it will be; for to Him every thing is present and nothing is future. For this reason, Boethius says that His knowledge of future things

¹⁵⁰ David B. Burrell, "Aristotle and 'Future Contingencies'," *Philosophical Studies (Maynooth)* 13, (1964), 47. emphasis in original.

¹⁵¹ Aquinas, "Disputed Questions on Truth (Quaestiones disputatae de Veritate)"., 3.3, as referenced in Burrell, *Knowing the Unknowable God*, 97-98.

¹⁵² Burrell, *Knowing the Unknowable God*, 98-99. See also Burrell, "Maimonides, Aquinas and Gersonides on Providence and Evil," 54ff.

¹⁵³ Aquinas, "Disputed Questions on Truth (Quaestiones disputatae de Veritate)"., 2.12, as referenced in Burrell, *Knowing the Unknowable God*, 101.

¹⁵⁴ Aquinas, "Disputed Questions on Truth (Quaestiones disputatae de Veritate)"., 2.12, as referenced in Burrell, *Knowing the Unknowable God*, 100.

‘is more properly called providence than foresight’.”¹⁵⁵ Hence, contingent things and events cannot be said to be known by God *before* they happen because they do not exist. If they occur, God knows them as present. As was noted for the formal features, particularly eternity, this is simply the grammar of the situation. For Burrell, “the relations between time and eternity defy formulation.”¹⁵⁶ It is not fully open to our understanding.¹⁵⁷

An issue, which has bred much discussion, is that of whether and how God knows the future, the issue of ‘middle knowledge’ wherein God can know what free choices individuals will make in whatever circumstance they may find themselves, even if such conditions don’t obtain. For Burrell, this raises ambiguities because of the propositional nature of the argument in which the tenses are confused; at times the future and other times the present, as “‘true propositions’ seem to refer only indirectly to what *is* the case.” Burrell suggests that in these discussions we take care to convert “every phrase containing ‘future’ as an adjective into a tensed verb phrase – so ‘my future job’ becomes ‘the job I will take’, never letting the adjective transform itself into a freestanding noun, ‘the future’.”¹⁵⁸ For Burrell, one cannot know what will happen if we keep tied to fact, tied to what *is* the case, and as Aquinas states, since ‘the future’ does not yet exist, and what does not exist is not there to be known.¹⁵⁹ As Burrell notes, for

¹⁵⁵ Aquinas, "Disputed Questions on Truth (Quaestiones disputatae de Veritate)", 2.12, as referenced in Burrell, *Knowing the Unknowable God*, 100.

¹⁵⁶ Burrell, *Knowing the Unknowable God*, 104.

¹⁵⁷ This discussion is derived from Burrell, *Knowing the Unknowable God*, 99-104.

¹⁵⁸ Burrell, *Deconstructing Theodicy*, 102-103.

¹⁵⁹ Burrell, "Distinguishing God From the World," 12. This refers to Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 4, KNOWLEDGE IN GOD, 1.14.13

Aquinas, not even God can know “the future in itself”¹⁶⁰ because what is to be has not yet happened, i.e., “what-will-be does not yet have being (*esse*) in itself, and truth is convertible with *esse*.”¹⁶¹ Although Aquinas has affirmed that God does know what will happen he insists that God knows such things as happening, in their presentness.¹⁶² Hence, that which has not happened cannot be known by anyone, including God; put simply, there is nothing to know. “Not even God can know what is not yet present.”¹⁶³ A problem for us due to our tensedness.

PROVIDENCE

Further to our understanding of God acting, that is “and afterwards of the power of God, the principle of the divine operation as proceeding to the exterior effect,”¹⁶⁴ let us consider the notion of Providence, the positive side of the creator/creature relation and, in particular, as a further clarification of the notion of relationship,¹⁶⁵ for as we have observed, knowing and loving are the only ways intrinsically in which God can relate to God’s creation without any notion of reciprocity.¹⁶⁶ Further, the notion of providence is germane to our response to natural evil, an important part of the relationship between us and God.

Providence derives from the Latin *providentia* meaning ‘foresee’ or ‘attend to’, hence to ‘timely preparation for future eventualities’ and from that to ‘the protective care

¹⁶⁰ Burrell, *Deconstructing Theodicy*, 103, citing Aquinas’ *de Malo*, 16.7.

¹⁶¹ Burrell, *Deconstructing Theodicy*, 103.

¹⁶² Burrell, *Deconstructing Theodicy*, 103; Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 4, KNOWLEDGE IN GOD, 1.14.13. See also Burrell, *Freedom and Creation in Three Traditions*, 105-112; Burrell, “Divine Practical Knowing: How an Eternal God Acts in Time.”

¹⁶³ Burrell, “Why not Pursue the Metaphor of Artisan and View God’s Knowledge as Practical,” 40.

¹⁶⁴ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 4, KNOWLEDGE IN GOD, 1.14, Prologue, as cited *supra*, 156.

¹⁶⁵ Burrell, *Knowing the Unknowable God*, 71. See also Chapter 3, *supra*, 156.

¹⁶⁶ As cited earlier, Burrell, *Knowing the Unknowable God*, 72; *supra*, 156.

of God'. This comes from the notions of creation where creation also entails the notion of God sustaining and preserving of the world. "God is self-revealed as the one ... who wills to bring the creation and especially each human person to its fulfillment."¹⁶⁷ For Burrell, as Aquinas states:

Since, however, God is the cause of things by His intellect, and thus it behooves that the type of every effect should pre-exist in Him, as is clear from what has gone before, it is necessary that the type of the order of things towards their end should pre-exist in the divine mind: and the type of things ordered towards an end is, properly speaking, providence."¹⁶⁸

And further,

Hence all things that exist in whatsoever manner are necessarily directed by God towards some end; as the Apostle says: "Those things that are of God are well ordered" (Rom. 13:1). 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. It has also been shown that God knows all things, both universal and particular. And since His knowledge may be compared to the things themselves, as the knowledge of art to the objects of art, all things must of necessity come under His ordering; as all things wrought by art are subject to the ordering of that art."¹⁶⁹

Therefore, "Creation is an organizing or formal fact; it is not a statement about a situation. Rather, creation states something about any situation: whatever is is thereby related to some organizing principle."¹⁷⁰ Further, providence only adds to conservation, the idea whereby all things are planned or "necessarily directed by God towards some end."¹⁷¹

The term providence carries a range of meanings, frequently reflecting doctrinal positions, but generally God is conceived as the power sustaining and guiding human destiny which arises from our notions of creation, of God sustaining or preserving the

¹⁶⁷ Owen C. Thomas and Ellen K. Wondra, *Introduction to Theology*, 3rd ed. (Harrisburg, PA.: Morehouse Publishing, 2002), 122.

¹⁶⁸ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 5, THE WILL AND POWER OF GOD, 1.22.1, as referenced in Burrell, *Freedom and Creation in Three Traditions*, 118.

¹⁶⁹ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 5, THE WILL AND POWER OF GOD, 1.22.2, as referenced in Burrell, *Freedom and Creation in Three Traditions*, 198.

¹⁷⁰ Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action*, 155.

¹⁷¹ Burrell, *Freedom and Creation in Three Traditions*, 118.

world. Burrell nowhere defines the term but simply uses it. Consonant with his use, I find the most straightforward meaning to be “the doctrine ... which asserts that the world is a network of natural and human causes and that God is in control of the world – that an event can be understood as having a natural or human causal explanation – and that it can be seen as a providential event, an act of God, at the same time,”¹⁷² which is related to the intelligibility of the universe. While the doctrine can be construed broadly, e.g., election, predestination, salvation, my intent is to limit the consideration to that of the creator/creature relation.

As a preliminary to our considerations of providence, let us begin with the notion of God acting in the world that God has created, usually discussed with reference to the agency of God. As Burrell observes, we know very little yet in some ways a great deal. He refers to Aquinas’ assertion that God’s creating and God’s conserving are similar with the simple difference that creating presumes nothing to be present;¹⁷³ all that God does is, in essence, creating. “God does not ‘fiddle’ or ‘micro-manage’.” What God does, reflecting on the discussion in Chapter 3, is provide *esse*, existing.¹⁷⁴ “Among all effects the most universal is existence itself, which should accordingly be the proper effect of the first and most universal cause, which is God.”¹⁷⁵ Burrell, referring to Aquinas’ discussion of the ‘divine names’, adds that Christians use the word God “because of the operation peculiar to him which we constantly experience” as a

¹⁷² Thomas and Wondra, *Introduction to Theology*, 11.

¹⁷³ Burrell, *Freedom and Creation in Three Traditions*, 68, referring to Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 14, DIVINE GOVERNMENT, 1.104.1. See also David B. Burrell, “Thomas Aquinas and Islam,” *Modern Theology* 20, no. 1 (2004), 81.

¹⁷⁴ Burrell, *Freedom and Creation in Three Traditions*, 68.

¹⁷⁵ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 8, CREATION, 1.45.5, as referenced in Burrell, *Freedom and Creation in Three Traditions*, 68.

reference to the creator's loving providence.¹⁷⁶ Therefore, creation covers conservation of each existing thing as well "and in such a way as to animate its activities,"¹⁷⁷ referring to which "God's acting in creatures, therefore, must be understood in such a way that they themselves still exercise their own operations."¹⁷⁸ Hence divine action is not interventionist. This notion will be visited later when we discuss causality.

In the discussion of God's simpleness¹⁷⁹ we found that God lacking both 'form' and 'matter', which would imply potentiality, leads to our understanding of God as *actus purus*.¹⁸⁰ Further, as Burrell, following Aquinas, notes, "Whatever is 'in act' ... need do nothing further to become a cause. Its capacity for acting is inherent."¹⁸¹ In acting, what ever is in act acts as an agent but does not itself change; what ever is acted upon changes, both by being under the influence of the agent and in the way it is influenced.¹⁸² Burrell examines a number of Aquinas' use of *actus*¹⁸³ and of these I will focus on what Burrell styles as 'natural process'.¹⁸⁴

As implied above, it is important that the mover be able to be itself unmoved, to be itself unchanging. While our common usage considers cause and causes to entail the passing of something from A to B, e.g., momentum in the case of physical bodies implying a change in A, or some form of attraction of A for B, e.g., magnetism, Aquinas

¹⁷⁶ David B. Burrell, "Naming the Names of God: Muslims, Jews, Christians," *Theology Today* 47, (1990), 24, referring to Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 3, KNOWING AND NAMING GOD, 1.13.9 ad 3.

¹⁷⁷ Burrell, *Freedom and Creation in Three Traditions*, 69.

¹⁷⁸ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 14, DIVINE GOVERNMENT, 1.105.5, as referenced in Burrell, *Freedom and Creation in Three Traditions*, 69.

¹⁷⁹ See *supra*, 141ff.

¹⁸⁰ This discussion is based upon Burrell, *Knowing the Unknowable God*, 48, and the *Summa* translation, Vol. 2, EXISTENCE AND NATURE OF GOD, 1.3.

¹⁸¹ Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action*, 4, 135.

¹⁸² Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action*, 135.

¹⁸³ Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action*, 137.

¹⁸⁴ Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action*, 150-154.

asked whether it is ever necessary to conclude that an agent's role entails a change in the agent and, according to Burrell, the answer is no.¹⁸⁵ Causing something to happen is not itself an action, rather causing an effect can be considered as a relation between the agent and that acted upon. What is necessary is that A be *in act*; it may also be necessary for B to have some relation to A, e.g., proximity, the example of a fire and nearby material. Aside from physical explanations, the sense of relation holds, B depends upon A to the extent of a relation of dependence. "This relation is initiated so that the agent thereby becomes cause as well, as its act activates the effect."¹⁸⁶ Examples are provided: a doctor cannot *cause* healing but only help the process; someone can *cause* another to hear but not to understand. "When Aquinas insists that the act whereby the agent becomes the act of the thing moved, he effectively shifts the stage of the discussion from *actus* to *relatio*. Causality itself becomes 'simply the relation of dependence in the effect with respect to the cause,'"¹⁸⁷ a shift to grammar and functionality locating causality in the formal category of relation. "The fact of causality is adequately explained by the activity of the agent itself, together with the relative order of mover and moved. No further activity is required. *Actus* conveys a sense of agency sufficient to display a connection of mover with moved, without needing to posit any qualitative transfer between them."¹⁸⁸ This gives a further insight into the relation of God to the world.

¹⁸⁵ Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action*, 151.

¹⁸⁶ Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action*, 151-152.

¹⁸⁷ Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action*, 153, citing Bernard J.F. Lonergan, *Grace and Freedom: Operative Grace in the Thought of St Thomas Aquinas* (New York, NY: Darton Longman and Todd, 1971), 65.

¹⁸⁸ Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action*, 153-154.

Let us pursue this further, in particular the knowledge God has of particulars, a matter that exercised Maimonides given revelation's insistence of God's providential concern and care for individuals.¹⁸⁹ Our understanding is based upon the distinction between God's speculative and practical knowing which presses us to inquire into the relation between God and all that comes from God and, for Burrell, the question then becomes that of providence, "in religious terms, since the first principle will not simply know but care."¹⁹⁰ Hence we begin with the question of God knowing particulars. For Burrell, as Aquinas stated:

every creature has its own nature in so far as it participates in some way the likeness of the divine essence. In this way then God, in knowing his essence as imitable in this particular way by this particular creature, knows his essence as the nature and Idea proper to that creature; and similarly in other cases.¹⁹¹

and

the divine essence causes proper knowledge of each and every thing, for it is the proper intelligible character of all.¹⁹²

Now Burrell notes that Aquinas stated that the proper effect of God is *esse*, reflecting our view of creation¹⁹³ and couples this with Aquinas' use of the term 'emanation' suitably gutted of logical necessity,¹⁹⁴ and with the notion of God's knowledge of what God has created as being that of an artisan,¹⁹⁵ concluding that in giving existence to each individual thing God is intimately present to each thing as was noted earlier.¹⁹⁶ For Burrell, it is then a short step to "we are bound to profess that divine Providence rules all

¹⁸⁹ See Burrell, *Knowing the Unknowable God*, 20-21.

¹⁹⁰ Burrell, *Knowing the Unknowable God*, 79-80.

¹⁹¹ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 4, KNOWLEDGE IN GOD, 1.15.2.

¹⁹² Aquinas, "Disputed Questions on Truth (Quaestiones disputatae de Veritate)", 2.4.2.

¹⁹³ Burrell, *Knowing the Unknowable God*, 91, citing Aquinas, Vol. 8, CREATION, 1.45.5.

¹⁹⁴ Burrell, *Knowing the Unknowable God*, 91.

¹⁹⁵ Burrell, *Knowing the Unknowable God*, 93-94.

¹⁹⁶ See *supra*, 149, Existence in Things.

things, not only in their general natures, but also as individuals,” concluding: “And since his knowledge is related to things like that of an artist to his works of art, as we have noted, it must be that all things are set under his ordering, like works of art under the art that makes them.”¹⁹⁷ This is an intimate relationship with creation.

God’s ordering all things raises the question of the freedom of things, particularly our freedom, a greatly contested issue over the years. As Burrell notes, the image of God’s ordering all things gives us the image of the clay in the hand of the potter, it challenges our notions of independent agency.¹⁹⁸

AGENCY – PRIMARY AND SECONDARY CAUSALITY

God acting has a profound influence on our understanding of natural evil. As Burrell observes, to say that God acts is a commonplace and attested to throughout revelation.¹⁹⁹ However, the issue arises, *how* does God Act? An ocean of ink has been spilled on this topic; there is a rich literature and, particularly, in the science-faith debates.²⁰⁰ For Burrell, the stories of divine action alternate between God as the real

¹⁹⁷ Burrell, *Knowing the Unknowable God*, 95; Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 5, GOD’S WILL AND PROVIDENCE, 1.22.2.

¹⁹⁸ Burrell, “Aquinas’ Debt to Maimonides,” 73.

¹⁹⁹ Burrell, *Freedom and Creation in Three Traditions*, 67.

²⁰⁰ One thinks of the series of studies sponsored by the Vatican Observatory beginning with *Physics, Philosophy, and Theology: A Common Quest for Understanding* (Vatican City State: Vatican Observatory, 1988) and continuing in the series *Scientific Perspectives on Divine Action: Quantum Cosmology and the Laws of Nature*, ed. Robert John Russell, *Scientific Perspectives on Divine Action* (Vatican City State: Vatican Observatory Publications, 1993); *Chaos and Complexity*, ed. Robert John Russell, *Scientific Perspectives on Divine Action* (Vatican City State: Vatican Observatory Publications, 1995); *Evolutionary and Molecular Biology*, ed. Robert John Russell, *Scientific Perspectives on Divine Action* (Vatican City State: Vatican Observatory Publications, 1998); *Neuroscience and the Person*, ed. Robert John Russell, *Scientific Perspectives on Divine Action* (Vatican City State: Vatican Observatory Publications, 1999); *Quantum Mechanics*, ed. Robert John Russell, *Scientific Perspectives on Divine Action* (Vatican City State: Vatican Observatory Publications, 2001); *Scientific Perspectives on Divine Action: Twenty Years of Challenge and Progress*, ed. Robert John Russell, *Scientific Perspectives on Divine Action* (Vatican City State: Vatican Observatory Publications, 2007); and more recently for example Denis Edwards, *How God Acts: Creation, Redemption, and Special Divine Action* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2010); not to mention the various symposia or collections on the subject.

author of all that happens in spite of appearances of real human action and God only acting specifically either directly or through humans.²⁰¹ As has been noted,²⁰² “God exists in everything ... as an agent is present to that in which its action is taking place,”²⁰³ Further, in acting, what ever is in act acts as an agent but does not itself change; what ever is acted upon changes, both by being under the influence of the agent and in the way it is influenced.²⁰⁴

Yet positing that God’s conserving is similar to creation with the simple difference that creating presumes nothing to be present along with our understanding developed in Chapter 3 on God giving *esse* to God’s creation,²⁰⁵ and, in particular, “Among all effects the most universal is existence itself, which should accordingly be the proper effect of the first and most universal cause, which is God,”²⁰⁶ we come to understand that “God’s activity in the world is ever an instance of or a consequence of bestowing existing (*esse*),” and in such a way as the life of each existing thing.²⁰⁷ The proper effect of God “is existence and the activity which follows upon existing.”²⁰⁸ Burrell adds that God acts in the acting of things by causing them to be what they are, i.e., “God’s acting in creatures, therefore, must be understood in such a way that they

²⁰¹ In Burrell, *Learning to Trust in Freedom*, Burrell devotes the book to treating *desire* to lead into a discussion of *agency* “which offers a short answer to the query: What is it about the universe that could possibly testify to its being created?”, xv.

²⁰² *Supra*, 150.

²⁰³ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 2, EXISTENCE AND NATURE OF GOD, 1.8.1, as referenced in Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action*, 38.

²⁰⁴ Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action*, 135.

²⁰⁵ See Chapter 3, *supra*, 113.

²⁰⁶ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 8, CREATION, 1.45.5, as referenced in Burrell, *Freedom and Creation in Three Traditions*, 68.

²⁰⁷ Burrell, *Freedom and Creation in Three Traditions*, 68.

²⁰⁸ Burrell, “Why not Pursue the Metaphor of Artisan and View God’s Knowledge as Practical,” 40.

themselves still exercise their own operations,”²⁰⁹ the basic issue in so-called primary/secondary causation. For Burrell, this places all the causes we, as humans, know into a secondary status with respect to God.²¹⁰

So what are we doing when we are acting? how is the act mine? do we have freedom in so doing? further, what do we mean by freedom? Burrell notes the contrast between the Cartesian and existential alternatives of either our actions are caused by understanding or willing, or that of explicit decision, finding that Aquinas approach avoids this, human action is inherently utterly intentional.²¹¹ There are four factors involved in acting: agent, end, object, and circumstance. Circumstances are not usually under our control and thereby can affect the effectiveness of what we do. However, we can understand the end and the object. Hence, we can be held responsible, praised or blamed, for what we do. The choice of end follows upon our grasp of the goal and its draw upon us. Such a draw “is more like an inclination than a push” following upon perceiving something as a desirable end. For Burrell, “As Aquinas sees it, willing is meant to incline towards the good which reason indicates,” and “the act whereby one tends spontaneously to the end presented he calls ‘consent’.”²¹²

Underlying this is an emphasis on human intentional activity, free in the sense of acceptance or refusal rather than the emphasis on the person’s ‘decision’. This allows God to enable us without constraining us. Hence, people are responsible agents, “the activity of free choice depends upon an act of consenting to ends understood as personal

²⁰⁹ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 14, DIVINE GOVERNMENT, 1.105.5, as referenced in Burrell, *Freedom and Creation in Three Traditions*, 69.

²¹⁰ Burrell, "Creation, Will and Knowledge in Aquinas and Duns Scotus," 179-180.

²¹¹ Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action*, 140.

²¹² Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action*, 141.

goals.” My act *is* my act. “Finally, the repeated performance of actions which make up living demands proximate principles of activity called habits of action (or *habitus*).

These must themselves be some sort of act, so they are called ‘first act.’”²¹³

I have alluded to the notion of our freedom. How can we understand this in our current context? A common tendency, particularly today, is to identify freedom with choice, to deciding, to *my* decision. In its strong libertarian sense such freedom entails no constraints on our choice of what we do. However, as Burrell notes, Aquinas used Aristotle’s analysis of practical reason of deliberation over *means* to ends, observing that one cannot choose one’s ends, they are given; what we do is either consent to the end or refuse it.²¹⁴ And our ends are that which we consider good for *us*, *our* good; as Burrell notes, they “are rarely chosen or even decided upon, ... they grow on us,” or we “grow into them,”²¹⁵ we discern them. What we do is consider how, the means, to achieving our ends. Hence, only means are chosen and with a view to the end. Burrell refers to the notion that we not so much *make* choices as *take* them.²¹⁶

As sentient thinking creatures we can be responsive to God, we can recognize God as that ultimate to which we yearn. As Burrell observes, “God, ... my sovereign good, could so draw [me] ... as to bring me freely to consent to the end for which my nature [yearns],”²¹⁷ God could present me with both the end I desire and, through my

²¹³ Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action*, 148.

²¹⁴ Burrell, “Aquinas’ Debt to Maimonides,” 74; Burrell, *Freedom and Creation in Three Traditions*, 86-94; Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action*, 141-144.

²¹⁵ Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action*, 144.

²¹⁶ Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action*, 144. An interesting and perceptive deconstruction of the common tendency to insist on autonomous reason and freedom is found in David B. Burrell, “Autonomous Reason versus Tradition-Directed Inquiry: Mulla Sadra, Lonergan, MacIntyre, and Taylor,” *Lonergan Workshop* 21, (2008), which places the emphasis on discernment.

²¹⁷ Burrell, “Aquinas’ Debt to Maimonides,” 74.

understanding present me with possibilities as means to the end I desire. From this we can freely take decisions which do not in anyway abrogate our freedom; “were [God] to move us to do something, the natural way for God to do so would be as the final cause of our actions.”²¹⁸ As Burrell summarizes,²¹⁹ any good choice presupposes an orientation to an end, not as a choice but as a consent to one’s very being and where the end “is infinitely more than we can ask or imagine”²²⁰

We are now in a position to consider *how* God can act. It must be borne in mind that God as free creator does not act as we act, we must maintain the ‘distinction’. Our mode of making decisions does not apply to God. As discussed, our freedom is rooted in consent to ends whereas the distinct mode of God’s action is free and. eternal, there is no sense of our notions of ‘intentionality’ for God, there is no ‘end’ for God as there is for us, there is no *ad* anything for God. Further, though we have participation in God’s perfections this is not one of them, there is no basis in this for analogical predication of deciding to God, except perhaps the traditional analogy of love.²²¹

LOVING

Let us return to the notion of God’s love for us, a notion adverted to above: knowing and loving are the only ways intrinsically in which God can relate to God’s creation without any notion of reciprocity, the issue which was mentioned earlier.²²² This notion is of major import to the discussion of response in Chapter 6. From a broad perspective, God’s loving stems from the notion that God freely created us, God desires

²¹⁸ Burrell, "Aquinas' Debt to Maimonides," 74. See also *supra*, 149ff.

²¹⁹ Burrell, "Aquinas and Scotus: Contrary Patterns for Philosophical Theology," 110.

²²⁰ *The Book of Alternative Services*, 214; Ephesians 3:20.

²²¹ The notion of perfections was discussed earlier, see *supra*, 138, and is developed more fully later, see *infra*, 206.

²²² Burrell, *Knowing the Unknowable God*, 72; Chapter 3, *supra*, 116.

that we be. In this I can do no better than to follow what Burrell has provided in his book *Freedom and Creation in Three Traditions*.²²³

As Burrell observes, trying to be true to the ‘distinction’ we are unable to find a suitable “image for the interaction of creatures with their creator”, given that one of these is the source of all that the other is, yet that very fact can suggest a model, “that of lover and beloved.” Further, “if God’s love be utterly disinterested, the response of human beings will aspire to return that love in kind if that be possible.”²²⁴ The writers of the Christian revelation, the New Testament, “follow the witness of Jesus by entering into an explicit dialogue with ‘the [Hebrew] scriptures’ to transform the covenant with the people into a call to all peoples. The exigencies of that call are enacted in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.” Fundamentally, “God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us,” (Rom. 5:8) the saving death of Jesus, and the context: “No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. You are my friends” (John 15:13-14) Although we are sinners, yet the term friend, applied to Abraham, is applied to us, reinforced by “I do not call you servants any longer, ... I have called you friends.” (John 15:15) This is accompanied by an implicit call if not demand, “You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last.” (John 15:16)²²⁵ Burrell adds, “Yet friends of God we are if Jesus makes us so: such is the legacy of his followers.” He further notes that the metaphors used in the New Testament are conscious references to the Hebrew Scriptures

²²³ Burrell, *Freedom and Creation in Three Traditions*, 128-139.

²²⁴ Burrell, *Freedom and Creation in Three Traditions*, 128.

²²⁵ Burrell, *Freedom and Creation in Three Traditions*, 137.

– as completions of them.²²⁶ The exigency laid upon us is that of a new form of life: “he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love. He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will,” (Eph. 1:4-5) yet still not as a status so much as an exigency. As Burrell concludes:

But just as something new happened to humanity when “the Word was made flesh” (John 1:14), so are those who seek to follow him empowered to do so by a “new creation” (2 Cor. 5:17) in the Spirit of God (Gn. 1:2) who, now “living in” the followers of Jesus, will not only “give life to [their] own mortal bodies” but will enable the “entire creation” to realize its purpose (Rom 8:11, 22).

...

Jesus not only discloses God’s love for all creatures, notably his human brothers and sisters, but through his life, death, and resurrection manages to provide the vehicle whereby that love may remake human creatures in his own likeness as Son (Word) of God. So the love which the creator has for creatures is made efficacious for all human beings in Jesus: the Word of God made flesh. That is the ontology which emerges from the gospel narratives What makes the resurrection central, then, is not merely its power to verify but the yet more palpable fact that this new life is thenceforth made available to mere mortals ... What is new in Christianity is the disclosure of that Word as God, and with it the call to all people to become” “friends of God.”²²⁷

Creation

A fundamental action of God is creation. There are a few aspects which have been alluded to and which are in need of further reflection, the notions of free creation and, an understanding of the act of creation. Let us briefly return to consideration of the creation. The remarks in the first two sections of this chapter invite us to revisit some of the classical notions, i.e., free creation, *creatio ex nihilo*, *creatio continua*, and see them in a new light. My purpose in this is to show how theological understanding may itself be enriched by its own encounter with a more philosophically refined understanding of the meaning of something like a notion of a ‘world’, to complete an understanding of

²²⁶ Burrell, *Freedom and Creation in Three Traditions*, 138.

²²⁷ Burrell, *Freedom and Creation in Three Traditions*, 138-139.

world for our discussions of natural evil, all of which will lead to the diagnostic of Chapter 5.

As Burrell states, "Creation is an organizing or formal fact; it is not a statement about a situation. Rather, creation states something about any situation: whatever is is thereby related to one originating principle."²²⁸ Moreover, following from Sokolowski's emphasis on the 'distinction' of God from the world, Burrell observes that creation is first in God's dealings with the world and therefore, our understanding of that relation underlies all of our attempts at speaking of God and the world.²²⁹ Aquinas' discussion of creation begins with the question "Article 1. must everything that is have been caused by God?"²³⁰ As Burrell notes,²³¹ given the statements: "Neither then can we say that God's existence is other than his nature. ... So in him nature must not differ from existence. It is therefore God's very nature to exist. ... God therefore is not only his own essence, but also his own existence,"²³² which elicits the response "We are bound to conclude that everything that is at all real is from God. ... For we are left with the conclusion that all things other than God are not their own existence but share in existence,"²³³ which follows. Everything but the Creator is created. This further implies that only God is necessary, everything else is created; and this establishes the basis for Sokolowski's 'distinction'. We also get the notion that the proper effect of God "is the

²²⁸ Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action*, 155.

²²⁹ Burrell, "The act of creation with its theological consequences," 41.

²³⁰ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 8, CREATION, 1.44.1, as referenced in Burrell, "The act of creation with its theological consequences," 42.

²³¹ Burrell, "The act of creation with its theological consequences," 42-43.

²³² Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 2, EXISTENCE AND NATURE OF GOD, 1.3.4, as referenced in Burrell, "The act of creation with its theological consequences," 42.

²³³ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 8, CREATION, 1.44.1, as referenced in Burrell, "The act of creation with its theological consequences," 42.

very existence of things”²³⁴ as we saw in the discussion of agency earlier.²³⁵ Burrell

notes that this unique form of causation implies that:

Creation is not a change, except merely according to our way of understanding ... creation, whereby the entire substance of things is produced, does not allow of some common subject now different from what it was before, except according to our way of understanding, which conceives an object as first not existing at all and afterwards as existing²³⁶

and hence, “creating is not a process answering the question: *how* does God create?”

since God creates intentionally.²³⁷

FREE CREATION

As we have observed in our discussions of God’s action,²³⁸ God is the universal cause of all that is, providing the most universal effect, namely existence; which is another way of talking about creation; “creation is the issuing of the whole of being from universal being, [*emanatio totius esse*] as we have remarked.”²³⁹ As Burrell observes, in a discussion of one’s understanding of God and one’s understanding of the world and their relation, that “much will turn on the contrast of *necessary* with *free*, which long characterized a debate between philosophers and religious thinkers,”²⁴⁰ and “that ‘free creation’ is a matter of revelation rather than a philosophical inference.”²⁴¹ As well, there is the notion of gift, nothing is presumed, God created out of love.²⁴² This further

²³⁴ Burrell, "The act of creation with its theological consequences," 43.

²³⁵ *Supra*, 171.

²³⁶ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 8, CREATION, 1.45.2, ad 2.

²³⁷ Burrell, "The act of creation with its theological consequences," 43; Burrell, "Aquinas Appropriation of *Liber de Causis* to Articulate the Creator as Cause-of-Being," 78.

²³⁸ *Supra*, 156ff; referring to Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 8, CREATION, 1.45.5.

²³⁹ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol.8, CREATION, 1.45.4.1; Burrell, "Creation, Will and Knowledge in Aquinas and Duns Scotus," 177.

²⁴⁰ Burrell, "God, Religious Pluralism, and Dialogic Encounter," 210.

²⁴¹ Burrell, "God, Religious Pluralism, and Dialogic Encounter," 212.

²⁴² Burrell, "The Challenge to Medieval Christian Philosophy: Relating Creator to Creatures," 136-140.

implies that creation as gift is thereby not a given,²⁴³ which is an aspect of our thinking differently, a counter to common presumptions. This notion of gift, the utter gratuity of creation, what Burrell calls “first grace”,²⁴⁴ also gives us the fact that creation is not necessary to God, the radical understanding that it might not have been.²⁴⁵ All of which leads us to the discussion of necessity in God, e.g., ‘God can’t ...’ which is common in the theodicy discussions.

Underlying the discussion of necessity is the background of the emanation scheme.²⁴⁶ As has been observed, although Aquinas, in using the term, had gutted it of the notion of logical necessity, yet it carries echoes of necessity. For Burrell, with the identification of God’s existence with God’s essence Aquinas clearly rules out need, supporting the notion of God producing things “not because he needed them nor because of any reason outside himself, but from love of his own goodness;” as Aquinas states: “by maintaining that God made everything through his Word we avoid the error of those who held that God’s nature compelled him to create things.”²⁴⁷ What this “reference to the creator’s inner Trinitarian life suggests is that creating is a fully gratuitous act, operating out of a fullness that needs no further completion. ... [however] an adequate account of God’s freedom in creating will escape us in principle”²⁴⁸ It should be noted that all references to God throughout this dissertation refer to the Triune God (see the so-called Athanasian Creed – one God who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit). As Aquinas

²⁴³ Burrell, "Incarnation and Creation: The Hidden Dimension," 235.

²⁴⁴ Burrell and Malits, *Original Peace: Restoring God's Creation*, 59.

²⁴⁵ Burrell, "The Christian Distinction Celebrated and Expanded," 218-219.

²⁴⁶ See *supra*, Chapter 3, 107ff.

²⁴⁷ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 6, THE TRINITY, 1.32.1, ad.3; Burrell, "Creation and 'Actualism': The Dialectical Dimension of Philosophical Theology," 89.

²⁴⁸ Burrell, "The Challenge to Medieval Christian Philosophy: Relating Creator to Creatures," 138.

noted: “The creative power of God is shared by the whole Trinity; hence it goes with the unity of nature, not with the distinction of persons. Therefore, through natural reason we can know what has to do with the unity of nature, but not with the distinction of persons.”²⁴⁹

CREATIO EX NIHILO/ CREATIO CONTINUA

The notion of *creatio ex nihilo* seems to imply that “once there was nothing and then there was something, in short, an absolute beginning,”²⁵⁰ there was a beginning moment in time. Aquinas argued that it was possible to conceive of creation as without a beginning, but he contended that it cannot be proved by reasoning alone that the world did not exist from eternity. For Aquinas, the concept of createdness has to do with total and radical dependence on God as first cause of all things. Burrell, noting the medieval tradition, observes that Aquinas, following the lead of others, saw it as an indicator of the difference between those believing in scripture and the proponents of the logical notion of emanation. While one could consider revelation as giving a creation without a beginning, “the *apparent* insistence of Genesis on a point at which this temporal universe began made the utter dependence of creatures on a creator that much more evident,” and represented a free initiative on the part of the Creator.²⁵¹ This idea is reinforced by Aquinas’ insistence that God is “the beginning and end of all things.”²⁵² Burrell notes that the notion of *creatio ex nihilo* is not found in Genesis but that Aquinas and his predecessors, particularly Maimonides, were not interpreting scripture, rather

²⁴⁹ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 6, THE TRINITY, 1.32.1.

²⁵⁰ Burrell, *Freedom and Creation in Three Traditions*, 7.

²⁵¹ Burrell, *Freedom and Creation in Three Traditions*, 7; emphasis in original. This also implies that time began with the creation.

²⁵² Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 2, EXISTENCE AND NATURE OF GOD, 1.2 Prolog; emphasis added.

they were using the philosophical tools available to them to try to understand “the sense of God as the free origin of all there is.”²⁵³ These notions, that of presuming nothing at all and that of the universe having a beginning, one can consider as a development of the faith without finding them in the text *per se*,²⁵⁴ rather they reinforce the Genesis story as a vivid portrayal of God’s rule over the powers of darkness.²⁵⁵ Burrell discusses the notions of development of thought as implied by the scriptures, noting that literal or very narrow interpretations of the creation narratives could presuppose something to work with and that this in turn could imply the creator as demiurge.

So anyone who pretends to describe an utterly originating action will be pressing language beyond its ken, and we can recognize that immediately. So it must be the community, as it seeks to understand these texts in relation to the larger sweep of revelation, which insists that they are intending something which they cannot say. For the respective communities came to realize that the divine action portrayed narratively must nonetheless be understood as that of causing the very being of things and indeed of all that is.²⁵⁶

In essence, *free creatio ex nihilo* is necessary to let God be God, a topic pursued by Burrell in “Creatio ex Nihilo Recovered”.²⁵⁷

At a naïve level, if the universe came from existing material primordial chaos, what or who created it? where did it come from? This surely compromises our understanding of God implying God and the universe somehow in parallel. As Aquinas observed:

Were God to work only on something presupposed, the implication would be that it was not caused by him. We have already shown that there is naught in being that is not from God, who is the all-embracing cause of existence entire. That is why we are bound to infer that God brings things into existence from nothing.²⁵⁸

²⁵³ Burrell, *Freedom and Creation in Three Traditions*, 12.

²⁵⁴ Burrell, *Freedom and Creation in Three Traditions*, 15-16.

²⁵⁵ Burrell, *Freedom and Creation in Three Traditions*, 18.

²⁵⁶ Burrell, *Freedom and Creation in Three Traditions*, 24-26; especially 25.

²⁵⁷ Burrell, "Creatio ex Nihilo Recovered," 7-10.

²⁵⁸ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 8, CREATION, 1.45.2.

Further, Burrell couples this with Aquinas' insisting on creation as "the issuing of the whole of being from the universal cause, which is God" and which cannot itself take time there being no *process* "involved in so primal an expression of *act*."²⁵⁹ As Burrell notes, there is *no how*, and *no change* from one thing into another.²⁶⁰

The notion of *creatio continua* stems from both the notions of conserving, as discussed earlier, that God is continuously acting to sustain the universe in existence,²⁶¹ and from modern understanding of new things arising, the idea that God in conserving is, in fact, creating. On this latter there are varieties of opinions, e.g., Andrew Pavelich, "On the Idea that God is Continuously Re-Creating the Universe."²⁶² For Burrell "'*creatio continua*' is a euphemism for the fact (Aquinas) that creation and conservation are the same thing, only differing conceptually."²⁶³ As he notes in various places, there cannot be a significant difference between creating and conserving, God always acts as God the creator acts.

As a side note, for Burrell, given revelation, particularly Genesis, Aquinas argued that creation could be conceived following revelation, that is, without a beginning, but Genesis does imply a point of beginning to the universe and this "does make the utter dependence of creatures on a creator that much more evident."²⁶⁴ Burrell feels that for Aquinas the idea of a 'free creator' does not entail an initial moment of

²⁵⁹ Burrell, "Aquinas Appropriation of *Liber de Causis* to Articulate the Creator as Cause-of-Being," 76, citing Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 8, CREATION, 1.45.1.

²⁶⁰ Burrell, "Aquinas Appropriation of *Liber de Causis* to Articulate the Creator as Cause-of-Being," 78.

²⁶¹ *Supra*, 165ff.

²⁶² Andrew Pavelich, "On the Idea that God is Continuously Re-Creating the Universe," *Sophia* 465, (2007). Searching the University of Ottawa on-line archives gave some 17 papers (18 April 2014).

²⁶³ David B. Burrell, private correspondence.

²⁶⁴ Burrell, *Freedom and Creation in Three Traditions*, 7.

time although “postulating an initial moment would make the case more evident.”²⁶⁵

However, there is nothing preventing the notion of *creatio ex nihilo* in concert with the notion that the universe had always been, particularly given the understanding of eternity. But a major consequence of Aquinas consideration of *creatio ex nihilo* places “creation as dependence in existing.”²⁶⁶ As a further side note, it should be observed that creation cannot itself take time, in spite of revelation implying seven days. There is no process involved. This *is* act, and God acts eternally.²⁶⁷

ORDERING

From my perspective, the order in the universe seems to be reflecting, if not something intelligent, which I believe it does, at least that the universe seems intelligible. For Burrell, order is most clearly to be found in reason.²⁶⁸ Further, as Lonergan notes, stemming from our ability to reason and derive understanding, we consider the universe to be intelligible and from that “there arises the question whether the universe could be intelligible without having an intelligent ground. But that is the question about God.”²⁶⁹ As Aquinas stated, “God’s effects resemble God as far as they can, but not perfectly”²⁷⁰ and “properties that belong to a thing over and above its own nature must derive from somewhere, either from that nature itself ... or from an external cause”²⁷¹ which implies that the nature of things as we see them, beyond their specificity, i.e., the effects of God, the existence of things, reflect in some way the God

²⁶⁵ Burrell, "Freedom and Creation in the Abrahamic Traditions," 152-153.

²⁶⁶ Burrell, "Freedom and Creation in the Abrahamic Traditions," 153.

²⁶⁷ Burrell, "Aquinas Appropriation of *Liber de Causis* to Articulate the Creator as Cause-of-Being," 76, 78, 82.

²⁶⁸ Burrell, *Analogy and Philosophical Language*, 39.

²⁶⁹ Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 101.

²⁷⁰ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 2, EXISTENCE AND NATURE OF GOD, 1.3.3, ad 2.

²⁷¹ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 2, EXISTENCE AND NATURE OF GOD, 1.3.4

who gives them existence. We have discussed creation as an intentional emanating²⁷² from God and the notion of God as artisan,²⁷³ all implying that God knows what God is doing in the originary act of creation and sustaining the universe as well, and we briefly discussed the notion of creation participating in God,²⁷⁴ which in turn implies that things participate in the intelligibility of God, the order in the universe is intelligible. As Burrell observes, “what the act of creation bestows, in creating this world, is what makes it to be and to be a world: the existential order that is the only matrix within which action occurs.”²⁷⁵ Creating is an ordering, an aspect of the emanation scheme devoid of the notion of necessity.²⁷⁶ This is all reinforced by Aquinas: “Now that which is best of all in creation is the good which consists in the order of the universe as a whole ... Therefore the order of the universe as a whole is the special object of God’s intention.”²⁷⁷

Recapitulation

We have up to now reviewed Burrell’s approach, one which he defines as philosophical theology, i.e., an acknowledgement that one is indeed doing *theology* although in the course of philosophical inquiry wherein revelation guides how one uses philosophical tools as the basis for examining the traditional considerations of God and aspects of God’s creation, all of which gives us a broad perspective on God. Using that perspective we then have examined the crucial notions of creation as that which defines

²⁷² *Supra*, 170.

²⁷³ *Supra*, 160ff.

²⁷⁴ *Supra*, 170.

²⁷⁵ Burrell, "Creation and 'Actualism': The Dialectical Dimension of Philosophical Theology," 83.

²⁷⁶ Burrell, "Aquinas Appropriation of *Liber de Causis* to Articulate the Creator as Cause-of-Being,"

⁷⁸. See also Burrell, *Faith and Freedom*, Prologue, xii-xx1.

²⁷⁷ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 4, KNOWLEDGE IN GOD, 1.15.2.

how we are to understand God, the world, the relationship between the world and God, and thus, the way we discuss God as Creator and the world as created. We have explored the metaphysical thinking underlying this understanding, in particular the notion of existence – every creature exists only by participating in the inexhaustible act of existing which is the creator – all as a prelude to an examination of some of the things we can say of God, both formal features and other characteristics germane to this dissertation. We have examined what are known as the ‘perfections’ of God and considered an understanding of God’s acting in the world, considerations of knowing, providence, agency and God’s loving of what God has created. Finally, we have examined the notions of free creation and *creatio ex nihilo*, and an understanding of the intelligibility of the universe, the integrity of a world to be understood.

My reasoning in selecting these aspects of the tradition ties into the basic contention that Burrell brings to the discussion, our need to think differently. Our current cultural perspectives privilege the kind of thinking that presumes ‘scientific’ thinking, that starts with the universe as the ground for looking at the world, and hence a presumption (usually unexamined) in our discussions on these matters. As I have noted earlier, underlying a rather ordinary, even innocent, distinction, that of God and the world, is a tacit presumption of the two in parallel and somehow in competition, yet the integrity of the ordering of the universe cannot be a prior limit to an understanding of God’s action. Burrell’s adoption of Sokolowski’s ‘distinction’, that of the utter transcendence of God, underlies his examination of creation and provides a different framework for examining the universe and natural evil within it. Hence this retrieval of the tradition.

As discussed in Chapter 1, I have been engaged in retrieval of the tradition under the guidance of David Burrell in order to address the question of natural evil and at this point I feel that we have retrieved those elements of the tradition necessary for us to address the question. I feel that Burrell has shown how a retrieval of a theological tradition continues to carry resources for assisting us in thinking the question of natural evil differently. We have explored, through a reading of David Burrell, and the deeper meanings that his explorations have uncovered of the meaning of God as Creator and creation in Christian tradition, that we have to think differently about God's relation to this world. Such exploration has shown how theological understanding may itself be enriched by its own encounter with a more philosophically refined understanding of the meaning of something like a notion of a 'world', especially as this philosophical reflection is informed by developments in modern science that alert us to a notion of the creativity and the fecundity of the universe. As we have examined, the tradition has substantive contributions which merit detailed philosophical scrutiny, and the contemporary re-appropriation of that tradition helps us in the holding together of a sound belief in God's goodness and the goodness of creation in the face of the evils in the universe. I consider that we have reached a point of understanding such that we can now address the thrust of this dissertation.

My task remaining is, in addressing the question of natural evil in a good creation, and drawing on the work of David Burrell, can the issues identified by the attempts to understand natural evil be addressed and resolved consonant with this developed understanding? In this I will partition the effort into two stages, two chapters, each of which represents a step in advancing my thesis. Firstly, in Chapter 5 I will

examine the nature of the impasse mentioned earlier and suggest perspectives to resolve it. Then in Chapter 6 I will address an alternative perspective, a more constructive approach in our rising to the challenge of natural evil.

Therefore, let us begin with an analysis of the impasse in our thinking and talking of natural evil.

God saw everything he had made, and indeed, it was very good. Genesis 1:31

5. ON CREATIVITY AND NATURAL EVIL IN BURRELL

My thesis, argued in this dissertation, is that David Burrell's refined understanding of creation and existence provides a way of advancing the question and exploration of natural evil. Using his approach to philosophical theology, one emphasizing theology and rooted in the tradition (faith seeking understanding), provides a way beyond the practices of theodicy and the inadequacies of a stress on either scientific thinking or philosophy, all of which run up against an impasse.

The aim of this chapter and the following is to bring the resources of Burrell's thinking to bear more directly on the topic of natural evil. Each of these two chapters represents a stage in advancing my thesis. To reiterate, this dissertation is a reading of David Burrell as a way of advancing our way of questioning and understanding of natural evil; it does not present a definitive solution.

Let me summarize briefly what has been said before. My intention in the previous chapters has been to lay the groundwork for looking at the goodness of God and God's creation in spite of natural evil. We have examined Burrell's theological understanding and, in particular, a look at his approach, one which he defines as philosophical theology, i.e., an acknowledgement that one is indeed doing *theology*, that is, a mode of theology whereby revelation expands philosophical categories opening us up to a broader range of categories and thereby providing us with a broader perspective on God and assisting us in thinking God's action in the universe. Underlying this is Burrell's emphasis on creation, particularly free creation, the very gratuity of what is.

We have examined creation, that which defines how we are to understand God, the world, the relationship between the world and God, and thus, the way we speak of God as creator and the world as created. Fundamental to any discussion of God is the very fact of existence – in essence, the age-old questions: why is there something rather than nothing? for what reason do we exist? and, how can we understand creation? from what perspective? This has led us to an understanding of the creator-to-creation relationship which, for Burrell as it was for Aquinas, is a non-reciprocal relation of dependence, but one which is more intimate to us than anything else; at its core, a subtle understanding of the basic relation which we understand as creation, the gift of existence. The notions of free creation and *creatio ex nihilo* express an understanding of the intelligibility of the universe, the world to be understood. This Christian understanding of the freedom of God and our dependence provides a new context for the modes of possibility, actuality, and necessity, each of these being understood in a new way. The approach of philosophical theology expands our horizons and opens us to new categories of understanding.

There are two stages to our exploration of natural evil. Given what I shall identify in this chapter to be the root of the impasse, in the subsequent chapter I shall focus on a re-examination of natural evil on the basis of Burrell's perspective of philosophical theology, an attempt to approach the question of natural evil by thinking differently, of proposing and examining an alternative perspective on natural evil, one not commonly adverted to. One of the critical implications of Burrell's reflections on evil is the reminder that the language of God as creator does not come first in the mode of a logical inference such that we affirm the goodness of creation and then ask, why is

there evil. The philosophical theological logic works in the opposite direction. We shall see that, for Burrell, the notions of creation and redemption are integrally related. For example, in Burrell's reflections on the book of Job, Burrell shows that the resonances of the voice of God as creator only emerge from the drama of Job's wrestling with suffering. It is more his interlocutors who attempt to explain suffering by first appealing to God's order. As I indicated in my opening chapter, we have constantly to regain or re-appropriate our understanding of God as creator. Job teaches us how a response is, in fact, formed in a faith that abides with the promise of God's goodness as creator. In other words, the experience and affirmation of God as creator, indeed a greater intelligibility into the order of the universe, emerges in its fuller meaning not prior to but in response to the experience of evil.

In view of elaborating these two stages in light of Burrell's philosophical theology, the one that reveals in more detail the present impasse, the other that proposes a more constructive way of 'thinking differently', in this chapter I shall proceed broadly as follows. We must keep in mind that the question of natural evil is fundamentally a question of how we understand God's acting in the world. Hence, firstly, based on the developments of the preceding two chapters, I shall address the topic of God's action or the manner in which we, based on our reading of Burrell, may conceive God's relation to the world.

In this first stage there are three steps. Firstly, I shall review and extend how, for Burrell, the issue here is not our notions of world or of God, but how we speak about God and how such language draws on strategies such as analogy to introduce correctives to habitual presuppositions. How does our understanding rise up to think 'with God' in

God's own mode of action? This is critical, how do we speak of God's action in relation to the world, or the God-world relation? This is where, as I shall show, the root of the problem resides, namely in our presuppositions as shown in our use of language. A major element in this, using Burrell's approach to philosophical theology, is to advert explicitly to the use of analogy, a mode of intelligibility used extensively by Burrell of talk *in divinis* and one which seems appropriate to deal with creativity and its relationship to God. As was observed, "Our view of the world, ourselves, and our God are wrapped up in the way we use analogy."¹ Another aspect of language is the notion of the perfection terms and their use, how we try to express what we think God is, our understanding of God through the perfections that flow from the Godhead.

This should help in the second step of this chapter, to expose more clearly the current difficulties, that is, the way we pose the question of natural evil. The approach, one based upon Burrell's philosophical theology, examines the order of the world as created, i.e., the intelligibility in things, especially their creativity. Here I shall say a word with respect to how we appeal to the notion of 'natural', especially as this notion has been shaped by findings in modern science; what do we mean when we use the terms natural and the universe together? How can we respect the integrity of the developments in modern science, draw on them, yet expand their philosophical presuppositions as Burrell invites us to do? I shall explore this by addressing the notion of 'creativity,' a subtheme or motif throughout this dissertation. As part of this

¹ Philip Rolnick, *Analogical Possibilities: How Words Refer to God* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1993), 1.

discussion we shall consider briefly Lonergan's notion of emergence, a way of thinking about the universe, a way of viewing creativity in the universe.

Finally, from the foregoing, we can examine the question of natural evil and the contrast between that commonly assumed by modern science as a mode of inquiry and investigation and the broader perspective for which we have been searching. We shall also consider a common challenge to God, the common ascription of a 'moral' demand on God, a consequence of a common perspective of the universe, i.e., "what kind of God – *if any* – is plausible as an explanation of the origins of the universe as we find it"² All of this to reflect on how the question of natural evil is posed, the source of the impasse, our way of thinking of the God that has created all-that-is. Our orientation is not to think from the presuppositions of modern science but to think from the side of creation, from within God's mode of action as creator. This will set the scene for introducing Burrell's invitation to think the question differently, the focus of the next chapter.

Language 'in Divinis'

For Burrell, from his very early training, language and its use are fundamental in understanding.³ Further, in his work, he is engaged in a hermeneutical retrieval of the tradition; what were these masters saying to that audience using those words, on those issues, under the conditions and presumptions of that time, and, in particular, what meaning does that have for us today, trying "to understand those who have gone before us in an effort to discover our own ways into the future."⁴ Further, our use of language

² Stout, *The Flight from Authority: Religion, Morality and the Quest for Autonomy*, 123, as cited in Tilley, "The Problems of Theodicy: A Background Essay," 40. Emphasis in the original.

³ See Chapter 2, particularly *supra*, 63ff.

⁴ Burrell, *Knowing the Unknowable God*, ix.

reflects presuppositions with respect to the God-world relation and how we conceive this relation.

As we have seen, from his perspective, in discussing the ‘perfections’ of God Aquinas was very careful in his use of language. This is an underlying principle in Burrell’s *Aquinas: God and Action*.⁵ As discussed in Chapter 2, Burrell’s approach to philosophical theology, rooted in faith, is governed by attentiveness to language, both the grammar we use and the words themselves, their use in the past as well as today. Burrell argues that a “postmodern perspective offers us a fresh appreciation of the medieval proposal that philosophy become a handmaiden of faith. There is, in fact, a mutual normativity at work between reason and faith, with each perspective testing the propriety of the other.”⁶ In essence, the medievals were using a form of philosophical theology without any particular reference to it as such. Therefore, let us take another look at the use of language.

Burrell observes, citing Aquinas:

Words are used of God and creatures in an analogical way, that is in accordance with a certain order between them ... In this way some words are used neither univocally nor purely equivocally of God and creatures, but analogically, for we cannot speak of God at all except in the language we use of creatures, and so whatever is said both of God and creatures is said in virtue of the order that creatures have to God as their source and cause in which all perfections of things pre-exist transcendently.⁷

Implicit in this is the notion of creation, and even more so, “the dynamic orientation of intentional creatures to their source;”⁸ an underlying theme in both Aquinas and Burrell.

I find it interesting that Aquinas’ discussion of the use of language *followed*, not

⁵ Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action*.

⁶ Burrell, "Philosophy and religion," 122.

⁷ Burrell, "Aquinas’ Debt to Maimonides," 66-67, citing Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 3, KNOWING AND NAMING GOD, 1.13.5.

⁸ Burrell, "Aquinas’ Debt to Maimonides," 68.

preceded, his actual practice in discussing the perfections of God and he devoted a full *quaestio* to the topic.⁹ In questions 3-11 of the *Prima Pars* he gives an illustration of what Burrell calls philosophical grammar. Burrell notes that Aquinas' account, early in the *Summa Theologiae*, lays out the grammar of God, grammar revealing the nature of things; there is a similarity between language and reality, a parallel between our understanding and the world; what can be said has a relationship to what is, there is an isomorphism between language and reality, even more so, an isomorphism between our acts of understanding and reality.¹⁰ Hence, the emphasis on the way we use language. Burrell stresses the contextual nature of understanding and how with the inherently analogous nature of language, actual use of terms indicates how language is functioning, how we can understand what is the case.¹¹

Clearly therefore, grammar is an important aspect in the use of language *in divinis*. Burrell's perspective of philosophical theology is strategically founded on one "which orients itself by language usage" in which grammar, the "set of rules outlining the appropriate ways of employing an expression," "reveals the essential contours of the subject."¹² Burrell devotes a chapter of *Aquinas: God and Action* to the subject¹³ as he

⁹ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 3 KNOWING AND NAMING GOD, 1.13. *Quaestio 13*, 'de nominibus dei', 'The Names of God', translated by Herbert McCabe in Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 3, KNOWING AND NAMING GOD, 47, as "Theological Language", and by Timothy McDermott in Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae: A Concise Translation*, trans., Timothy McDermott (Notre Dame, IN: Christian Classics, 1989), 30, as "We can talk about God but not define him". See also Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action*, 67. It would appear that the expression 'Names of God' is Aquinas' way of referring to how we say anything about God: David B. Burrell, "Religious Language and the Logic of Analogy," *International Philosophical Quarterly* 2, (1962), 646.

¹⁰ Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action*, 4, 84, citing Wittgenstein, *The Philosophical Investigations*, 371, 373.

¹¹ Burrell, "Aquinas and Scotus: Contrary Patterns for Philosophical Theology," 95. See also 104-105.

¹² Burrell, *Analogy and Philosophical Language*, 32, a shift in order.

¹³ Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action*, 3-12.

interprets Aquinas' practice. Further, he entitles the first part of the book, chapters 1-7: "*Scientia Divina: The Grammar of Divinity*". He notes that the medievals were steeped in an "intensive preoccupation with logic and language in the form of 'speculative grammars,'" ¹⁴ which, as we noted earlier, formed part of philosophical grammar, the set of related skills that today might be listed under logic, grammar, and criticism – similar to today's philosophical analytic tools. ¹⁵ As Burrell observes of Aquinas' presentation of what McCabe translates as 'theological language', ¹⁶ "What is of interest to us now is the way he takes for granted a formal isomorphism between grammatical and metaphysical structure (or 'composition'), and yet does not allow that fact to hamstring his efforts to express God's transcendence." ¹⁷ To bring this to today, Burrell notes that philosophy in the West has, to a great extent, become acutely aware of logic and language which links today to the thirteenth century. ¹⁸ From a modern perspective, as we have seen, it is clear that Burrell has been influenced by Wittgenstein. ¹⁹ He also notes George Lindbeck's assertion that doctrine represents the grammar of our practices. ²⁰

Burrell links the use of language about God to the notion of creation, our understanding of our selves as created, as creatures. ²¹ Some of our use of language,

¹⁴ Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action*, xiii.

¹⁵ Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action*, 4. See also Burrell, *Exercises in Religious Understanding*, 126-129. As cited earlier, *supra*, 75.

¹⁶ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 3, KNOWING AND NAMING GOD, 1.13 Theological Language.

¹⁷ Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action*, 6.

¹⁸ Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action*, xiii.

¹⁹ *Supra*, 81.

²⁰ Burrell, "Religious Experience and Religious Truth," 191. This refers to Lindbeck's *The Nature of Doctrine*, (Philadelphia, Westminster Press, 1984).

²¹ E.g., Burrell, "Beyond Idolatry: On 'Naming' the One – God."; David B. Burrell, "Analogy, Creation, and Theological Language," in *American Catholic Philosophical Association National Office of the American Catholic Philosophical Association*, (2001).

naming things being inherent in us, is related to praise by creatures which recognize themselves as such, creatures of a free creator: “the praise such creatures render to their Creator will befit their nature as naming animals, and so be as articulate as possible.”²² Yet there is the difficulty of expressing our praise when “knowing that we do not know what God is.”²³ Burrell states that for Aquinas we *can* do it but our *way* of doing it shows how we can use language. God’s ‘names’ relate us to God, God to us and us to ourselves; in particular, their aspiration structure orients us to God. However, naming seems to imply positing attributes to God, a problem for Maimonides and a challenge as to how we could talk of God.²⁴ Burrell considers that Aquinas took up the challenge and grounded it with a stress on the *simplicity* of God, one in whom there is an identity of essence and existence, which means that there is no composition in God and hence no semantic handle for attributes; nothing can be added. Our difficulty stems from the declarative nature of our statements which imply composition. Our language is inadequate. However, our recognition of this and our capacity to factor this into our accounts of God is basic.

In his treatment of this topic in the *de Potentia*, Aquinas suggests that such a capacity is grounded in the fact of creation brought to consciousness: *as* God understands many creatures in one act of understanding, so our intellect, ascending from the multiplicity of creatures to God understands that there are many notions relating imperfectly to one God (see q. 7, a. 6, ad 5). The very possibility of an ascent of the mind to something so simple and unitary as God, then, presupposes the fact of a creating emanation from that One. Those features of this world which we recognize to be perfections may be used to ascend to an imperfect understanding of their source because we know the world to be patterned according to divine wisdom.²⁵

Hence, the terms we use signifying perfections can be said such that “when used of God

²² Burrell, "Beyond Idolatry: On 'Naming' the One – God," 28.

²³ Burrell, "Beyond Idolatry: On 'Naming' the One – God," 28. This cites Aquinas, *In Librum de Divinis Nominibus Expositio*, 7.4.

²⁴ Burrell, "Beyond Idolatry: On 'Naming' the One – God." 28-29, and *supra*, 111.

²⁵ Burrell, "Beyond Idolatry: On 'Naming' the One – God." 29, emphasis in the original.

do signify something that God really is but they signify it imperfectly because creatures represent God imperfectly.”²⁶ As mentioned earlier, underlying this is the notion of God’s simplicity. For Burrell this is neither descriptive nor analogical usage. “It is rather a shorthand way of establishing a set of grammatical priorities designed to locate the subject matter as precisely as possible. So the assertion that God is simple claims, among other things, that God exhausts divinity.”²⁷

Burrell suggests that there are some aspects of note.²⁸ Firstly, he notes there is the distinction between concrete and abstract terms, a distinction which carries philosophical consequences. This issue is grammatical. Normal predication says something about the subject; however, in talking about God we cannot say something in our usual manner, God is not a thing, we cannot characterize God in the usual way. Something else is going on when we say, for example, that God is good. Burrell observes that Aquinas recognizes that such usage is in some way improper yet illuminating, the form of predication is *sui generis*. The adjectival (concrete) expression is “inadequate and misleading when predicated of divinity, and must be complemented by the nominal (abstract) expression.”²⁹ Citing Aquinas he points out:

[s]ince we come to know God from creatures and since this is how we come to refer to him, the expressions we use to name him signify in a way appropriate to the material creatures we ordinarily know. Amongst such creatures the complete subsistent thing is always a concrete union of form and matter; for the form itself is not a subsistent thing, but that by which something subsists. Because of this the words we use to signify complete subsistent things are concrete nouns which are appropriate to composite subjects. When, on the other hand, we want to speak of the form itself we use abstract nouns which do not signify something as subsistent, but as that by which something is. ...

²⁶ Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action*, 69-71, citing Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 3, KNOWING AND NAMING GOD, 1.13.2.

²⁷ Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action*, 5.

²⁸ Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action*, 4-5.

²⁹ Burrell, *Freedom and Creation in Three Traditions*, 11.

Now God is both simple, like the form, and subsistent, like the concrete thing, and so we sometimes refer to him by abstract nouns to indicate his simplicity and sometimes by concrete nouns to indicate his subsistence and completeness; though neither way of speaking measures up to his way of being, for in this life we do not know him as he is in himself.³⁰

In this Aquinas is breaking an established rule “in order to show that what holds for the universe cannot hold for the ‘source and goal of all things’. God’s transcendence does not admit of description.”³¹ Therefore, the normal predicative concrete form is misleading when applied to God, it implies God has attributes; it must be complemented with the abstract statement; that is, ‘God is just’ must be complemented with ‘God is justice’.³² However, this usage itself is odd (if not improper), the latter stretching the use of language. Thus the import of philosophical theology, language is not simply propositional. This will be further elaborated later in this chapter when we discuss the root of the impasse with respect to the question of natural evil.

Secondly, and extending the foregoing, Burrell marks how Aquinas makes the distinction between the thing signified and the way we signify the thing, the distinction between *res significata* and the *modus significandi*, the distinction between the pure notion and the usage,³³ such distinction being fundamental to assessment, to evaluation.³⁴ Burrell sees this as part of a broader skill in the use of expressions and the way we use them, a skill related to the practice of philosophical grammar. The two forms differ having different grammatical roles.³⁵ The *res significata* refers to what we intend by saying what we say, and the *modus significandi* is the way we put what we

³⁰ Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action*, 6, citing Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 3, KNOWING AND NAMING GOD, 1.13.1.2.

³¹ Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action*, 5.

³² Burrell, "Naming the Names of God," 28 29.

³³ Burrell, "Aquinas on Naming God," 201.

³⁴ Burrell, "Philosophy and religion," 121.

³⁵ Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action*, 10.

say, our straining to use our language. This reflects the challenge in our use of expressions about God, the difference between what is meant, the pure notion, and the way we express it, and this applies directly to the ‘perfections’ of God.

Thirdly, there is the distinction between our understanding of expressions and their meaning well beyond their normal use. In this there is often little congruence between what we think and what we state.³⁶ Burrell suggests that Aquinas’ insistence on this was to emphasize the transcendence of God.³⁷ As Burrell notes, “The use of such expressions in one context does not infect their application in another, yet neither use fails to be precise.”³⁸ An example is the use of wise as a perfection, the difference, for example, between a wise judge and a wise hunter. Our understanding reflects our use, the context is vital.

We understand such perfections, however, as we find them in creatures, and as we understand them so we use words to speak of them. ... So far as the perfections *signified* are concerned the words are used literally of God, and in fact more appropriately than they are used of creatures, for these perfections belong primarily to God and only secondarily to others. But so far as the *way of signifying* these perfections is concerned the words are used inappropriately, for they have a way of signifying that is appropriate to creatures.³⁹

Finally, and this is very important in Burrell’s thinking, from considerations of the perfections, as implied, such words are used in a variety of ways with differing senses and hence their usage and the skill in their use is what is called analogical, such words having a family resemblance well beyond metaphor. This notion of skill in use is referred to by Burrell in a number of places where he posits the notion of ‘exercises’ in the sense of exercises in use, both of the use of analogy as well as the practice of

³⁶ Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action*, 75.

³⁷ Burrell, *Analogy and Philosophical Language*, 136.

³⁸ Burrell, *Exercises in Religious Understanding*, 127-128.

³⁹ Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action*, 72, citing Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 3, KNOWING AND NAMING GOD, 1.13.3, emphasis added.

philosophical theology.⁴⁰ This leads us to a fuller consideration of analogy.

*ANALOGY*⁴¹

As was noted earlier,⁴² more than grammar, there is the whole question of how we use words and a very important aspect of the use of language is that of analogy, the set of expressions which, as Aquinas noted, can be used in a fashion neither univocal nor equivocal, but somewhere in between.⁴³ For Burrell, Aquinas argued that certain terms which the tradition calls analogous, terms which are evaluative or assessment terms rather than descriptive terms, can properly be predicated of both creator and creature though we cannot know how to use them properly of God since as we use them they “signify [what God really is] imperfectly,” terms we will never grasp the full meaning of yet which we must use to call attention to God, and which in their ordinary uses can only mislead us; so, paradoxically, they are apt for use *in divinis*.⁴⁴ In this way, we remind ourselves that language as we use it “will fail to represent adequately what God is.”⁴⁵

I would argue, based upon my studies of Burrell, that analogy is a fundamental tool, expressions ‘playing away from home’, and which are as negative regarding

⁴⁰ For example, Burrell, *Exercises in Religious Understanding*, 125-136; Burrell, "Religious Experience and Religious Truth; Burrell, *Friendship and Ways to Truth*, 25-29. He also refers to the practices in the monastic and subsequent cathedral schools, e.g., Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action*, xiii, and illustrates the notion by his own effort in Burrell, *Exercises in Religious Understanding*.

⁴¹ Described by Burrell as “A Language of ‘imperfect signification’” in Burrell, "Philosophy and religion," 120-122.

⁴² See Chapter 2, *supra*, 25ff where we introduce the topic.

⁴³ Burrell in a variety of places implies the close connection between the practice of philosophical theology and the use of analogy, e.g., Burrell, "From Analogy of 'Being' to the Analogy of Being," 120-121.

⁴⁴ See Burrell, "Religious Experience and Religious Truth," 193; Burrell, "Analogy, Creation, and Theological Language," 35. See also Burrell, *Towards a Jewish-Christian-Muslim Theology*, 113.

⁴⁵ See Burrell, "Religious Experience and Religious Truth," 193; Burrell, "Analogy, Creation, and Theological Language," 35.

descriptive features as Aquinas was in his use in trying to ‘know the unknowable God’.⁴⁶ For example, we may properly say that God is just or wise without any claim as to *how* God is just or wise.⁴⁷ At root, Burrell argues that analogy *is* the way we can speak of God, even if imperfectly, and it *is* the way we express our acts of understanding. He observes that being mindful of the ‘distinction’ entails “a radical unknowing on the part of human beings and an inescapable recourse to analogous discourse regarding divinity.”⁴⁸ He cites Aquinas’ use of Aristotle’s *De Interpretatione* to the effect that as thoughts are the likeness of things so words, as the signs of thoughts, refer to things⁴⁹ and hence our reference to a thing reflects our understanding.⁵⁰ There is caution needed here. One must stress that our use *signifies what God really is imperfectly*. There is no common ground between God and us, God is God and we are creatures. Creation is a relation so there is no way to *understand* God in our terms; God exceeds what we can say. And yet, we are in relation to God and the relation, as will be discussed, is very intimate.

Broadly speaking, as was said, analogy is the transferring of meaning from one subject (the analogate) to another subject seen as comparable or parallel in some way, there being some aspect in common enabling the transfer; there is a something that is

⁴⁶ Burrell, *Freedom and Creation in Three Traditions*, 12; Burrell, "Why not Pursue the Metaphor of Artisan and View God's Knowledge as Practical," 41; Burrell, *Knowing the Unknowable God*, 3; Burrell, *Deconstructing Theodicy*, 101-102.

⁴⁷ Burrell, "Naming the Names of God," 28.

⁴⁸ Burrell, *Freedom and Creation in Three Traditions*, 165.

⁴⁹ Burrell, *Exercises in Religious Understanding*, 126, a reference to Aristotle, "De Interpretatione (On Interpretation)," (The University of Adelaide).

<https://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/a/aristotle/interpretation/> (accessed 15 June 2015); Internet.16a3.

⁵⁰ Burrell, *Exercises in Religious Understanding*, 126-127, 132-133, citing Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 3, KNOWING AND NAMING GOD, 13.1. See also Burrell, *Analogy and Philosophical Language*, Chapter 6, Thomas Aquinas: Analogical Usage and Judgment, 119-170, particularly 157-160.

shared in some way, e.g., an idea or pattern or function; something with different but related meanings. An analogous sense of a word is proportioned (not strict proportion as Cajetan would have had it) to “one which is connatural to us” and the usage of which turns on distinctions of understanding and judgement.⁵¹ Terms are used to express a like meaning of different things at different intensities, having diverse usage “in diverse contexts, yet short of ambiguity,”⁵² there is no privileged use.⁵³ It is a form of predication and, in a sense, can be considered as between univocity and equivocity. “Recall Gilson’s insistence that analogy is not a conceptual matter but always involves the judicious use of terms to negotiate diverse contexts.”⁵⁴ Usage of analogy is fundamentally based upon judgement as to the nature of the particular analogy. As Burrell observes, “analogous terms may usefully be described as ‘systematically ambiguous.’ It is as though one can never let them out of sight; one must always be molding them to serve one’s purpose.”⁵⁵

There is, of course, the controversy between univocity and equivocity of terms. The argument is old and can be exemplified by that between Aquinas and John Duns Scotus (c. 1266-1308).⁵⁶ The origin of the controversy is the insistence by Aquinas on the distinction of existence and *esse*, whereas Scotus’ insistence on the univocity of

⁵¹ Burrell, “Religious Language and the Logic of Analogy,” 648. Thos. De Vio Cajetan, O.P., was a 16th century commentator on Aquinas who, in effect, gave a theory of Aquinas’ use of analogy, reducing it to strict proportionality of the type a:b::c:d, a view criticized by many commentators, in particular, Burrell. See Burrell, *Analogy and Philosophical Language*, 11-20, 119ff.

⁵² David B. Burrell, “Analogy and Judgement,” *Continuum* 2, no. 3 (1964), 440. See also Burrell, *Knowing the Unknowable God*, 111-112; Burrell, “Aquinas and Scotus: Contrary Patterns for Philosophical Theology,” 101-102.

⁵³ Burrell, *Analogy and Philosophical Language*, 12.

⁵⁴ Burrell, “Creator/Creatures Relation,” 183. See also the discussion in Burrell, *Analogy and Philosophical Language*, 20, 31-32, 153ff.

⁵⁵ Burrell, *Analogy and Philosophical Language*, 6.

⁵⁶ The controversy may well have been a part of the academic struggles in Paris in the 13th century, particularly that between the mendicant orders, the Dominicans and the Franciscans.

being is in direct opposition contending for the primacy of existing. Without getting into the intricacies of the controversies, for the purposes of this discussion, as Burrell notes, “While each was quite conversant with the speculative grammar of the day, which sought to establish critical links between language and logic, one might fairly say that Aquinas was more concerned to root logic in language, while Scotus ever sought to refine language in the service of logic.”⁵⁷ At heart is the question as to whether a philosophically precise language is univocal or analogous. This gives us two very distinct perspectives. “For Scotus, such discourse must be univocal, as the precondition for straight talk and coherent argument. ... For Aquinas, however, analogous usage alone reflects the related differences in reality, so he will be preoccupied to show how these eminently useful resources of language may be employed in a disciplined philosophical argument. His sense of ‘analogical’ is ‘systematic ambiguity’ guided by astute judgment.”⁵⁸ For Burrell, our use of analogy calls attention to our acts of understanding, not to notions, concepts, etc.; these are derivative.⁵⁹

Frequently the terms involved in analogy are transcendentals; they do not fit in any of the Aristotelian categories, e.g., just, good, wise, loving. As was noted above, judgement is the key element in this use of analogy. For Burrell:

what can be said about a thing will be subordinate to something else: the act of judgment – or, in more colloquial speech, *how* it is said, or the manner in which what is said is put forth. Following this lead, we will forebear asking *whether* our concepts apply to the subject in question, but rather ask *how* they might be used to elucidate it. And if that be true of things in the world, it must *a fortiori* be the case when considering divinity.

Here we have the connection between this central distinction of Aquinas and his attention to analogy, notably in discourse about God. And once that connection is seen, one would be less

⁵⁷ Burrell, "Creation, Will and Knowledge in Aquinas and Duns Scotus," 176.

⁵⁸ Burrell, "Aquinas and Scotus: Contrary Patterns for Philosophical Theology," 101-102.

⁵⁹ See Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action*, Part 2, *Actus*: The Operative Analogous Expression, 131-200.

surprised to find an “Aquinas who looks more like Wittgenstein than Avicenna.” In fact, the reflections of the later Wittgenstein on the multiple uses to which *we* put language will appear as serendipitous confirmations of the role which Aquinas’ distinction plays in our attentiveness to language and the ways we use language.⁶⁰

The position of judgement in use of analogy is fundamental to Burrell’s view of Aquinas’ use of analogy. It would appear to be solidly linked to Burrell’s tutelage on understanding under Lonergan. It is a basic position in *Analogy and Philosophical Language* and found throughout his oeuvre.⁶¹

Burrell considers one’s use of analogy as revealing one’s position in the world, the world as we see it. “Language would then prove a valuable key to that style of question long called metaphysical. In fact, the very structure of our language – the way we say whatever it is we say – has long been recognized to be the most available if not the only way of adjudicating questions in metaphysics.”⁶² He discusses the broad range of expressions such as simple, order, good, fruitful, expressions that resist any formula giving their meaning and which defy simple categorization yet which are found to be useful in expressing ourselves and which go beyond metaphor. In the case of divinity, Burrell, following Aquinas, limits the use to so-called perfection expressions: simpleness, being, living, good, wise, just.⁶³ In this examination of the use of language, let us look again at these perfection terms beyond our discussion in the previous chapter.

PERFECTION TERMS⁶⁴

Burrell suggests that in our discussion of God there are roughly three ways that

⁶⁰ Burrell, *Knowing the Unknowable God*, 37, emphasis in the original. See also 111-112.

⁶¹ In particular see Burrell, *Knowing the Unknowable God*, 31-37; Burrell, “Aquinas and Scotus: Contrary Patterns for Philosophical Theology,” 91-112; Burrell, “From Analogy of “Being” to the Analogy of Being,” 113-126.

⁶² Burrell, *Analogy and Philosophical Language*, ix.

⁶³ See Burrell, *Analogy and Philosophical Language*, 86-87, 128, 132-133, 136; Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action*, 69-77.

⁶⁴ This presentation relies on Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action*, 66-80.

we use language: as religious address, e.g., “O just one, who ordains ...”; secondly, in credal terms indicating our convictions, e.g., “God is just”; and thirdly, in theologically reflective questions attempting to understand our convictions, e.g., “If God is just, why does evil prevail?”⁶⁵ This helps in distinguishing religious and theological usages. He calls much of contemporary usage into question for failing to make this distinction and for failing to see that the ‘credal usage’ is a bridge between religious and theological usage. Further, the credal usage leads us into examination of our searching for ways of understanding what we say and for the truth of what we say. He contends that surface grammar is misleading, the matters are not straightforward, and points to the early articles of Aquinas’ *Summa Theologiae, Prima Pars*, Question 13 where Aquinas points out the care and skill needed in these matters. This is, for us particularly, a caution; surface language is the basis of common scientific and philosophical presuppositions and conditions the way we think about God, the way we use language and overlook fundamental distinctions that must be acknowledged, e.g., a confusion of God as creator with God’s creation, the universe, and this confusion can be quite subtle and create problems in our thinking and discourse.

As Burrell observes, our use of the perfection terms is, in itself, inadequate. In considering whether any of the terms we use of God express what God is, (after pointing out that negative implications are inadequate or limiting, e.g., God is living implies only that God is not like an inanimate thing; and that simple causal usages are also inadequate, e.g., God is good only because God causes good things or that God is the cause of something, e.g., health,) he cites Aquinas:

⁶⁵ Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action*, 68.

We shall suggest that such words do say what God is; they are predicated of him in the category of substance, but fail to represent adequately what he is. The reason for this is that we speak of God as we know him, and since we know him from creatures we can only speak of him as they represent him. ... Thus words like 'good' and 'wise' when used of God do signify something that God really is but they signify it imperfectly because creatures represent God imperfectly.⁶⁶

All of our talk of God must be subject to understanding that God is "the first cause of all things"⁶⁷ and "the beginning and end of all things."⁶⁸ Burrell observes that Aquinas' use of language 'describing' God is justified by reference to causality, cause itself being used analogously.⁶⁹ From our perspective of philosophical theology, we don't get mired in purely philosophical thinking.

There is the inadequacy of language, both structural and categorical, in attempting in some manner to describe God. Of course, as has been said, there is the need to keep in mind both the abstract and concrete usage of an expression, yet we must be careful beyond this. As Burrell noted above, Aquinas claims some expressions "do signify something that God really is" but "they signify it imperfectly." We find that the distinction between the *res significata* and the *modus significandi* does not help. Hence, in our use there is no simple rule. Burrell suggests that the expressions signify something by the roles they play, not by pointing or defining. As he notes, "closer attention to these roles affords the clues we have to what it is the terms signify. And analogous expressions merit special attention precisely because of their capacity to play

⁶⁶ Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action*, 69-71, citing Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 3, KNOWING AND NAMING GOD, 1.13.2.

⁶⁷ Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action*, 69, referring to Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 3, KNOWING AND NAMING GOD, 1.12.12.

⁶⁸ When Burrell discusses the foundational notion of Creation he often refers to Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 2, EXISTENCE AND NATURE OF GOD, 1.2, Prologue. See, e.g., Burrell, *Freedom and Creation in Three Traditions*, 11; Burrell, "Creation and 'Actualism': The Dialectical Dimension of Philosophical Theology," 88.

⁶⁹ Burrell, *Analogy and Philosophical Language*, 132-133.

many different roles gracefully. ... in quite unrelated contexts.”⁷⁰

Burrell discusses two particular aspects of Aquinas’ use: these expressions are used literally of God, and they are used truthfully.⁷¹ To begin with, there is the distinction we must make of the use of these terms when speaking of God or of creatures: “the perfections which in creatures are many and various pre-exist in God as one.”⁷² As Burrell notes, Aquinas says that the perfections are used literally of God.

God is known from the perfections that flow from him and are to be found in creatures yet which exist in him in a transcendent way. We understand such perfections, however, as we find them in creatures, and as we understand them so we use words to speak of them. ... So far as the perfections signified are concerned the words are used literally of God, and in fact more appropriately than they are used of creatures, for these perfections belong primarily to God and only secondarily to others. But so far as the way of signifying these perfections is concerned the words are used inappropriately, for they have a way of signifying that is appropriate to creatures.⁷³

While such expressions carry a trace of metaphor they function more broadly quite literally in different contexts. Further, while perfection expressions are assessment terms and are analogous, the range of analogous terms may well be broader; here, however, we focus on their use as perfection terms.⁷⁴ What is of import is that some words “simply mean certain perfections without any indication of how these perfections are possessed – words, for example, like ‘being’, ‘good’, ‘living’ and so on. These words can be used literally of God.”⁷⁵ Secondly, therefore, we can state true things of God though they do not particularly tell us *about* God. Also of note is

[w]hen we say he is good or wise we do not simply mean that he causes wisdom or goodness, but

⁷⁰ Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action*, 71-72.

⁷¹ Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action*, 71-72.

⁷² See Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action*, 72-80 and particularly 76, all of which use Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 3, KNOWING AND NAMING GOD, 1.13.5.

⁷³ Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action*, 72, referring to Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 3, KNOWING AND NAMING GOD, 1.13.3.

⁷⁴ Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action*, 71-72.

⁷⁵ Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action*, 73, referring to Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 3, KNOWING AND NAMING GOD, 1.13.3.1.

that he possesses these perfections transcendently. We conclude, therefore, that from the point of view of what the word means it is used primarily of God and derivatively of creatures, for what the word means – the perfection it signifies – flows from God to the creature. But from the point of view of our use of the word we apply it first to creatures because we know them first.⁷⁶

Burrell notes that perfection terms or expressions can be used widely and beyond the manners in which we use them; they have great flexibility and yet, as has been noted, we have no indication of *how* God possesses them. All we have is Aquinas' statement that God "possesses these perfections transcendently." Hence, one cannot pretend to know what exactly one means in their use, we don't know what God is like; rather, as an example, "[not] that God is wise in a particular manner, but that wisdom correlates with being divine." "Any given conception of wisdom falls short of characterizing God, though some of them may yield leading analogies to help us think of God."⁷⁷ "It is the analogous semantic structure of perfection-words which make them apt for use *in divinis*."⁷⁸

In concluding his discussion of Aquinas' use, Burrell observes that Aquinas provided no theory of analogy. After all, the expressions called 'analogous' are those needed in such diverse situations that their appropriateness cannot be identified.⁷⁹ As noted earlier:⁸⁰ "Aquinas is perhaps best known for his theory of analogy. On closer inspection, it turns out that he never had one. Rather, he made do with a few vague remarks and that grammatical astuteness which I have suggested as replacement for

⁷⁶ Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action*, 76, referring to Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 3, KNOWING AND NAMING GOD, 1.13.6.

⁷⁷ Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action*, 75.

⁷⁸ Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action*, 76, emphasis in original.

⁷⁹ Burrell, *Analogy and Philosophical Language*, 198; Burrell, "Religious Experience and Religious Truth," 193; Burrell, *Friendship and Ways to Truth*, 53-54; Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action*, 63-65.

⁸⁰ Chapter 2, *supra*, 87.

intuition.”⁸¹ Further, nothing seems to give rules for the correct use of these perfection expressions. The only thing appears to be the context, the context for the purpose in mind, and, particularly, the judgement employed in their use. “All that Aquinas' theological treatment demands is that we be able to use them to make true if inadequate assertions about God. ... He knows what must be denied, has some glimmer of what might be, and withal feels compelled to assert what he knows must be the case, since it embodies his own good and that of the universe.”⁸²

Creativeness

So, what then are the implications of these reflections on the relationship between God and the world for our question of natural evil? A good illustration is the way many have appealed to the notion of ‘creativity.’ As was noted in the Introduction to this dissertation, we have been seeking a way of thinking differently about the relationship of God and the universe, and I have explored, as part of this, following Tilley and Ward among others,⁸³ the approach of examining creativity and its relationship to the intelligibility of the universe, a notion used by these authors in their discussion of natural evil. This was to help us in rethinking our understanding of natural evil and its entailed suffering, helping us rediscover the goodness of God and the goodness of creation amid the challenges to such belief. However, given the understanding developed in the preceding chapters and in the discussion of analogy and perfections in this chapter, and our use of language, perhaps the ‘attribution’ of

⁸¹ Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action*, 63. See also Burrell, *Analogy and Philosophical Language*, 170.

⁸² Burrell, *Analogy and Philosophical Language*, 168-169.

⁸³ See Chapter 1, Creation and Creativity, *supra*, 38.

creativity as a ‘perfection’ in God could help us in this regard in contrast to its undifferentiated use. The notion thus is transformed from a generalized use into the perspective of a philosophical theological reflection on God's action.

As noted in the Introduction⁸⁴ and following Burrell's philosophical theology, I wish to pursue an avenue of thought, something of a invitation proffered by Terrence Tilley among others, a strategy which he himself entitled the ‘creativity defense’ whose attractiveness lies in its consideration of the advances in modern science, suggesting that “God's grace is in the world as the gift of creativity, a gift visible in a universe that evolves by chance in the natural realm and by constructions in the social realm.”⁸⁵

Creativity implies a relationship with God and God's action as creator and sustainer of the universe. This, of course, raises questions: questions of how do we understand God's role both in the initial act of creation and in continuing creation? what are the implications of creation and sustaining of the universe for creativity? how do we understand creativity in the universe and what limitations if any are there on this understanding? how do we understand our role in creativity? in light of creativity, how do we understand the intelligibility of the universe as a whole, particularly in light of the pressures of the thinking emphasized by modern science? Finally, there is the basic question addressed by this dissertation, how does this broadened understanding, this way of thinking differently, help us address the issue of natural evil?

Creativity appears to refer to a sense of the surplus of life in the order of the world and, as such, it is an invitation to think anew an experience of grace, this as a

⁸⁴ *Supra*, Introduction, 8ff.

⁸⁵ Tilley, "Towards a Creativity Defense of Belief in God in the Face of Evil," 202-203.

surplus of meaning that is not overcome by evil. Hence, analogy seems an appropriate way to deal with this notion and its relationship to God, perhaps creativity as a perfection. “Analogy is inherently expressive of relationships; and in doctrine, metaphysics, and anthropology, we are often in the business of expressing relationships. Our view of the world, ourselves, and our God are wrapped up in the way we use analogy.”⁸⁶ The intent is to explore how we can understand creativity as a ‘perfection’ of God, or better under the discussion of “Names of God”, which was treated analogously by Aquinas. Through the use of analogy, there may be a way to introduce the relationship of the notion of creativity and God. I should note that the terms creativeness and creativity are not being used as concepts but rather as analogues for an activity noticed in the universe.

Is the notion of creativeness a perfection in God? It would seem so. The term does not fit any of the Aristotelian categories, it going beyond quality. While commonly tied to the notion of bringing something into existence, the root being create, e.g., produce, generate, bring into being, make, fabricate, fashion, build, construct, design, devise, originate, frame, develop, shape, form, forge; it also encompasses the ideas of the use of the imagination or original ideas, especially in the production of an artistic work, and the related analogies of bringing about, e.g., give rise to, lead to, result in, cause, breed, generate, engender, produce, make for, promote, foster, sow the seeds of, contribute to; as well as to the analogies of establishment, e.g., establish, found, initiate, institute, constitute, inaugurate, launch, set up, form, organize, develop; all in all a very

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Rolnick, *Analogical Possibilities: How Words Refer to God*, 1.

rich panoply of meaning. The term is not, in its use of God, in any way an attribute,⁸⁷ God being the creator of all that is and hence beyond what we can understand, and in parallel to the other terms applies “more appropriately to God than to creatures.”⁸⁸ Given creation, the term can be used literally *of* God,⁸⁹ although we have utterly no conception of *how* God possesses creativeness.⁹⁰ In these and other aspects, the term creativeness might be appropriately seen as a perfection term. On the other hand, while certainly an aspect of our understanding of God, the nature of creativity is different from the other perfections: simpleness, perfection, goodness, limitlessness, unchangeableness, eternity and oneness, all of which appear on the surface to be static terms and rooted in simpleness. Creativity, on the other hand, can refer to a mode of acting without in any way implying change. While it could be questioned, from the nature of the notion of creativeness and its manner of use, I propose to consider the terms creativeness and creativity as perfections of God but in an analogous way.

An additional question is whether anything other than God can create. While Burrell only explicitly addresses this question in passing,⁹¹ a simple reading of Aquinas indicates that the answer is an unequivocal no, he addresses the notion directly. The term creative is used *only* in considering God and God’s action as creator, never in a creature. While Aquinas does acknowledge that Peter Lombard, ‘The Master’, “holds that it is possible for a creature to receive the power to create not as by its own power, or authority as it were, but ministerially as an instrument,” however, he goes on: “But if we

⁸⁷ Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action*, 69.

⁸⁸ Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action*, 71.

⁸⁹ Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action*, 72, 74.

⁹⁰ Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action*, 73.

⁹¹ I would suggest that Burrell assumes that *only* God can create – for him this is a non-question.

look into the question carefully, it will be clear that this is impossible. The action of any thing, even though it be performed instrumentally, must proceed from that thing's power."⁹² Further, in the *Summa Contra Gentiles* he states that it is "perfectly clear that nobody can produce anything by creation."⁹³ We find in the *Summa Theologiae*, "Manifestly creation is the proper action of God himself", and, "it clearly appears that no created being can cause anything unless a subject be presupposed, which is incompatible with the meaning of creation."⁹⁴ I would suggest that this latter phrase provides the clue. It would appear that Aquinas is narrowly delimiting the term to The Creation, and while one should not claim this is his presumption, given the static view of the universe at that time in that culture – what you see, *is* – makes sense. Interestingly, Burrell does not directly address this question in his writing. It would appear that based upon his understanding of free creation the question simply does not arise. However, from a consideration of existence, things' operations are a sign of their existence and all that emanates from it, and from "that divine activity will flow all that comes to be from such creatures."⁹⁵ Burrell does, in passing, address Aquinas' contention that only God can create in *Knowing the Unknowable God* and his comments on Rudi te Velde's *Substantiality and Participation in Thomas Aquinas* where referring to the *Summa Theologiae*, 1.45.5: is it exclusively for God to create? He observes, "producing existence absolutely, not merely of this thing or of that sort of thing, belongs to the

⁹² Aquinas, "Disputed Questions on the Power of God (Quaestiones disputatae de potentia Dei)"., Q3, Article 4, Is the Creative Power or Act Communicable to a Creature?

⁹³ Thomas Aquinas, "Summa contra Gentiles (Tractatus de fide catholica, contra Gentiles [contra errores infidelium])", (1261-1263). <http://dhspriority.org/thomas/english/ContraGentiles.htm> (accessed 15 June 2015); Internet., Bk. 2, 20, That No Body is Capable of Creative Action.

⁹⁴ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 8, CREATION, 1.45.5: Is it exclusively for God to create?

⁹⁵ Burrell, "Creation and 'Actualism': The Dialectical Dimension of Philosophical Theology," 82.

meaning of creation. ... [And] among all effects the most universal is existence itself, which should accordingly be the proper effect of the most universal cause, which is God.”⁹⁶ Also, in *Original Peace*, similarly referring to *ST* 1.45.5, he observes that since “the very ‘to-be of things is the proper effect’ of the creator in creating” that only God, “whose essence is simply to be, can create; any intermediaries would be utterly redundant.”⁹⁷ Given today’s perspective of an evolving universe, I would suggest that considering the wide range of its use, the term creativeness and its associate creativity are analogs of the perfection terms and through participation, in a sense, creatures are creative.⁹⁸

Let us now begin to move to the consideration of God’s acting in the universe and, in particular, that aspect where we consider creativeness in the universe. Burrell suggests two aspects. The first is that of ordering in the universe, and the second is derived from the notion of artisanship, the author/character analogy, which gives insight into that of creator/creature. Both are governed by God’s own acting as ‘artisan’.

ORDERING IN THE UNIVERSE

As observed earlier,⁹⁹ the order in the universe seems to be reflecting, if not something intelligent which I believe it does, at least that the universe seems intelligible.¹⁰⁰ Further, as Aquinas stated, “God’s effects resemble God as far as they can, but not perfectly”¹⁰¹ and “properties that belong to a thing over and above its own

⁹⁶ Burrell, *Knowing the Unknowable God*, 94; Burrell, "Thomas Aquinas and Islam," 76.

⁹⁷ Burrell and Malits, *Original Peace: Restoring God's Creation*, 67.

⁹⁸ The notion of participation was introduced briefly in Chapter 3, *supra*, 114. It is developed more fully in this chapter, 219

⁹⁹ Chapter 4, *supra*, 184ff.

¹⁰⁰ See the Introduction, *supra*, 5ff, and Chapter 1, *supra*, 38ff.

¹⁰¹ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 2, EXISTENCE AND NATURE OF GOD, 1.3.3, ad 2.

nature must derive from somewhere, either from that nature itself ... or from an external cause”¹⁰² which implies that the nature of things as we see them, beyond their specificity, i.e., the effects of God, the existence of things reflect in some way the God who gives them existence. From our understanding of providence we see that “there is no difference between God’s conserving activity and God’s creating” and “all of God’s activity partakes of creating: all that God can do is to create.”¹⁰³ Burrell also notes that providence merely adds to conservation “the idea whereby all things are planned to an end.”¹⁰⁴ Creation bestows order. Creation itself also has an implication of something new occurring, and I would argue that creativity, derived from our understanding of creation, has a thrust towards something new and some sense of an ordering principle. Similar to Burrell, I would consider creating as an ordering, an analogue of the emanation scheme devoid of the notion of necessity, a notion to which I shall return.¹⁰⁵ Burrell, in discussing the way in which God acts, notes that “the creator ever acts by constituting the order which inheres in each existing thing, in the measure that it is.”¹⁰⁶

Burrell links the ordering of things to God’s knowledge of them,¹⁰⁷ God knows what God is doing as creator and, taking the argument from Maimonides, argues that, for

¹⁰² Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action*, 26, referring to Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 2, EXISTENCE AND NATURE OF GOD, 1.3.4.

¹⁰³ Burrell, *Freedom and Creation in Three Traditions*, 68. See also the discussion of providence, *supra*, 165ff.

¹⁰⁴ Burrell, *Freedom and Creation in Three Traditions*, 118, referring to Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 5, THE WILL AND POWER OF GOD, 1.22.2.

¹⁰⁵ Burrell, "Aquinas Appropriation of *Liber de Causis* to Articulate the Creator as Cause-of-Being," 78. See also Burrell, *Faith and Freedom*, Prologue, xii-xxi.

¹⁰⁶ Burrell, "Aquinas Appropriation of *Liber de Causis* to Articulate the Creator as Cause-of-Being," 82.

¹⁰⁷ Burrell, "Maimonides, Aquinas and Gersonides on Providence and Evil," particularly 43-60.

Aquinas, God's knowledge relates to things as the cause of their being,¹⁰⁸ their ordering, and links it further by Aquinas to God in eternity, seen by Burrell as a step well beyond a theory of emanation.¹⁰⁹

GOD AS ARTIST

Burrell links this sense of ordering further to the notion of God as craftsman, as artisan.¹¹⁰ We have discussed this briefly earlier.¹¹¹ The creativity of an artist “might inform the philosophical reflections of those standing in a tradition which affirms creation”¹¹² and help us “to reflect on an experience of creativity open to each of us ... in an explicit attempt to probe what speculative thinkers have recognized as the controlling image for God’s knowing: artistry. ... And the image itself – indeed the doctrine of creation – suggests that the creative mode is itself the more perfect mode of knowing, and that all one may ever succeed in doing through philosophical reflection or scientific investigation amounts to approaching things from our side: deriving what knowledge we can from them.”¹¹³

I find it interesting that Burrell uses Dorothy Sayers’ imagery in *The Mind of the Maker* in discussing our experiencing of creativeness.¹¹⁴ She gives an analogy of God as creator, but God as Trinity, a comparison between human creativity and the divine

¹⁰⁸ Burrell, "Maimonides, Aquinas and Gersonides on Providence and Evil," 54, referring to Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 4, KNOWLEDGE IN GOD, 1.14.8.

¹⁰⁹ Burrell, "Maimonides, Aquinas and Gersonides on Providence and Evil," 55.

¹¹⁰ Burrell, "Maimonides, Aquinas and Gersonides on Providence and Evil," 53-54. See also Burrell, "Why not Pursue the Metaphor of Artisan and View God's Knowledge as Practical," 34-42; Burrell, "Creation, Will and Knowledge in Aquinas and Duns Scotus," 179; Burrell, *Freedom and Creation in Three Traditions*, 105; Burrell, *Learning to Trust in Freedom*, 34-35; in all of which he contests the notion of God ‘choosing’ a world to create.

¹¹¹ *Supra*, 160

¹¹² Burrell, "Maimonides, Aquinas and Gersonides on Providence and Evil," 61.

¹¹³ Burrell, "Maimonides, Aquinas and Gersonides on Providence and Evil," 62.

¹¹⁴ Burrell, "Maimonides, Aquinas and Gersonides on Providence and Evil," 62-63.

creativity.

For every work [*or act*] of creation is threefold, an earthly trinity to match the heavenly.

First, [*not in time but merely in order of enumeration*] there is the Creative Idea, passionless, timeless, beholding the whole work complete at once, the end in the beginning: and this is the image of the Father.

Second, there is the Creative Energy [*or Activity*] begotten of that idea, working in time from the beginning to the end, with sweat and passion, being incarnate in the bonds of matter: and this is the image of the Word.

Third, there is the Creative Power, the meaning of the work and its response in the lively soul: and this is the image of the indwelling Spirit.

And these three are one, each equally in itself the whole work, whereof none can exist without other: and this is the image of the Trinity.¹¹⁵

As noted, Burrell observes this leads us to ask how our “own experience of creativity might inform the philosophical reflections of those standing in a tradition which affirms creation,” and help us “to reflect on an experience of creativity open to each of us.”¹¹⁶ In this we encounter another perspective of “the controlling image for God’s knowing: artistry,”¹¹⁷ implicitly that of creativity, which is available, even if imperfectly, in each of us. He suggests that this itself is a good mode of knowing.¹¹⁸ As Terence Tilley observed, “Our creativity is a form of creaturely participation in the gracious agency of God available for complex entities;”¹¹⁹ it gives us a universe with open natural systems. He “suggests that God’s grace is in the world as the gift of creativity, a gift visible in a universe that evolves by chance in the natural realm and by constructions in the social realm.”¹²⁰

In our discussion of creativeness, we have been considering God’s acting in the

¹¹⁵ Sayers, *The Mind of the Maker*, 37-38, emphasis in the original.

¹¹⁶ Burrell, "Maimonides, Aquinas and Gersonides on Providence and Evil," 61.

¹¹⁷ Burrell, "Maimonides, Aquinas and Gersonides on Providence and Evil," 62.

¹¹⁸ Burrell, "Maimonides, Aquinas and Gersonides on Providence and Evil," 63.

¹¹⁹ Tilley, "Towards a Creativity Defense of Belief in God in the Face of Evil," 205. Also Chapter 1, *supra*, 14.

¹²⁰ Tilley, "Towards a Creativity Defense of Belief in God in the Face of Evil," 202-203.

universe, in creation, particularly in an attempt at understanding creativity and creativeness. Before I complete my discussion of that topic there are three aspects of God's action of which I wish to remind us. They are both related to God's acting in us, a sense of a form of the acting of autonomous creatures in the world. This provides the contrast between what Burrell insists we should do and the common presumptions of the scientific paradigm, the scientific way of thinking. Firstly, there is the notion of our participation in creation. As has been said, creativity implies a relationship with God and God's action as creator and sustainer of the universe, which, among others raises the question of how do we understand our role in creativity? Secondly, there is the question of our own activity in the universe. Finally there is the further sense of creativity as an exhibition of autonomous activity, the notion of emergence.

PARTICIPATION

Let us consider the question of our use of perfection terms for other than God, that is, how may we apply these terms to ourselves. This is linked to the notion of participation which primarily refers to existence, to participation in the gift of existence.¹²¹ However, it has a broader analogous use. Burrell argues that one can use the same term for features of both the creator and creature providing we are acutely sensible of the difference, the 'distinction'; for "whatever perfections creatures possess 'must pre-exist in him in a higher manner'" inasmuch as he is everything's cause, it being "precisely recognition of God as the cause of being which allows that the same terms may be predicated of creator and of creature without thereby implying that there

¹²¹ See Chapter 3, *supra*, 113ff.

be *something* they both hold in common.”¹²² As Burrell observes, the perfections of everything exist in God for two reasons, any perfection found in an effect must be found also in the cause of that effect; and since God then “is the primary operative cause of all things,” “the perfections of everything must pre-exist in God in a higher manner”¹²³

Further, in our use of these analogous terms we must be aware that the terms we use do not adequately represent God, since “we speak of God as we know him, and since we know him from creatures we can only speak of him as they represent him,”¹²⁴ yet our use stems “through concepts appropriate to the perfections creatures receive from him.”¹²⁵ Consonant with this Burrell remarks:

from the point of view of what the word means it is used primarily of God and derivatively of creatures, for what the word means – the perfection it signifies – flows from God to the creature. But from the point of view of our use of the word we apply it first to creatures because we know them first. That, as we have mentioned already is why it has a way of signifying that is appropriate to creatures.¹²⁶

and, derivatively,

every creature has its own nature in so far as it participates in some way the likeness of the divine essence. In this way then God, in knowing his essence as imitable in this particular way by this particular creature, knows his essence as the nature and Idea proper to that creature; and similarly in other cases.¹²⁷

Bringing this to creativeness, Burrell observes that we can “identify a trace of God’s creative activity in creatures, as each participates in the gift of existing as it comes

¹²² Burrell, “From Analogy of “Being” to the Analogy of Being,” 118. This cites Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 2, EXISTENCE AND NATURE OF GOD, 1.4.2, emphasis in the original.

¹²³ Burrell, “From Analogy of “Being” to the Analogy of Being,” 118. This refers to Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 2, EXISTENCE AND NATURE OF GOD, 1.4.

¹²⁴ Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action*, 69, referring to Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 3, KNOWING AND NAMING GOD, 1.13.2.

¹²⁵ Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action*, 69, referring to Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 3, KNOWING AND NAMING GOD, 1.13.4.

¹²⁶ Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action*, 73, referring to Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 3, KNOWING AND NAMING GOD, 1.13.6.

¹²⁷ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 4, KNOWLEDGE IN GOD, 1.15.2.

forth from the creator”¹²⁸

EXISTENCE IN THINGS

Secondly, there is the question of our own activity, our being what we are, our existence understood as *act*.¹²⁹ This analogous term has a very wide range, mostly related to performance. For Burrell, intentional activity, an inherently analogous expression, is the paradigm for *actus*, and particularly the act of understanding which underlies all human activity.¹³⁰ As was noted in the discussion of providence,¹³¹ Burrell observes that creation covers conservation of each existing thing as well “and in such a way as to animate its activities,”¹³² referring to God acting in the acting of things by causing them to be what they are, i.e., “God’s acting in creatures, therefore, must be understood in such a way that they themselves still exercise their own operations.”¹³³ Therefore Burrell concludes that the proper effect of God “is existence and the *activity which follows upon existing*.”¹³⁴ For Burrell, Aquinas considers God’s creative activity is expressed “in the to-be of each creature.”¹³⁵ From this I conclude that things, creatures, not only ‘rational creatures especially’, have their own particular activities as a result of participating in being which implies that creatures can be creative. From this perspective of both God’s action and God’s enabling our action let us return to the

¹²⁸ Burrell, *Towards a Jewish-Christian-Muslim Theology* (Chichester, Sussex: John Wiley; and Sons Ltd., 2011), 21-22.

¹²⁹ Chapter 3, *supra*, 113.

¹³⁰ See Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action*, Part 2, *Actus: The Operative Analogous Expression*, 131-200. The term also underlies the first half of Burrell, *Knowing the Unknowable God*. See also Burrell, *Freedom and Creation in Three Traditions*, Chapter 3, On Characterizing Creation, 39-46.

¹³¹ See Chapter 4, Providence, *supra*, 165ff.

¹³² Burrell, *Freedom and Creation in Three Traditions*, 69.

¹³³ Burrell, *Freedom and Creation in Three Traditions*, 69, referring to Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 14, DIVINE GOVERNMENT, 1.105.5.

¹³⁴ Burrell, "Why not Pursue the Metaphor of Artisan and View God's Knowledge as Practical," 40, emphasis added.

¹³⁵ Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action*, 149.

notion of creativeness by way of consideration of the notion of emergence.

EMERGENCE

Finally, bringing these together, as noted earlier in the Introduction,¹³⁶ Elizabeth Johnson, in "Does God Play Dice?" postulates that "if God works through chance, then the natural creativity of chance itself can be thought of as a mode of divine creativity in which it participates."¹³⁷ For her "the stuff of the world has an innate creativity in virtue of which the new continuously emerges through the interplay of chance and law."¹³⁸

Further,

In dialogue with contemporary science, theology understands that the Creator God is neither a maker of clocks nor an instigator of anarchy, but the one ceaselessly at work bringing overall direction and order to the free play of the undetermined realms of matter and spirit, "an Improviser of unsurpassed ingenuity." In this evolutionary world, the essential role of genuine randomness does not contradict God's providential care but somehow illumines it.¹³⁹

This notion has also been observed, as noted earlier, by Terence Tilley: "God's grace is in the world as the gift of creativity."¹⁴⁰ As was noted there, among the virtues of Tilley's approach is his understanding of how it adverts to an intelligibility of the profusion and variety of life in the order of cosmos¹⁴¹ while framing this intelligibility within a wider and more fundamental comprehension of our awareness of a grace-filled creation; a reference to the sheer gratuity of existence.

Consideration of the variety found in the universe leads to the notion of emergence. We are aware of our understanding of the intelligibility of evolution and

¹³⁶ Chapter 1, *supra*, 45.

¹³⁷ Johnson, "Does God Play Dice?," 15-16.

¹³⁸ Johnson, "Does God Play Dice?," 7.

¹³⁹ Johnson, "Does God Play Dice?," 18.

¹⁴⁰ Tilley, "Towards a Creativity Defense of Belief in God in the Face of Evil," 202-203. See also Chapter 1, *supra*, 46ff.

¹⁴¹ This profusion reminds one of the great prodigality attested to in the Bible, for example the Parable of the Sower: Matt. 13:1-9, Mark 4:1-9, Luke 8:4-8.

development in the natural processes of the universe, and I think it reasonable from the perspective of understanding of creation as a relation, and hence, particularly, of God's conserving of the universe, to postulate the immanence of the creator working through this natural ordering. Bernard Lonergan, particularly in *Insight*,¹⁴² gives emergence, in the form of emergent probability, as a principle for insight into creativity as exhibited in the cosmos, a creativity which leads to an understanding of its ordering and intelligibility. This is an integrated world-view which, from consideration of our very thinking, our acts of understanding and the progressive and cumulative nature of our successive acts of understanding, encompasses the thinking of modern science. Emergence provides a basis for this understanding of the underlying intelligibility of the universe: "Emergence ... is the addition of novelty to what went before."¹⁴³ Thus, a new thing, a novelty, something not there before, at least as far as we know, arises. New things emerge when the conditions are appropriate for emergence, emergence arising from natural process and chance.¹⁴⁴ This very emergence is an evolutionary analog of emanation. As a wise Rabbi has stated, in contradistinction to the scientific perspective on evolution, "We believe not in creative evolution; instead we believe in evolutionary creation."¹⁴⁵ Burrell sees "creation as the orderly bestowal of things' being, which adopts the metaphor of *emanation* and sees *existing* as a participation in being by virtue

¹⁴² Lonergan, *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding*. See also The Halifax Lectures: Bernard J.F. Lonergan, *Understanding and Being*, 2nd ed. (Toronto, Buffalo, London: University of Toronto Press, 1990).

¹⁴³ Patrick H. Byrne, "The Thomistic Sources of Lonergan's Dynamic World View," *The Thomist* 46, no. 1 (1982), 136.

¹⁴⁴ This notion of chance, of randomness, could, on its own, lead to the substitution of the idea of stochastic deism in place of the scientific perspective of deterministic deism. However, given the emphasis on existence as pure gift and the notion of participation, either is obviated.

¹⁴⁵ Reuven Bulka, in *Ottawa Citizen*, 23 June 2013, p.E 13.

of the One whose very essence is to-be, and so alone can make things participate in being,” this participation as order inherent in each thing, not imposed but inherent.¹⁴⁶ Of import is the use by Aquinas of the metaphor ‘emanation’ “for the *sui generis* activity of not only creation but for free creation.”¹⁴⁷ This perspective of emergence is tied to our use of analogy, a stress in this dissertation, where judgement in use is of importance, our emphasis on our acts of understanding rather than explanation. Thus, the novelty that emerges is also one at the level of our insights (scientific), our acts of understanding.

It is important to understand that what arises, while derived from a simpler level of being, is itself something new with its own properties, the higher levels being implicit in the lower levels.¹⁴⁸ We find that emergence is also an illustration of *creatio continua*; as Burrell has observed, “the creator, in acting, acts always as creator; and this proposition elucidates Aquinas's contention that creating and conserving are the same action, differing only in that conserving presupposes things present.”¹⁴⁹ Burrell adverts to creating as an ordering where things come into being after their kind where “whatever is, is inanimate, animate, or intelligent, in the sense that something may simply exist, or exist as a living being, or as an understanding being,”¹⁵⁰ and where the differences are ascending levels, or modes of being, such that the being of “inanimate things is regarded

¹⁴⁶ Burrell, "Aquinas Appropriation of *Liber de Causis* to Articulate the Creator as Cause-of-Being," 80-81, emphasis in original.

¹⁴⁷ Burrell, "Aquinas Appropriation of *Liber de Causis* to Articulate the Creator as Cause-of-Being," 76. Burrell notes a long personal struggle (approx. 20 years) of an initial opposition between ‘necessary emanation’ and ‘free creation’. See e.g., Burrell and Moulin, "Albert, Aquinas, and Dionysius," 638-639; Burrell, "The Challenge to Medieval Christian Philosophy: Relating Creator to Creatures," 130.

¹⁴⁸ Burrell, "Aquinas Appropriation of *Liber de Causis* to Articulate the Creator as Cause-of-Being," 80.

¹⁴⁹ Burrell, "Aquinas Appropriation of *Liber de Causis* to Articulate the Creator as Cause-of-Being," 82.

¹⁵⁰ Burrell, "Aquinas Appropriation of *Liber de Causis* to Articulate the Creator as Cause-of-Being," 78.

as restricted, those capable of growth and/or of self-motion more ample, and those also endowed with understanding and intention yet more fully realizing the reaches of being;”¹⁵¹ being is expressed in different ways. This surely is grace, grace as the fundamental gift, God giving existence to things.

Burrell also ties together the notions of emergence and participation, “a rich scenario of the universe participating in being as it emanates from a creator.”¹⁵² As Tilley notes, “Some creatures (creatures who participate in the creative goodness of God) are not only able to reproduce, but to create novelties. Matter has the ‘wondrous ability ... so to organize itself as to bring forth the truly new from within itself.’ This is creativity. This is grace.”¹⁵³ For him, “Our creativity is a form of creaturely participation in the gracious agency of God available for complex entities.”¹⁵⁴

To bring this to natural evil: “the world-order is an intelligible unity mirroring forth the glory of God. Because of this intelligible unity lower natures are subordinate to higher natures, not merely extrinsically, but also intrinsically, as appears in chemical composition and in biological evolution. Again, because of this intelligible unity finite natures are sacrificed for the greater perfection of the whole; thus there are extinct species and the toleration of many physical evils.”¹⁵⁵ This is where Tilley’s Creativity Defence comes in. As stated, he replaces the third element in a common form of the expression of the syllogism discussing evil with “R: It is not possible for God to create a

¹⁵¹ Burrell, “Aquinas Appropriation of *Liber de Causis* to Articulate the Creator as Cause-of-Being,” 78-79.

¹⁵² Burrell, *Learning to Trust in Freedom*, 13.

¹⁵³ Tilley, “Towards a Creativity Defense of Belief in God in the Face of Evil,” 205. In this he cites Johnson, “Does God Play Dice?,” 7-8.

¹⁵⁴ Tilley, “Towards a Creativity Defense of Belief in God in the Face of Evil,” 205.

¹⁵⁵ Bernard J.F. Lonergan, “The Natural Desire to See God,” in *Collection*, ed. Frederick E. Crowe and Robert M. Doran (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1967, Reprinted 2005), 85.

world in which entities could exercise creativity and which did not contain genuine evils.”¹⁵⁶ This presents a problem in that it implies a sense of necessity in God, e.g., ‘God can’t ...’ which is common in the theodicy discussions. However, his conjecture that a world in which entities exercise creativity could well contain genuine evils seems to hold. And yet, as we have been discussing, the ‘good’ cannot be a premise in an argument, it is not an assessment term, as we shall see.¹⁵⁷ The syllogism is misconceived, it places God on the same plane as the universe, merely as the ‘biggest thing around,’ a confusion of creator and the creation.

As discussed in the Introduction to this dissertation, I stated an interest in exploring the notion of Tilley’s ‘creativity defence’, and hence the notion of creativity as a possible help in engaging with the issue of natural evil. It has become a topical notion in recent times.¹⁵⁸ In particular we explored the notion in a number of authors, particularly Terrence Tilley, Keith Ward and Arthur Peacocke, as well as in process thought. I have been proposing a way of rethinking creativity in the consideration of creation, a new way of thinking of the God-world relationship. We have found that the notion of creativity, derived from creation, has a thrust towards something new and some sense of an ordering principle. However, it seems to be incidental to the notion of emergence. While it has helped us in our understanding of the notion of emergence and the proliferation of different things in the universe, I am compelled to the inverse

¹⁵⁶ Tilley, "Towards a Creativity Defense of Belief in God in the Face of Evil," 203-204. The other two propositions are: P: God is omniscient, omnipotent, and wholly good. Q: The actual world contains genuine evils, natural, personal and social. The free-will defence has R: It is not possible that God could create a world with free creatures who never choose evil. Thus, it principally, though not exclusively, addresses moral evil.

¹⁵⁷ See *infra*, 230ff.

¹⁵⁸ See Chapter 1, *supra*, 38ff.

insight¹⁵⁹ that while interesting, *pace* Ward *et al.*, the notion of creativity on its own, or as purely scientifically conceived, does not help us in any particular way in understanding natural evil much less *explaining* it; and neither does the greater comprehensiveness and precision of emergence. Creativity is not a concept but rather an analogue for activities observed in ourselves and in the universe. As such, it can lead to insight but not explanation. While we can see or describe, to a degree, how we can understand God's acting in the universe, we must not confuse this with creation; it is not about how God does anything in a mode of 'tensed time'.

It should be clear, because of the limitations to our understandings, we cannot, with any certainty, *explain* natural evil. As noted earlier, a fundamental question raised by an encounter with natural evil is 'Why?' or even 'Why me?', a seeking for an explanation. Yet, as we have seen, there is no explanation. We can understand the occurrence but not the 'why now', 'why here'. While one can understand the underlying conditions for an earthquake or tornado, or the underlying causes of disease, we cannot explain the *occurrence*, particularly *this* earthquake, *this* tornado, *this* instance of disease. Such questions have no explanation, or at best a retrospective pseudo-justification based upon, for example, building on an earthquake fault line or in a flood plain, or venturing on questionable dietary practices. Thus we see that the notion of creativity does not help; more broadly, the scientific approach does not help. On its own it does not provide adequate resources to address the more fundamental issue. The even more critical issue is, what happens to what is left behind? As Lonergan noted, "the intelligible unity of the existing world order may be known in three ways, imperfectly by

¹⁵⁹ Lonergan, *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding*, 43-50, and *passim*.

philosophy, less imperfectly by theology, but satisfactorily only as a result of the beatific vision.”¹⁶⁰ We have no explanatory answers.

Natural Evil¹⁶¹

So what does the foregoing provide to help us in discussing natural evil? In this dissertation we have been examining David Burrell’s retrieval of the tradition. We have looked at his approach to philosophical theology as a way to ‘think differently’. In particular, we have tried to see things from a perspective of God's self-communication in revelation, not ours. From the perspective of the world, the enigma remains: God gifts the creation with existence, an ultimate good, *yet* natural evil is suffered. Phrased as such, we are putting God into the dock; this is akin to a theodicy approach, it implies ‘Why, God?

As was stated in the beginning of this dissertation, we are dealing with the experiences, evidences, and the questions of the evils of our time which raise strong challenges to the confession of the goodness of God and God’s creation; in particular, we are considering those aspects commonly termed natural evil derived from the unavoidable reality of belonging to a universe and order of life which is characterized by the raw facticity of suffering. As has been noted,¹⁶² natural evil, a character of our experience of the universe, implies states of affairs and their effects which are to be avoided and for which no agent is morally responsible. Obvious examples mentioned

¹⁶⁰ Lonergan, "The Natural Desire to See God," 85.

¹⁶¹ As noted in Chapter 1, 14ff, it seems common in the literature in discussions of evil to find the emphasis on ‘moral’ evil and Burrell is no exception. However, Burrell’s emphasis is on theodicy, not the distinction between natural and moral evil. Consequently, the outline of part of this section, is based upon Davies, *Thomas Aquinas on God and Evil*, particularly 67-70. Burrell, in his review of Davies book, commends Davies approach, *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 86, No. 4, 731-732.

¹⁶² Chapter 1, *supra*, 14ff.

are natural disasters such as meteorites, hurricanes, tornados, earthquakes and accompanying tsunamis, but also human illnesses, diseases, viruses, bacterial infections, cancers, and genetic defects as well as disorders in the animal and plant world. Further, as noted by Tilley, social or systemic evils, those patterns of institutions or societies frequently bound by not fully considered rules or practices or by prejudice or injustice, can also be harmful to people either directly or indirectly, and present many of the same results as natural evils, they have similar characteristics to natural evil.¹⁶³

Yet our overall approach, within the Christian tradition, is that of affirming God's goodness and the goodness of creation along with one's reasons for this affirmation. Hence, let us review such statements in light of our reading of Burrell. Again, we must be careful in our use of language, both what we say, and how we say it. The question arises, is God as the free creator causally responsible for the evil we encounter? How can we affirm God's goodness?¹⁶⁴ We have seen that God is good. However, examined closely, the goodness of God is not necessarily as we might think. The whole notion of good is used analogously and there is our tendency to align *our* use of terms to *our* needs, as *we* perceive them, to *our* mode of signifying, an implicit anthropocentrism.¹⁶⁵ We cannot call God morally good nor morally bad or indifferent. Have we posed the question aright? We accept that God is good, but as we saw this is a perfection¹⁶⁶ referring to God's causing of all creaturely goodness, not God's carrying out of moral obligations. God does not have reasons the way we creatures have; we

¹⁶³ Tilley, "Towards a Creativity Defense of Belief in God in the Face of Evil," 211-212. See also Tilley, *The Evils of Theodicy*, 238ff.

¹⁶⁴ Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action*, 30.

¹⁶⁵ Burrell, "From Analogy of 'Being' to the Analogy of Being," 122.

¹⁶⁶ Chapter 4, *supra*, 140ff.

must get beyond a 'moral' way of stating the question. Let us, then, look at our understanding of 'good' more closely.

THE GOOD

As noted earlier,¹⁶⁷ we discovered that it is by existing that something achieves actuality and hence something is good in so far as it has existence, as it exists.¹⁶⁸ God desires that we be. Good is not being used here as an assessment term,¹⁶⁹ God does not have to do anything admirable; put quite simply, God alone is good by nature; God has no added 'accidents' goodness belonging to God by nature, and God is not oriented toward some extrinsic goal, rather God is the ultimate goal of all things.¹⁷⁰ Burrell ties this back to existing.¹⁷¹ Hence, to exist is inherently good; the contrary is nothing, *nil*.

Burrell, in commenting on Aquinas' use of the metaphor of emanation, and the *Liber de Causis*, observes that in creating things God infuses things under the aspect of the good, communicating God's goodness *to* things.¹⁷² From the discussion of creativity we find that God in creating, created things which interact with each other and, in the case of living things, each having its own needs. As Burrell noted, God in causing each thing to be acts in the things acting causing them to be what they are¹⁷³ leading us to conclude that "God's acting in creatures, therefore, must be understood in such a way

¹⁶⁷ Chapter 4, *supra*, 147.

¹⁶⁸ Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action*, 31-32; Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 2, EXISTENCE AND NATURE OF GOD, 1.5.1.

¹⁶⁹ Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action*, 34.

¹⁷⁰ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 2, EXISTENCE AND NATURE OF GOD, 1.6.3. Burrell indirectly refers to this notion of God, being 'the good' in a number of places, e.g., Burrell, "Freedom and Creation in the Abrahamic Traditions," 149; Burrell, "Al-Ghazali on Created Freedom," 170-171; Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action*, 35, 117.

¹⁷¹ Burrell, *Knowing the Unknowable God*, 60; Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action*, 34.

¹⁷² Burrell, "Thomas Aquinas and Islam," 80-81; Burrell and Moulin, "Albert, Aquinas, and Dionysius," 639-640, emphasis added.

¹⁷³ Burrell, *Freedom and Creation in Three Traditions*, 68-69.

that they themselves *still exercise their own operations*.¹⁷⁴ This can imply that things pursuing their own good may cause evil to other things, an implication of the discussion of God's existence in things.¹⁷⁵ As the old example illustrates, what is good for a lion is not necessarily good for a lamb! Thus, we find that, from this perspective, we can, in a sense, understand the notion of natural evil. As Davies notes, God does not have to make things, but given that God has, the consequences are to be expected; there are going to be victims.¹⁷⁶ But again, with this common philosophical approach, we encounter a dead end and at an abstract level. The propositional approach does not help. We are still arguing at a surface level and we seem to be missing Sokolowski's fundamental difference – God is God, we are creatures. Let us consider another approach in our attempt to understand natural evil, one rooted in history.

PRIVATION

The question persists, is God causing evil? As Gilby notes,¹⁷⁷ for Aquinas, God as creator of a world in which suffering exists is not causing evil directly or as an end in itself, God only causes good. The badness encountered is not created by God. As tradition would have it, evil is not a substance or entity in its own right but a *privatio boni*: the absence or lack of some good power or quality which a thing by its nature ought to possess, that is, not a simple negation. As was noted in Chapter 1,¹⁷⁸ evil is a

¹⁷⁴ Burrell, *Freedom and Creation in Three Traditions*, 68-69, referring to Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 14, DIVINE GOVERNMENT, 1.105.5, emphasis added.

¹⁷⁵ See *supra*, 221.

¹⁷⁶ Davies, *Thomas Aquinas on God and Evil*, 68.

¹⁷⁷ Gilby, "Appendix 4, Evil.", Vol. 8, CREATION, Variety and Evil, 161.

¹⁷⁸ Chapter 1, *supra*, 23ff. See also the discussion above,

privation, in particular, a privation of being,¹⁷⁹ the notion of something not being what it should be by nature, evil as a diminution or privation of the good of something, yet accompanied with a notion of the goodness of creation and a graced creation. However, evil suffered is not an illusion, it is real enough. So we end up with the notion implying that privation is explicable in terms of the good that is created; that is, natural evil can be considered a consequence of something being good or seeking its perfection in its way sometimes causing bad to something else in its way. “Almighty God in no way would permit any evil in his works unless he were not so good and powerful that he could bring good even out of evil.”¹⁸⁰ Burrell, in discussing both the cause and the frequency of evil, refers to Aquinas’ dry observation:

[A]n evil admits of an indirect cause merely. And so it is impossible to take it back to anything that is the direct cause of evil. As for the reference to evil being present in the majority of cases, it is simply untrue. For things subject to generation and decay, in which alone we experience physical evil, compose but a small part of the whole universe, and besides defects of nature are minority occurrences in any species.

They seem to be in a majority only among human beings. For what appears good for them as creatures of sense is not simply good for them as human, that is as reasonable beings; in fact most of them follow after sense, rather than intelligence.

There is no going back indefinitely in the series of causes of evil. Instead all evils are to be resolved into some cause which is good, and from which evil results indirectly.¹⁸¹

As noted earlier, following Davies,¹⁸² for Aquinas there is no reason to question God’s goodness, “the explanation of evil is not to be found in what God has *done* or is

¹⁷⁹ Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action*, 104. Here Burrell is discussing Aquinas treatment of goodness in general and notes confusion relating to the use of the notion. He refers to his approach as keeping to Aquinas’ grammar of the situation to then draw out its consequences to lead to a more substantial discussion. In a review of his oeuvre, I have not been able to find any discussion by Burrell of the notion.

¹⁸⁰ Davies, *Thomas Aquinas on God and Evil*, 69, citing Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 5, GOD’S WILL AND PROVIDENCE, 1.22.2, ad 2.

¹⁸¹ Burrell, *Learning to Trust in Freedom*, 36-37, referring to Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 8, CREATION, 1.49.3.ad 5, 6.

¹⁸² Chapter 1, *supra*, 24.

doing. Rather it lies in what he has *not* done or is *not* doing.”¹⁸³ “For Aquinas, therefore, the question to ask when confronted by evil is not ‘Why does God produce so much evil?’ It is, ‘Why is there less good than there might be?’”¹⁸⁴ For Davies, “[Aquinas] thinks that evil suffered in the world is neither *more* nor *less* than we can expect in a material world in which scientific explanations can be given for what happens. According to Aquinas, God has created a material world in which there is evil suffered.”¹⁸⁵ Further, Davies observes that “what goes by the name ‘the problem of evil’ since the time of Hume (or, indeed, Epicurus) is not a problem for Aquinas. Without denying God’s omnipotence, omniscience, or goodness, he does not think that God has any moral case to answer.”¹⁸⁶ Davies sees no answer to the question of why there are evils and Aquinas could not be expected to answer “given his fundamental conviction that we are seriously in the dark when thinking of God.”¹⁸⁷

While on the surface Davies’ realism is understandable and grounded in an affirmation of the goodness of God and of creation, yet at the existential level it cannot be considered a particularly pastoral doctrine, and again it is a basically philosophical response, a philosophical understanding, and from a theological perspective it keeps running up against an impasse. This seems to be about as far as a philosophical reflection may lead us. However, there are some positive aspects, ones which get us away from the surface aspect of things. For example, privation does not grant evil any

¹⁸³ Davies, *The Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, 89, emphasis in the original.

¹⁸⁴ Davies, *The Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, 91.

¹⁸⁵ Davies, ‘Foreword’ to Aquinas, *On Evil*, 22, emphasis in the original. See also *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 8, CREATION, Variety and Evil, 1.48.1, particularly: Reply, a.5 and 1.48.2. See also Davies, *Thomas Aquinas on God and Evil*, 68.

¹⁸⁶ Davies, *Thomas Aquinas on God and Evil*, 72, 88-89, 129.

¹⁸⁷ Davies, *Thomas Aquinas on God and Evil*, 130.

'ontological' status in that there would be something that exists that is not God. Christian tradition posits existence and seeks to understand that, i.e., what exists as the effect of God's free act of creation. We have briefly touched on the notion of presence earlier.¹⁸⁸ Trying to think as Burrell would have it, it is not that things simply fall short of *act*, or that God is not doing something, but that God is *in fact* present in the very operations of life, not only an understanding of existence as good, but also from existence as gift, that is, the movement of God toward us. Thus, even though there is privation there is also existence itself.

REDEMPTION

Furthering the notion of God with us, at this point it is appropriate to briefly revisit the notion of redemption,¹⁸⁹ the sense of God 'for' us. For Burrell this cannot be separated from creation and is steeped in revelation. These must be considered together for a fully Christian theology.¹⁹⁰ Burrell talks of the two foci, creation-*cum*-revelation, much as in an ellipse, an attempt to counter an apparent insistence on either, e.g., discussions of the first two articles of the Creed where often there is an emphasis on the saving life of Jesus and a downplaying or forgetfulness of creation.¹⁹¹ As he observes, "the primary content of revelation will be creation-*cum*-redemption."¹⁹² Though difficult, the message of revelation must have both "as moments in God's undeserved

¹⁸⁸ *Supra*, 154

¹⁸⁹ See *supra*, 'As Redemption', 122.

¹⁹⁰ Burrell, "Incarnation and Creation: The Hidden Dimension," 234.

¹⁹¹ Burrell, "Incarnation and Creation: The Hidden Dimension," 235. These twin foci are an underlying theme in Burrell and Malits, *Original Peace: Restoring God's Creation*. Burrell suggests that this is a result of an emphasis on Sunday, the feast of the resurrection as opposed to the Sabbath, Saturday, the celebration of God's resting from the work of creation.

¹⁹² Burrell, "Incarnation and Creation: The Hidden Dimension," 236.

self-giving”¹⁹³ in that each provides the context for the other. As he observes, “Indeed, the operative faith of Christians has always presumed this inner connection; the task of theologians is at best not to betray it.”¹⁹⁴

This leads to the understanding that nothing is ‘left behind’ since all things will reach their ‘act’, i.e., the perfection to which they are called by virtue of being created; nothing in a sense is lost, the notion of lost is a tensed perspective. Further, we should not allow a notion of emergence and its sense of open-endedness to override how everything in fact reaches its term. That is also why creation for Burrell is complemented by redemption. In eternity everything that is is ‘present’ to God.

AN ALTERNATIVE PERSPECTIVE

Up to now our emphasis has been on existence, what is, our understanding and particularly our relation to Being as existence. There is another analogy parallel to the analogy of being, the analogy of love. We have touched on aspects of this earlier, Why did God bother?¹⁹⁵ We realized that God creates out of the love of God’s own goodness; there is a ‘procession of love’ in God. God’s love is to will goodness to things, to their participation in existence and as we have just discussed, existence is good. This is a result of free creation.¹⁹⁶ Coupled with the notion of God being with us, there appears to be a prospect of getting beyond the impasse.

As we have seen, neither the scientific approach nor the purely philosophical approach adequately addresses our concerns. Again, we have not been enabled to think

¹⁹³ Burrell, "Incarnation and Creation: The Hidden Dimension," 239.

¹⁹⁴ Burrell, "Incarnation and Creation: The Hidden Dimension," 240.

¹⁹⁵ *Supra*, 129.

¹⁹⁶ Burrell, *Freedom and Creation in Three Traditions*, 96.

differently, we are still thinking from our perspective, not God's. We have to think more broadly; surely today theology is more sensitive to the pastoral dimension. We need to advance our thinking at the level of an understanding, and I suggest that philosophical *theology* holds the key. The impasse must be recognized and resolved, then we can move forward.

The Impasse

There appears to be two aspects of our recognition of the impasse. Firstly, we can recognize that the impasse consists in presuppositions and anticipations entailed by the way we use language and overlook fundamental distinctions that must be acknowledged; to wit, we cannot confuse God as creator with God's creation, the universe. This confusion can be quite subtle and create problems in our thinking. Secondly, there is the presumption that God has something to answer for, again a confusion of God and creatures forgetting the difference. We have to go beyond these speculative approaches. The impasse, I argue, remains as a consequence of the absence of a theological moment. We have to maintain the 'distinction,' (i.e., the insight into the notion of God as creator) and for this reason it is generally recognized that there is no solution as a purely philosophical explanation to the problem of evil.

The notion of privation, such as that worked out in their reflections on Aquinas by Davies and to which Burrell himself refers as an indispensable moment in thinking the question of evil,¹⁹⁷ escapes these limits in some ways. For Burrell it is a function of our understanding of God as good and our understanding that God desire the goodness of all things – that they reach 'act.' That said, privation remains a basically philosophical

¹⁹⁷ Burrell, *Towards a Jewish-Christian-Muslim Theology*, 20.

response, perhaps the farthest possible extensions of a philosophical understanding. Granted, the notion of privation would argue that the problem of evil does not exist, it being a mistaken human construct confusing God and creatures. However, the experience of natural evil remains. A purely philosophical perspective at this critical existential moment continues to come up against an impasse, in the sense of the farthest that it can go. While privation is understandable as a mode of argument, it still raises pastoral questions. This, to my mind, reinforces the approach in this dissertation, that of philosophical theology, a higher order integration of the two in one with a broadening of categories. We can maintain our roots from which philosophical discourse 'separated' itself.

The *problem* of natural evil lies in its specificity, its particularity. This brings us back to one of Tilley's basic problems, one he argued against strongly, the issues raised by purely speculative efforts. All these discussions can themselves carry echoes of theodicy, that is, participation in not "merely an assertive discourse, but to declare that evils are mere abstractions to be dealt with only by theory. ... a practice that creates more evils than it explains."¹⁹⁸ 'Evil' becomes a bloodless abstraction which ignores the harsh facticity and specificity of evil.¹⁹⁹

Indeed, it is the pastoral dimension and the theological moment that continue to invite us to think differently. As Burrell states, understanding serves us best when "at the service of life."²⁰⁰ I would maintain that Burrell opens the door to the sensitivities in the understanding called for. The difficulty is that the space between philosophy and

¹⁹⁸ Tilley, "The Problems of Theodicy: A Background Essay," 47.

¹⁹⁹ Tilley, "The Problems of Theodicy: A Background Essay," 38.

²⁰⁰ Burrell, "Religious Life and Understanding," 678.

theology cannot be crossed from the philosophical side; a philosophical *theology* is needed. This is evident in Ricœur's own thinking and to a certain extent, it is evidence of an abiding challenge identified by both Tilley and Davies, where Tilley, in his 'creativity defense' tries to hold two ends of the chain while pointing out how we lack seeing the connections, and Davies closes with a chapter on the Trinity.²⁰¹

As a mode of understanding, the approach of philosophical theology emphasizes the use of language. We should be aware that at the root of the word for 'suffering' is that for 'undergo', hence treated as synonyms. As Burrell notes, most of the significant things in our lives are not something we do, rather they are things we undergo. He observes that such a realization is "a step towards undermining the modern presumption that suffering is the worst of evils."²⁰²

I claim that Tilley and Ricœur are vindicated. Tilley's contention is satisfied: "My basic contention is that the problems of evil generally need to be dissolved, not resolved."²⁰³ Ricœur's desire is met: "Do we find an invitation to think less about the problem or a provocation to think more, or to think differently about it?"²⁰⁴ As noted, from the perspective presented, the *problem* of evil does not exist; it is a mistaken human construct confusing God and creatures. However, the *fact* of natural evil remains; evil is not something to be endured stoically; it provokes outrage; there remains the harsh raw suffering resulting from some of these events. The *challenge* of natural

²⁰¹ Davies, *Thomas Aquinas on God and Evil*, Chapter 9, "The Trinity and Christ," 97-111. See also Brian Davies, *The Reality of God and the Problem of Evil* (London, UK, New York, NY: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2006), 239-246.

²⁰² Burrell, *Friendship and Ways to Truth*, 10.

²⁰³ Tilley, "Towards a Creativity Defense of Belief in God in the Face of Evil," 195. See also Chapter 1, *supra*, 38.

²⁰⁴ Ricœur, "Evil, a Challenge to Philosophy and Theology," 249. See also Chapter 1, *supra*, 52

evil is not so much to seek explanation but to understand and, more importantly, to respond. We should seek for a response to, rather than an explanation of, evil.²⁰⁵ I suggest that philosophical *theology* holds the key in advancing our understanding. Therefore, let us now turn to a more constructive side of the use of Burrell's approach.

²⁰⁵ Ricœur, "Evil, a Challenge to Philosophy and Theology," 259.

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. John 1:5.

6. RETHINKING THE QUESTION OF NATURAL EVIL IN LIGHT OF INSIGHTS ON CREATION FROM DAVID BURRELL

In the previous chapter I attempted to identify the roots of the impasse arising from the arguments for theodicy, the latter being a common approach to the question of natural evil. In this chapter I attempt a more constructive approach to this question based on our elaboration of David Burrell's philosophical theology.

We have found that privation affirms something with respect to natural evil without becoming necessarily a theodicy; it is consistent with the question for further understanding raised in chapter 1, particularly by Tilley and Ricœur.¹ The argument of privation, stemming from Augustine and Aquinas, represents, as Burrell suggests, a certain achievement in that it is a function of our understanding of God as good and our understanding that God desires the goodness of all things — that they reach 'act.' In addition, privation does not grant evil any 'ontological' status such that there would be something that exists that is not from God. Christian tradition posits existence and seeks to understand that, i.e., that which exists as the effect of God's free act of creation, that which abides. However, privation remains a basically philosophical response, perhaps one of the farthest possible extensions of a philosophical understanding of natural evil. But surely there is more than this? Is there a deeper level of understanding, of intelligibility? The pastoral dimension demands it. Can we go beyond this apparent limitation?

¹ On privation see Chapter 1, *supra*, 20ff; Chapter 5, *supra*, 231.

Clearly, we still need to strive forward toward something more fruitful, to avoid fatalism in the face of evil, to avoid submission to evil, to avoid giving evil a status; we need to ‘dissolve’ the problems of evil.² As one reviewer notes, Ricœur, in calling evil a *challenge*, gives a critique of the traditional responses to a *problem*, a problem of the demands for logical coherence, and demonstrates that the latter is of limited worth.³ The idea of challenge indicates something to be contended against, not merely considered as a problem. As Burrell observes, the Book of Job “directs us to eschew *explanation* for other ways of rendering enigmas intelligible.”⁴ This ties with Tilley’s desire that “the problems of evil generally need to be dissolved, not resolved.”⁵

For Ricœur, theodicies leave unanswered an important part of the question, not merely the “Why?” but the “Why me?”⁶ We have to deal with the particularities, with the specifics. A common thinking is one which confuses guilt and suffering. This perspective is pervasive in the Book of Job, the implication being that one must have done something wrong, e.g., violated the covenant, and thereby offended God; hence the suffering. We discovered that the thinking this entails, either scientific or philosophical, fails; it is at the root of theodicy. As noted by Ricœur, “It is to this aporia that action and the catharsis of feelings and emotions are called upon not to give a solution but a response, a response able to render the aporia productive.”⁷ Ricœur’s approach to the

² Ricœur, “Evil, a Challenge to Philosophy and Theology,” 249; Emmanuel Durand, *Évangile et Providence* (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 2014), 24; Tilley, “Towards a Creativity Defense of Belief in God in the Face of Evil,” 195.

³ Brian Gregor, in a review of Ricœur, “Evil, a Challenge to Philosophy and Theology”, *Heythrop Journal*, Jan 2008, Vol. 49, Issue 1, 150-151.

⁴ Burrell, *Deconstructing Theodicy*, 123.

⁵ Tilley, “Towards a Creativity Defense of Belief in God in the Face of Evil,” 195.

⁶ Ricœur, “Evil, a Challenge to Philosophy and Theology,” 252.

⁷ Ricœur, “Evil, a Challenge to Philosophy and Theology,” 258.

‘scandal’ of evil is to praxis, to a three level response.⁸ This does not mean losing the sight of suffering. Further, we should not expect, either from ourselves or others, a stoical attitude, a ‘coping’ with suffering.⁹ As stated earlier, we should seek for a response to, rather than an explanation of, evil;¹⁰ we should engage in both ethical and political action that may reduce the quantity of suffering and lessen the amount of violence and suffering in the world.¹¹ We should remember:

Christ has no body now on earth but yours,
no hands but yours; no feet but yours.
Yours are the eyes through which Christ's compassion is to look out to the earth.
Yours are the feet by which He is to go about doing good.
Yours are the hands by which He is to bless His people.¹²

This response includes, of course, physical support: safety, food and water, shelter, as well as emotional support.¹³ This is the common response to natural disasters. The physical needs are typically the first actions. People are removed from the danger, provided shelter, warmth as necessary, and the necessities such as food and water. As needed, bodies are recovered. In the case of disease there is medical assistance, and measures to combat and isolate the infection. All of this is done to a greater or lesser degree, particularly internationally. Yet, this is only of the nature of immediate relief. Reconstruction or remediation is a longer-term action with variable results. However, beyond this, there are the inner needs of people.

Emotional support is to help in leading toward catharsis, the release of the

⁸ Ricœur, "Evil, a Challenge to Philosophy and Theology," 249-261.

⁹ Burrell, *Friendship and Ways to Truth*, 10.

¹⁰ Ricœur, "Evil, a Challenge to Philosophy and Theology," 259.

¹¹ Ricœur, "Evil, a Challenge to Philosophy and Theology," 259.

¹² Attributed to St. Teresa of Avilla, various translations and sources.

¹³ Tilley, in *The Evils of Theodicy*, talks of his experience as a hospital orderly during his university years, which entailed carrying the bodies of the deceased, particularly newborns, and the emotional drain this placed upon him. "Introduction," 1.

sufferer.¹⁴ In our action we should integrate and accept the ignorance of why. A survivor is not guilty for the suffering or death of the others; victims should not blame themselves. Secondly, we have to allow one's feelings and lament to develop into a complaint against God. This has echoes of Burrell's reflections on Job, particularly 'speaking to God as a relationship.'¹⁵ Emotional response should help in the sufferer's lament and transform it into complaint, a reasonable reaction to the suffering, which can lead to mourning, and in turn lead to:

A third stage in the catharsis of the lament is to discover that the reasons for believing in God have nothing in common with the need to explain the origin of suffering. Suffering is only a scandal for the person who understands God to be the source of everything that is good in creation, including our indignation against evil, our courage to bear it, and our feeling of sympathy toward victims. In other words, we believe in God *in spite of* evil. To believe in God *in spite of* ... is one of the ways in which we can integrate the speculative aporia into the work of mourning¹⁶

From a pastoral perspective one must avoid any attempt to explain, to answer the 'Why?' directly; one must avoid the implicit desire for explanation. Tilley points out that theodicies, being theoretical and addressed to those engaged in theoretical practice, do not address the real complaints or expression of grief.¹⁷ And Burrell observes, asking the why "makes sense as a plea or even a complaint, it does not as a request for an explanation;" God doesn't fit into our logical schemas, God is not a part of the universe.¹⁸ Tilley notes, "Few, if any, will be consoled or strengthened in moments of grief by either theodicies or defenses."¹⁹ False explanations are all too often offered in situations of profound suffering and evil where one would be wiser to remain silent than

¹⁴ Ricœur, "Evil, a Challenge to Philosophy and Theology," 259.

¹⁵ Burrell, *Deconstructing Theodicy*, 124.

¹⁶ Ricœur, "Evil, a Challenge to Philosophy and Theology," 260.

¹⁷ Tilley, *The Evils of Theodicy*, 229.

¹⁸ Burrell, *Deconstructing Theodicy*, 121-122.

¹⁹ Tilley, "Towards a Creativity Defense of Belief in God in the Face of Evil," 196.

dogmatically give an ‘explanation’ for something beyond our capacity to understand. From some perspectives, explanation is quite stark frequently confusing guilt and suffering; it is an irrelevancy. What one *can* offer, beyond the physical support, is presence with the sufferer; “appropriate responses are more in terms of ‘constant in companionship’, a practice necessary, but never sufficient, to sustain a fellow-sufferer in faith.”²⁰

Following Tilley, there are considerations where one can go further for those who believe in God, both others as we respond to them and for ourselves: for ourselves as support or ourselves as sufferers. Hence, beyond the direct response to incidents of natural evil already discussed, there is a deeper understanding of response based upon our relationship to God, our creator.

I have suggested throughout this dissertation that we need to think differently and have suggested that philosophical *theology*, as presented by David Burrell, holds the key in advancing understanding; it opens the categories and provides a deeper intelligibility about the way the question is asked. It exposes presuppositions while drawing into relief the significance of the reference to creation as a free and intentional act of God as creator. So how does one proceed? How does Burrell's approach effect that with respect to the question of natural evil? Let us begin by reviewing our understanding of the relationship between God and creation as a foundation for what follows. Then we can address an approach to natural evil, a particular existential response, both its roots and its fulfillment. We will explore this from a theological

²⁰ Tilley, "Towards a Creativity Defense of Belief in God in the Face of Evil," 196. See also Davies, *Thomas Aquinas on God and Evil*, 124.

perspective and from a philosophical theological perspective, this latter informed by the former. As Burrell has observed, our theology underlays our thinking.²¹

We shall explore this by turning to the more specific theological moment in Burrell's philosophical theology and then return to the implications of this for expanding the philosophical moment, both moments thereby contributing to the philosophical theological approach evident in Burrell. The former informs the latter.

Relation Between God and Creation

An important aspect of our understanding of our use of philosophical theology in this dissertation is that of relation, an analogous term used in different contexts but dominantly in our considerations of God and what God has created, God's creation. It is fundamental to the thinking put forward in this dissertation and was explored in Chapter 3.²² We have discussed this earlier. Let us now extend this notion.

The relation between God and the creation is "the necessary context for a proper understanding of the interaction of God and human beings, where the God in question is creator of all that is, including rational creatures like human beings,"²³ and hence a basic notion in our theology. "Creation not only comes first, as it were, in our God's transactions with the world; it is also true that the way we understand that founding relation will affect our attempts to articulate any further interaction."²⁴ Further, "The act of creation will be located not in the category of act or passion, but in that of relation."²⁵ This perspective of creation as relation has, as an essential element in its understanding,

²¹ Burrell, *Knowing the Unknowable God*, 1.

²² See Chapter 3, *supra*, 120.

²³ Burrell, *Freedom and Creation in Three Traditions*, 161.

²⁴ Burrell, "The act of creation with its theological consequences," 41.

²⁵ Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action*, 157.

that of creation as a free gift as has been noted earlier, it appears frequently in the scriptures.²⁶ For Burrell, the universe is not simply there, it is a result of God's free act. As well, fundamental to any discussion of God is the very fact of existence understood as the relation of creatures to their creator: "the very relation which bestows intelligibility in bestowing *esse*, while itself remaining unknowable to us."²⁷ This is an enduring relation; it is always there even though we don't advert to it. As has been observed, creation is the *hidden* element in Thomas Aquinas. As we have seen, free creation is an *explicit* element in Burrell's thinking.²⁸ From this perspective, creation is that which delineates how we are to understand God, the world, the relationship between the world and God, and thus, the way we discuss God as creator and the world as created.

However, as Burrell observes, in considering the relation between God and the world we have to take care in respecting the reality of each such that the distinction, is not considered a division within that world.²⁹ This notion of the 'distinction', as emphasized constantly by Burrell, is the ground of our understanding of the notion of the relation between God the Creator, and God's creation. However, creation being a key notion, showing how the relation is incomparable with any relation between two things we know will require "special metaphysical resources, while failing to advert to that fact

²⁶ See Chapter 3, *supra*, 122.

²⁷ Burrell, "Philosophy and religion," 122.

²⁸ See Chapter 3, *supra*, 95; Chapter 4, 179.

²⁹ Burrell, *Knowing the Unknowable God*, 17.

will inevitably involve ‘associating’ the creator with creatures”³⁰ in which case God becomes merely ‘the biggest thing around’.³¹

For Burrell, stemming from his sensitivity to the distinction, creation is primary in our thinking, it comes first, it is what we know.³² This implies that we need be careful of how we speak of the relation. The notion of relation is subtle, “not properly an accident for its being is not *in* but *ad*; which is to say that it does not exist in another so much as ‘between’ the *relata*.”³³ Thus the difficulty we have in discussing God and the notion of God’s relation to the creation and our need of analogous language. Yet how can we talk of two things without contrasting them? Given that one of those things is the creator of all the others, everything else is what it is in relation to that One.

Burrell further notes that while creatures have their very being from God, God in no way depends on the creatures being, i.e., on creating.³⁴ The creator-to-creation relationship has the latter in a non-reciprocal relation of dependence.³⁵ Thus, the notion of creation as relation is clear, the relationship is one of utter dependence, it is unilateral, all dependence being that of the creature to God and yet more fully: for “fully intentional and free agents whose freedom can be expressed as a ‘hunger for the good’ ... best seen as a response.”³⁶

As a caution, what seems to be often overlooked is that these are radically different orders: God is the *Creator*, the universe is the *creation* consisting therefore of

³⁰ Burrell, "Creator/Creatures Relation," 178.

³¹ As noted, a common phrase of Burrell.

³² Burrell, "The act of creation with its theological consequences," 41.

³³ Burrell, *Knowing the Unknowable God*, 23. Emphasis in original.

³⁴ Burrell, "The Challenge to Medieval Christian Philosophy: Relating Creator to Creatures," 134.

³⁵ See discussions in Chapter 3, 116ff.

³⁶ Burrell, "Aquinas Appropriation of *Liber de Causis* to Articulate the Creator as Cause-of-Being," 80.

creatures.³⁷ However, the notion that God is not really related to what is created is often misinterpreted. Burrell contends that a better reading is the “fact that God’s creating is an intentional activity of divinity, and not one which inherently relates God to creation in such a way that God could not be God without being creator as well;”³⁸ creation is not *necessary* to God but God *did* create, and as we have noted, out of love of God’s own goodness;³⁹ creation, i.e., existence, is pure gift. Creation *is* the relationship between them.

This gives us the notion that creatures must always be discussed as created by, and never apart from, their direct relation with their creator,⁴⁰ which in turn leads to another aspect of the relation. As has been said, God is more intimate to us than any thing else; God exists intimately in everything.⁴¹ God being “more intimate to things than anything else”⁴² implies that “relating is not so much a task as it is a surrender to the ‘facts of the matter,’ a letting-go of a posture of ‘existential autonomy’ (or separateness) to submit to the innate desire toward ‘the Good’ that spells our fulfillment.”⁴³

With this review of our perspective on the relation between God and the creation we are now in a position to address more directly our topic, natural evil and our

³⁷ Burrell, *Freedom and Creation in Three Traditions*, 2.

³⁸ Burrell, *Friendship and Ways to Truth*, 102.

³⁹ See the discussion of ‘goodness’ in Chapters 3, *supra*, 129, and 4, *supra*, 147; referring to Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 6, The Trinity, 1.32.1, ad.3; see also Burrell, “Creation and ‘Actualism’: The Dialectical Dimension of Philosophical Theology,” 89.

⁴⁰ Burrell, “Incarnation and Creation: The Hidden Dimension,” 213.

⁴¹ Burrell refers to this idea in a number of places, e.g., Burrell, *Freedom and Creation in Three Traditions*, 43; Burrell, *Faith and Freedom*, xxi; Burrell, “Aquinas’ Debt to Maimonides,” 73; Burrell, “From Analogy of ‘Being’ to the Analogy of Being,” 121; Burrell, “Creation, Will and Knowledge in Aquinas and Duns Scotus,” 178; Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action*, 40, referring to Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 2, EXISTENCE AND NATURE OF GOD, 1.8.1. See also Chapter 4, *supra*, 149.

⁴² Burrell, *Faith and Freedom*, xx-xxi.

⁴³ Burrell, *Deconstructing Theodicy*, 133.

response. As should be evident by now, our response is rooted in Burrell's retrieval of the traditional understanding of free creation, the notion of relation between God and God's creation, and its implications. The latter, as we have seen, is multi-faceted. Further, as we have seen, there is a need for response, not explanation.

Natural Evil – A Response

Let us consider the range of response from the common toward a much deeper response. We shall begin by examining a theological framework to provide a context for this deeper response and from this, using a philosophical theology, examine those resources and perspectives consonant with the tradition that can support us in contending with natural evil. As noted, Burrell observes that understanding serves us best when "at the service of life,"⁴⁴ there is the call for a response, for praxis, not a solution. While maintaining our approach to philosophical theology in our search for understanding, we have to turn more directly to the theological moment in a philosophical theology, a moment which was nonetheless present in the study from the beginning, theology as practice, a practice which is fundamental to our lives, to practical reason. As was said, there being no opposition in God between presence and actuation, we find from the perspective of philosophical theology, the notion of practical reason is appropriate. Burrell found it appropriate in his discussion of God creating, the notion of God as artisan.⁴⁵ This notion, used by Aquinas and derived from Maimonides,⁴⁶ carries with it the sense of intentionality and not merely speculation. God is present to the entire work

⁴⁴ Burrell, "Religious Life and Understanding," 678.

⁴⁵ See Chapter 4, *supra*, 160ff; Chapter 5, *supra*, 217ff. See also Burrell, "God, Religious Pluralism, and Dialogic Encounter," 199.

⁴⁶ Burrell, "Maimonides, Aquinas and Gersonides on Providence and Evil," 53.

of creation as an artisan is entirely present to his/her artistic work.

Let us consider more broadly, the posture within which such a response is made followed by a further examination of aspects of our relationship and its context. Lastly, let us consider an example of response at its deepest. From these we are enabled to then turn to a more philosophical moment but, as we have been endeavouring to do throughout this dissertation, to philosophy in service of theology, an exercise in Burrell's philosophical theology.

WORD, SOURCE, COMMUNITY – A FRAMEWORK⁴⁷

There is a particular practical theological structure used by Burrell that seems useful as a framework for living, a framework that is tradition oriented, and a way of locating our use of philosophy into our inquiries into theological issues. This ties into our understanding of creation and is highly relational, us to our God. As he has observed, our account of creation is derived from the community's appropriation of the revelation, the scriptures. For us, our appropriation of the revelation of creation, our 'doctrine of creation', simply asserts the utter dependence of everything on the creator. For Burrell, this appropriation comprises three components, the word, the source, and the community.⁴⁸ This is a context within which we can contend with natural evil and upon which we can hang the various resources available for believers, to help them 'go on'.

This framework, consisting of the interrelatedness of the notions of *word*, *source*, and *community*, is developed in *Freedom and Creation in Three Traditions* wherein

⁴⁷ Burrell, *Freedom and Creation in Three Traditions*, 161-184; particularly 161-168.

⁴⁸ Burrell, *Freedom and Creation in Three Traditions*, 161.

there is the *word* of revelation pointing to God, revealing the *source*, as the One who freely creates all-that-is; the *source* identified with God; and a *community* receiving, appropriating, and articulating this revelation in reflection and celebration.⁴⁹ These are together, an emphasis on any one can lead to a form of idolatry, “the God presented in each [*word*] is a God who reveals God’s own self [*source*], and yet that ‘revelation’ can only be appropriated ... within the *community*.”⁵⁰ In Burrell’s presentation the three notions are inextricably intertwined, one cannot sensibly discuss one of these without entailing both of the others.

WORD

As we have seen, the *word* comes first in our perspective. It should be noted that *word* is used analogously, it is not a statement about God nor a statement of God acting in ‘tensed’ time but rather an experience of God’s fidelity, God addressing us, God being present to us, and we being present to God.

As has been noted in our discussions of Job, God spoke to Job and this was linked to our understanding of creation.⁵¹ We have “God spake ...” (Gen. 1) giving us the creation, giving us *esse*. Further, we have the notion of Jesus, the Word of God made human, and “through Him all things were made,”⁵² “the very Word by which God creates the universe.”⁵³ This profession of faith has the *source*, that is, “the one from whom all-that-is freely emanates,”⁵⁴ revealing God’s self through the *Word*, our first understanding of something or someone beyond our selves. For us today, the *word* is

⁴⁹ Burrell, *Freedom and Creation in Three Traditions*, 161.

⁵⁰ Burrell, *Freedom and Creation in Three Traditions*, 162, emphasis added.

⁵¹ See *supra*, 128.

⁵² The second article of the Nicene Creed.

⁵³ Burrell, *Towards a Jewish-Christian-Muslim Theology*, 167.

⁵⁴ Burrell, *Freedom and Creation in Three Traditions*, 161.

chiefly given in the Scriptures, the revelatory text. Clearly, without the *word* we have no understanding of our faith; God reveals God's self through revelation, the *word*, yet as we shall see, that revealing needs a *community* to appropriate it, to be formed by it "which gives that *word* its efficacy by elucidating and celebrating it, thereby displaying its formative power."⁵⁵ Thus the *word* is addressed to us, it is personal. Burrell offers a caution: because the 'revelation' given in each case is delivered in words there is the tendency to make the *word* central, a tendency to idolatry of the word, a tendency to fundamentalism, forgetting the *source* or substituting the *word* for the *source*, the "source of all-that-is."⁵⁶

The *word* is revelatory in at least three modes. For Christians Jesus is the Word who was with God in the beginning and is God (John 1:1) from whom we get glimpses of God through the life of the Christ. However, this understanding of God is given to us today in the gospels. Thus we have the text as *word* revealing the *source*, God. Yet, the revelation is the text as received by the *community*, i.e., the *word* received by the community; again the three elements are intertwined. The third way we receive the *word* is through study, reflection, and liturgy;⁵⁷ we can 'hear' God speaking to us; and such appropriation creates "a viable margin of reason, a strategic point of intersection of faith and reason, where inquirers can stand to affirm what they apprehend."⁵⁸ Again, as we have seen in Job, the *word* addresses us personally, God does speak to us.

⁵⁵ Burrell, *Freedom and Creation in Three Traditions*, 163, emphasis added.

⁵⁶ Burrell, *Freedom and Creation in Three Traditions*, 162.

⁵⁷ Burrell, *Freedom and Creation in Three Traditions*, 161ff.

⁵⁸ Burrell, *Freedom and Creation in Three Traditions*, 165, 172.

SOURCE

Clearly, our understanding of the *source* is dependent upon revelation, the *word*. We have the roots of the *source* in Judaism: “Hear O Israel, God your God is one”, and in Christianity: “in one God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth” and made accessible through Jesus, Emmanuel, which means ‘God is with us’, and in “one Lord Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father.”⁵⁹ We “cannot speak of the revelatory *word* or *community* without acknowledging their *source*.”⁶⁰ This dissertation is itself focussed on the *source*, God.

It is appropriate that we should expect that that revelation will show something of what that *source*, God, is like. For Burrell, the “interaction of *source*, revealing *word*, and liberating *community*” tells us “something proper to the God” we worship.⁶¹ And yet, there is a great unknowing on our part and we must respect the distinction of God and the creation: “an intellectual ‘distinction’ which is not strictly speaking *conceptual* – that is, cannot be formulated as a division in the world.”⁶² As we have also seen, this understanding of *source* as creator has strong implications of the notion of relation; as already discussed, we are creatures related to the source of all-that-is from whom we derive our existence from that free act; as Burrell observes, “the ‘bestowal of existing’ can hardly be an impersonal act.”⁶³ This sense of God as free creator, creating out of love and enlivening us, should help provide us with a basis to stand, even under great difficulty.

⁵⁹ Burrell, *Freedom and Creation in Three Traditions*, 161-162.

⁶⁰ Burrell, *Freedom and Creation in Three Traditions*, 163.

⁶¹ Burrell, *Freedom and Creation in Three Traditions*, 183.

⁶² Burrell, *Freedom and Creation in Three Traditions*, 165, emphasis in original.

⁶³ Burrell, *Freedom and Creation in Three Traditions*, 164.

COMMUNITY

An accepting *community* is the nexus where these ideas come together. As Burrell states, "So the order from our side is: without community no word can be heard to lead us to a creator of all."⁶⁴ Further, "we would not rise to the notion of a free creator of the universe without that same creator's free revelation, and 'revelation' requires a response, there could be none such without a receptive and responding community."⁶⁵ This places a strong emphasis on *community* and within community, on friendship. "We can only learn how to be friends with God from those who have learned already, and it turns out that they have learned from others as well."⁶⁶ Underlying the support of inquiry, of learning, is a *community* based upon trust.⁶⁷ After all, as our faith is based on trust, so our life should be based on trust.⁶⁸ While Jesus is the Word, it is as reflected in texts that revelation is transmitted to subsequent generations through *community*. And for Burrell, "texts require communities, as community requires a texture of friendships."⁶⁹

For Burrell, the receiving of a 'revelation' is linked to those receiving it to attune themselves to it, "to the Creator's original purposes," and such an attunement is exhibited in the community formed by it, "a community of faithful whose efforts over time give an appropriate cultural form to the response called for by the divine initiative on their behalf." Such a *community* is the crucible in which the young and old members

⁶⁴ Burrell, *Freedom and Creation in Three Traditions*, 163.

⁶⁵ Burrell, *Freedom and Creation in Three Traditions*, 163.

⁶⁶ Burrell, *Friendship and Ways to Truth*, 58.

⁶⁷ Burrell, "Autonomous Reason versus Tradition-Directed Inquiry: Mulla Sadra, Lonergan, MacIntyre, and Taylor," 34.

⁶⁸ Burrell, *Towards a Jewish-Christian-Muslim Theology*, 65.

⁶⁹ Burrell, "Religious Experience and Religious Truth," 191.

are educated, formed, and respond to the One who called them.⁷⁰ It is clear from reading Burrell's oeuvre that the notion of *community* rooted in the tradition is vital in his life, as a lifelong student, as a religious, as a teacher and leader in a university and seminary, and as a friend, yet open and not constrained, constantly seeking understanding.⁷¹

As is evident, this structure is clearly Trinitarian, "the trinitarian structure of God's saving action".⁷² Jesus as the *word*, God the Father as *source*, and the Holy Spirit enlivening the *community*. We have referred to the notion of God creating "on account of the *love* of God's own goodness,"⁷³ and that God made all things as a "*procession* of love," a Trinitarian structure, which is reflected in "the threefold pattern of transcendent source, revealing word (wisdom), and nourishing community (love);" again "reflected in the communal and personal patterns of accepting and responding to that God's call."⁷⁴ As Burrell observes, this threefold pattern of *word*, *source*, and *community*, is necessary to counter an "inevitable march to alienation (where the transcendent source overcomes all created initiative), fundamentalism (when the word is read univocally and used as a club), and chauvinism (where this group and its interests eclipse all others)."⁷⁵

In summary, as a theological framework for living,

It is precisely the vitality of these texts in the communities which they shape, and which form people to be nourished by them, that contributes to their extraordinary power. There is an operative mutual inclusion of *word* in *community* which participants in the community would quite naturally overlook because they take it for granted. The *word* is in fact revealing because it lives in a *community* of worship and of human interaction which it animates. Likewise, the *word* itself refers to its divine *source* and is constantly employed in returning thanks to that *source* for

⁷⁰ Burrell, *Freedom and Creation in Three Traditions*, 164.

⁷¹ See, e.g., Burrell, *Friendship and Ways to Truth*; Burrell, *Questing for Understanding*.

⁷² Burrell, *Freedom and Creation in Three Traditions*, 183.

⁷³ See the discussion of 'goodness' in Chapters 3, *supra*, 129, and 4, *supra*, 147; referring to Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 6, The Trinity, 1.32.1, ad.3; see also Burrell, "Creation and 'Actualism': The Dialectical Dimension of Philosophical Theology," 89.

⁷⁴ Burrell, *Freedom and Creation in Three Traditions*, 166-167.

⁷⁵ Burrell, *Freedom and Creation in Three Traditions*, 167.

granting humankind this access to the life and work of God. “Revelation”, in short, requires such a threefold structure to be what it claims to be.⁷⁶

RESOURCES

Arising from the forgoing framework and from a perspective of philosophical theology there are particular resources to help us, both in helping others and for ourselves as sufferers. Such resources are rooted in the relation between creation and its creator discussed earlier and within the theological framework just discussed.

Burrell, from a perspective of faith that informs his philosophical theology, places a strong emphasis on the notion of the relation between the creature and Creator as a way of helping one ‘go on’ in spite of suffering. Directly related to the framework there are three practical resources worthy of our attention, some of which have already been discussed to a degree: *friendship* which can sustain us under difficulties, friendship both with God and others; *trust* which provides a basis for friendship both with ourselves and others, and particularly with God; and our *dialogue* with our Creator. All these are rooted in our understanding of our relation with our creator. I would note that these resources are linked to the framework discussed earlier, word, source, and community, but in inverse order. We have noted the need for attention to the theological moment inviting us to think differently, a way of expanding the philosophical moment. This now brings us back to philosophical moment, expanded by the previous theological moment of word, source, community, of Burrell’s philosophical theology. These resources are helpful as expansions in a practical mode of philosophical categories.

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Burrell, *Freedom and Creation in Three Traditions*, 172, some emphasis added.

FRIENDSHIP

Let us turn to an aspect of the relation of God with creation, in particular with “rational creatures especially,” that of friendship. As Burrell observes, we can be friends with God and, even more striking, God is friends with us, the notion of a transforming friendship or love drawing us out of ourselves. We have encountered this notion briefly earlier⁷⁷ in a discussion of God’s acting in the world, particularly that of loving, referring to “I do not call you servants any longer, ... I have called you friends.” (John 15:15) In Christianity we have God revealed in human form along with the call to be ‘friends of God’.⁷⁸ This is a grace granted by the “God who bridges what Aristotle deemed to be an unbridgeable divide in offering us divine friendship in Jesus.”⁷⁹ Citing Hauerwas, a colleague,⁸⁰ Burrell notes that friendship needs a history, a common memory – developed through revelation: We are enabled to become ‘friends of God’ “only through that mysterious elevation of mind and heart called ‘grace’,” a consequence of “our relating with God and to others who also share friendship with God,”⁸¹ and, citing Hauerwas, “to have our lives bounded by God’s love.”⁸²

The notion of God being friends with us stems from creation. Burrell states that from a perspective he considers inherent in Aquinas, “it is the same God who redeems as creates, and who creates us ‘from the beginning’ with a view to friendship. And this means that the very openness of our natures to such an unimaginable end becomes part

⁷⁷ Chapter 4, *supra*, 175ff.

⁷⁸ Burrell, *Freedom and Creation in Three Traditions*, 138-139.

⁷⁹ Burrell, "Religious Experience and Religious Truth," 190.

⁸⁰ Burrell is referring to a paper “Friendship: An Exercise in Theological Understanding” given by Stanley Hauerwas at a colloquium.

⁸¹ Burrell, "Religious Experience and Religious Truth," 192-193.

⁸² Burrell, *Towards a Jewish-Christian-Muslim Theology*, 193.

of what defines us as human beings.”⁸³ The roots in Aquinas, while strongly toward humans being friends with God, does have the notion: “Man then cannot rise from sin except by grace, whereby friendship is established between God and man” and “friendship resting on a certain equality, persons very unequal cannot be conjoined in friendship. To promote familiar friendship then between man and God, it was expedient that God should become man, ‘that while we know God in visible form, we may thereby be borne on to the love of His invisible perfections’”⁸⁴

Burrell proposes, contrary to Aristotle, that there *is* friendship with God and such friendship “suggests ... interpersonal union.” This degree of intimacy comes from the notion of the friend as another self, “present to me as I am to myself” and we are subjects, rather than objects, “more present to Him than they can ever be to themselves;” not only is the creature “created capable of responding but that he is present to God *as* another subject, an eventual partner in a dialogue ... where the dialogue is initiated and eternally constituted by a specific divine intention towards this creature after His own image.” While God is always present to us we only sense this intermittently to the extent that we can, given our human frailty. Yet, “The essence of this union, the ground of the dialogue we must live out, is the presence of the person to God, where he is loved with an eternal love.”⁸⁵ This *is* God with us. And this sense of God’s love for us can lead to exclaim with St. Paul, “For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ

⁸³ Burrell and Malits, *Original Peace: Restoring God's Creation*, 58.

⁸⁴ Aquinas, "Summa contra Gentiles (Tractatus de fide catholica, contra Gentiles [contra errores infidelium])", Book III, CLVIII and Book IV, LIV, 5.

⁸⁵ David B. Burrell, "Indwelling: Presence and Dialogue," *Theological Studies* 22, (1961), 15-17.

Jesus our Lord.” (Rom. 8:38-39)

A sharing of friendship is also a way to understanding, ‘learning how’ more than ‘learning that’ in community wherein being friends with friends of God helps develop a life, a way of being which can “result in the understanding of community and of tradition.”⁸⁶ This places a strong emphasis on community and within community, on friendship. This gives us a strong sense of community, where we are formed within a web of relationships with our friends, all “bound together by their shared faith in a communal goal.”⁸⁷ This links directly to the framework discussed earlier. As was discussed as part of the community⁸⁸ a ‘community of inquirers’ is based upon reasoning dependent upon trust, “for reasoning has always required more than reason itself. So inquiry will always require a community, yet what can transform a group into a community but trust?”⁸⁹

Such a friendship can provide support both in dealing with others as sufferers as well as support for oneself. This has echoes of the context discussed earlier, particularly in the notion of the community in which we live.

TRUST

However, as noted, underlying the notion of friendship is that of trust without which we could never start anything.⁹⁰ Trust, a reliance on the truth or fidelity of someone or something else, seemingly counter-cultural today, particularly given the culture of post-modernism with its suspicions, as is hope. “Hope, when it does emerge,

⁸⁶ Burrell, *Towards a Jewish-Christian-Muslim Theology*, 193.

⁸⁷ Burrell, "Religious Experience and Religious Truth," 186.

⁸⁸ *Supra*, 250.

⁸⁹ David B. Burrell, "Autonomous Reason Versus Tradition-Directed Inquiry: Mulla Sadra, Lonergan, Macintyre, and Taylor," *Lonergan Workshop 2008* 21, (2008), 34.

⁹⁰ Burrell, *Learning to Trust in Freedom*, xv.

does so from the ashes of optimism – so trust can surface only when naive confidence can no longer be sustained.”⁹¹ Yet, as we have seen, our trusting in divine providence ties us “intimately with our existential ties to a free creator.”⁹² In an important sense, trust is where our act of understanding of God’s free and intentional creating is transposed to a practical mode of understanding, not merely rational speculation.

Burrell cites Hauerwas who insisted that friendship entails vulnerability to the other, a posture which implies opening oneself to the other, in a sense, placing oneself in the hands of an other, a trust in the other.⁹³ Further, in friendship God, analogously, is vulnerable in that God takes the risk that God’s kingdom on earth depends on our faithfulness. This notion of trust entails that “there must be something (or someone) more in which (or in whom) we may put our trust, if the interpersonal friendship is to develop into what it promises. Here is where life pushes us beyond calculation to trust, beyond reason to faith. Yet that step beyond, as we have seen, is precisely what the logic of love demands of us.”⁹⁴ Such a posture gives the response to the “skeptical query: how can we trust in God?” by eliciting “what else can we trust in?”⁹⁵ – a link to our source. For us, faith is rooted in trust and so needs be expressed in a life of trust,⁹⁶ a way to ‘go on’.

TALKING TO GOD

In our own suffering, while God is God and we are creatures, God’s love for

⁹¹ Burrell, *Learning to Trust in Freedom*, 22.

⁹² Burrell, *Towards a Jewish-Christian-Muslim Theology*, 64.

⁹³ Burrell, *Friendship and Ways to Truth*, 51, citing Stanley Hauerwas from a paper given at a colloquium.

⁹⁴ Burrell, *Friendship and Ways to Truth*, 21.

⁹⁵ Burrell, "Autonomous Reason versus Tradition-Directed Inquiry: Mulla Sadra, Lonergan, MacIntyre, and Taylor," 34.

⁹⁶ Burrell, *Towards a Jewish-Christian-Muslim Theology*, 65

creation implies another aspect of relationship: we can talk to God. As we saw earlier,⁹⁷ there is the notion of God speaking as a mark of the relation with the creation: “And God said, ... And it was so,”⁹⁸ giving us the gift of existence itself. And the notion of God speaking is found throughout the Bible, and frequently to individuals, e.g., the prophets. As has been observed, a good example is Job. God heard his complaints and even more striking, God talked to Job,⁹⁹ a problem for philosophy but not for philosophical theology.

God speaking to individuals is a very intimate relation and is personal. The nature of the creator-creature relationship goes beyond our doctrinal statements such as offered by Job’s ‘friends’; it is personal and based on trust on our part.¹⁰⁰ The very nature of the dialogue reminds us that:

a keen sense of the uniqueness of the One about whom one is attempting to speak, or to whom one is daring to address oneself, will doubtless help to eliminate much nonsense of the ‘why is God doing this to me?’ variety. For while the ‘why’ makes eminent sense as a plea or even a complaint, it does not as a request for an explanation. For the action of a creator God simply will not fit into anticipated explanatory frames, any more than the activity of creating can be parsed as a process.¹⁰¹

As Burrell states “speaking to someone can engage both in a relationship of exchange open to yet other forms of understanding.”¹⁰² We have prayer and liturgy and this includes ‘hearing what God is saying’ through revelation, the word. Those steeped in liturgy and community are well aware of this; God does speak to us and we can “dare to enter into this founding relation with our creator who gives each of us our very being,

⁹⁷ Chapter 3, *supra*, 128.

⁹⁸ A reiterated theme in Genesis 1.

⁹⁹ Burrell, *Deconstructing Theodicy*, 115; see also Chapt 3, *supra*, 128ff.

¹⁰⁰ Burrell, *Learning to Trust in Freedom*, 19-30.

¹⁰¹ Burrell, *Deconstructing Theodicy*, 121-122.

¹⁰² Burrell, *Deconstructing Theodicy*, 124.

and should we do so, the personal boundlessness of that relation will allow us to ‘go on’,”¹⁰³ even under great difficulties.

In summary, we have friendship, trust and dialogue, all God oriented, as resources to help us. Friendship provides a supportive environment which can help us in our confrontation with natural evil. This in turn is bolstered by our trust in God, the God who desires that we be and is intimately with us in our trials. We find that we are not alone, we can talk to God and God *does* speak to us. What we have to do is be aware of our relationship with our creator and, through grace, be attuned to it. We can “dare to enter into this founding relation with our creator who gives each of us our very being, and should we do so, the personal boundlessness of that relation will allow us to ‘go on’.”¹⁰⁴

Presence

However, there is an aspect of the fundamental relation between us and God that is of great importance to us and particularly for the argument of this dissertation, in essence, the basis of my thesis. As we have seen from our reflections on the two previous moments creation is intentional, God desires that we be. Burrell has implied throughout his oeuvre, and for example in his discussion of Job, the act of creation establishes not only the complete otherness of God, but also establishes the creatures’ intimate relationship to him, the foundational relationship found in Job, that allows one to be present to the transcendent, holy, and incomprehensible God in all circumstances.

¹⁰³ Burrell, *Deconstructing Theodicy*, 110.

¹⁰⁴ Burrell, *Deconstructing Theodicy*, 110.

Even though totally unequal, Job speaks to God and God speaks to Job.¹⁰⁵ A paradox? the utter otherness of God and yet the intimacy between God and creatures? Yes.

As has been said, God is more intimate to us than any thing else;¹⁰⁶ God exists intimately in everything just as an artisan is present to what the artisan created, yet even more so.¹⁰⁷ We ourselves at best can only be present to the sufferings of others as observers; we are not within them as God is. However, God is no observer; rather, God “is in us making us to be” and hence God “is with us in our suffering as nothing else is.”¹⁰⁸ God being with us, we are invited to ‘see’ a presence where there appears to be absence, particularly in the midst of suffering.¹⁰⁹ God does speak to us and, as said earlier, we can “dare to enter into this founding relation with our creator who gives each of us our very being, and should we do so, the personal boundlessness of that relation will allow us to ‘go on’,”¹¹⁰ even under great difficulties. God being “more intimate to things than anything else”¹¹¹ implies that “relating is not so much a task as it is a surrender to the ‘facts of the matter,’ a letting-go of a posture of ‘existential autonomy’ (or separateness) to submit to the innate desire toward ‘the Good’ that spells our fulfillment.”¹¹²

¹⁰⁵ Burrell, *Deconstructing Theodicy*, e.g., 31, 48-49.

¹⁰⁶ *Supra*, 248ff. See also Chapter 4, *supra*, 149ff. See also Burrell, *Faith and Freedom*, xx-xxi.

¹⁰⁷ Burrell refers to this idea in a number of places, e.g., Burrell, *Freedom and Creation in Three Traditions*, 43; Burrell, *Faith and Freedom*, xxi; Burrell, "Aquinas' Debt to Maimonides," 73; Burrell, "From Analogy of 'Being' to the Analogy of Being," 121; Burrell, "Creation, Will and Knowledge in Aquinas and Duns Scotus," 178; Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action*, 40, referring to Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 2, EXISTENCE AND NATURE OF GOD, 1.8.1. See also Chapter 4, *supra*, 149ff.

¹⁰⁸ Davies, *The Reality of God and the Problem of Evil*, 168.

¹⁰⁹ This is a relationship in contrast to, for example, the free-will defence which could appear to place Creator and creature in competitive positions; see Burrell, "Creatio ex Nihilo Recovered," 18ff.

¹¹⁰ Burrell, *Deconstructing Theodicy*, 109-110.

¹¹¹ Burrell, *Faith and Freedom*, xx-xxi.

¹¹² Burrell, *Deconstructing Theodicy*, 133.

Hence, this notion of intimacy may also be understood as presence, God's presence to us and our presence to God, an imagery strengthening and giving a personal aspect to intimacy. From the developed context of the framework for a response we can see that this experience of abiding presence, as Burrell has so articulately shown (in his life, in the lives of his friends, and in the testimonies of Christian lives) is mediated through relationships of friendships, communities, and a tradition that sustains our confidence in the giftedness of existence. We cannot conceive of this intimacy as merely an intellectual understanding of God's presence to all of creation, it is existential,¹¹³ "whatever is, is so in its being present to its creator."¹¹⁴ Burrell pursues this notion from a Trinitarian perspective in an early paper: "Indwelling: Presence and Dialogue," a paper rooted in "the truth of God's personal love for contingent creatures."¹¹⁵ This perspective is part of the theological basis of Burrell's philosophical theology: "the indwelling is an intentional, intersubjective union, ... it terminates an eternal mission of the Trinity Itself, ... since the union is one of Creator with creature."¹¹⁶ As he observes:

The very essence of the indwelling is the presence of the person *to* God from all eternity. ... The import of this first principle turns on the way God knows. Whoever admits that all things are present to Him in the single grasp He has of Himself, and then realizes that He can never be an object to Himself, already possesses the key. For God does not know creatures as objects. They are rather present to Him, present in their lucid subjectivity in the simple act whereby He is present to Himself, present, needless to say, as subject. Creatures are present, it is true, as other, as distinct from Him, but this does not make them objects. Rather, even this "otherness" is transparent to God, who projects them as other, to be other. Two conclusions follow immediately. From the very structure of God's knowledge, we are closer, more transparent, finally more supple to Him than we are to ourselves — be it as creatures or as adopted sons. And furthermore, since it is this personal presence to God which, willed, gives us existence, there is

¹¹³ Burrell, "Indwelling: Presence and Dialogue," 16.

¹¹⁴ Burrell, *Freedom and Creation in Three Traditions*, 110, referring to Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 4, KNOWLEDGE IN GOD, 1.14.13.

¹¹⁵ Burrell, "Indwelling: Presence and Dialogue," 8.

¹¹⁶ Burrell, "Indwelling: Presence and Dialogue," 2.

no opposition in God between presence and actuation.¹¹⁷

Let me reiterate, God is more intimate to us than any thing else; God exists intimately in everything. Furthermore, “identifying the existence of the creature as ‘a relation to the creator,’ and hence as ‘what is more intimately and profoundly interior to things than anything else, including what makes each thing to be what it is (its essence),”¹¹⁸ is fundamental in our understanding of the ‘relation’.¹¹⁹ Burrell highlights the notion of presence by referring to Erik Persson, *Sacra doctrina: Reason and Revelation in Aquinas* of which he notes that Persson, by stressing “the primacy of *existing* in Aquinas’ account of creation,” links the relation between God and creation with “the unprecedented presence of the triune God in Christ to all of creation.”¹²⁰

As a reviewer noted, “Burrell suggests that God offers presence, not answers; God creates and creates anew, before, during, and beyond our suffering, in ultimately gift giving ways.”¹²¹ This *is* the gift of existence. Burrell cites Marilyn McCord Adams’ *Horrendous Evils* to the effect that acknowledging the *sui generis* nature of relation between us and our creator, the incommensurable good, helps us appropriate the relation such that “it is overall incommensurably good *for the participant*.”¹²²

This understanding of God’s presence to the world leads us to recall our discussion of providence¹²³ where nature, the universe, reveals something of God, the

¹¹⁷ Burrell, “Indwelling: Presence and Dialogue,” 6-7.

¹¹⁸ As *esse*, i.e., to exist, not essence as substance.

¹¹⁹ Burrell, “Creation and ‘Actualism’: The Dialectical Dimension of Philosophical Theology,” 87.

¹²⁰ Burrell, “Creatio ex Nihilo Recovered,” 17. He refers to Per Erik Persson, *Sacra doctrina: Reason and Revelation in Aquinas* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press/Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1970).

¹²¹ Amy Carr, Reviews, *Dialogue: A Journal of Theology*, Vol. 50, No. 3, Fall 2011, 309.

¹²² Burrell, *Deconstructing Theodicy*, 108, referring to Marilyn McCord Adams, *Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God* (Ithica, NY; London, UK.: Cornell University Press, 1999), 155, emphasis in the original.

¹²³ Chapter 4, *supra*, 165ff.

very gratuity of that universe originating with “the free Creator, without whose self-revelation we could never have suspected ourselves to be so graced.”¹²⁴ This leads to a world-view of God’s presence to a grace filled creation: “Avowing that the origin of the universe is free means, of course, that it is an utterly gratuitous act of God, a grace. And that means that the origin of the universe has to be personal, with the resulting emanation totally undeserved, revelatory of a ‘good and gracious God.’”¹²⁵ As noted earlier,¹²⁶ among the virtues of his approach is how Tilley’s understanding (and that of Elizabeth Johnson) adverts to an intelligibility of the profusion and variety of life in the order of cosmos while framing this intelligibility within a wider and more fundamental comprehension of our awareness of a grace-filled creation. Creation *is* good.

Transformation

At a deeper level, using these resources, Ricœur alludes to a fourth way, referring to those who can renounce all complaints against evil; they go beyond it.¹²⁷ This, to my thinking, is analogous to the development of a deeper perspective in those who have come through great suffering. From our examination of Job we have the intimation that this perspective comes after having struggled with evil, not as a premise to a ‘why evil?’ question. Arguing in a mode of a philosophical theology we find this perspective does not begin with: “If God is Good, if creation is good, why evil?” The ‘if statement’ distorts the experience. Rather, this is a form of Christian existentialism; it becomes fundamental to who they/we are.

¹²⁴ Burrell, "God, Religious Pluralism, and Dialogic Encounter," 209.

¹²⁵ David B. Burrell, "Creation as Original Grace," in *God, Grace, and Creation*, ed. Philip J. Rossi, The Annual Publication of the College Theology Society (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2009), 99.

¹²⁶ Chapter 1, *supra*, 46.

¹²⁷ Ricœur, "Evil, a Challenge to Philosophy and Theology," 260-261.

Burrell offers a salient example in a number of publications.¹²⁸ In discussions of faith, he references a Jew, Etty Hillesum (1914-1943, *d.* at Auschwitz), as an exemplar of holding firm under extreme stress and going well beyond her current situation. I should note that while she suffered under what is termed moral evil (although administered bureaucratically and hence, in a sense, a form of systemic evil), from the perspective of the sufferer, suffering is suffering; at this level there is no calculus of suffering. Hillesum's diary, written both in Amsterdam and in Westerbork, a holding area in the Netherlands, shows a developing faith and a remarkable serenity in the midst of the horror of the Holocaust, "a victim of genocide yet the contributor of a vision that carries us well beyond 'victimhood'."¹²⁹ As Burrell cites, in her reference to her psychological guide: "You taught me to speak the name of God without embarrassment. You were the mediator ... and now ... my path leads straight to God. ... And I shall be the mediator for any other soul I can reach."¹³⁰ Her understanding of her situation was quite clear: "What is at stake is our impending destruction and annihilation."¹³¹ Yet as a response, she said in what is in essence a prayer:

Dear God, these are anxious times ... but one thing is becoming increasingly clear to me: That you cannot help us, that we must help you to help ourselves ... Alas there doesn't seem to be much You Yourself can do about our circumstances, our lives. Neither do I hold You responsible. You cannot help us but we must help You and defend your dwelling place inside us to the last.¹³²

¹²⁸ Burrell, "Assessing Statements of Faith: Augustine and Etty Hillesum," originally written in 1989; Burrell, "Religious Experience and Religious Truth; Burrell, *Friendship and Ways to Truth*; Burrell, *Learning to Trust in Freedom*; Burrell, *Towards a Jewish-Christian-Muslim Theology*.

¹²⁹ Burrell, "Assessing Statements of Faith: Augustine and Etty Hillesum," 245.

¹³⁰ Burrell, "Assessing Statements of Faith: Augustine and Etty Hillesum," 250.

¹³¹ Burrell, *Learning to Trust in Freedom*, 51.

¹³² Burrell, "Religious Experience and Religious Truth," 199; Burrell, *Friendship and Ways to Truth*, 51; Burrell, "Assessing Statements of Faith: Augustine and Etty Hillesum," 251; Burrell, *Learning to Trust in Freedom*, 52.

This response to her situation is well beyond stoicism and well beyond victimhood. It adverts to the reality and horror of the situation yet with a sense of trust and deep faith in the goodness of God. This goes considerably beyond Ricœur's third stage.¹³³

Burrell refers to Hillesum – a person under extreme stress and suffering, both herself and those with her – as an example of 'going on'. Her responses are remarkable: in the midst of this misery she writes "time and again it soars straight from my heart – I can't help it, that's just the way it is, like some elementary force – the feeling that life is glorious and magnificent,"¹³⁴ and "yet I don't think life is meaningless. And God is not accountable to us for the senseless harm we cause one another. We are accountable to Him! I have already died a thousand deaths in a thousand concentration camps. ... And yet I find life beautiful and meaningful. From minute to minute."¹³⁵ As Burrell observes, the diaries project a conviction, shared by both Jews and Christians alike, that life itself as well as the universe is a gift. He cites Hillesum, "It still all comes down to the same thing: life is beautiful. And I believe in God – right in the thick of what people call 'horror'."¹³⁶ This is a remarkable transforming of the suffering of evil into something essentially good; creation is good.

As we ourselves have recited:

All of us go down to the dust;
yet even at the grave we make our song:
Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia.¹³⁷

¹³³ See *supra*, 243; also Ricœur, "Evil, a Challenge to Philosophy and Theology," 260.

¹³⁴ E.g., Burrell, "Assessing Statements of Faith: Augustine and Etty Hillesum," 250. In here he cites Etty Hillesum, *An Interrupted Life and Letters From Westerbork* (New York, NY: Henry Holt, 1996), 247.

¹³⁵ E.g., Burrell, "Assessing Statements of Faith: Augustine and Etty Hillesum," 251. In here he cites Hillesum, *An Interrupted Life and Letters From Westerbork*, 157.

¹³⁶ Burrell, "Assessing Statements of Faith: Augustine and Etty Hillesum," 252.

¹³⁷ *The Book of Alternative Services*, "Funeral Liturgy The Commendation," 586, 595.

Burrell cites an interview with Rowan Williams:

I believe that creation is a good thing because of that long-term purpose which is the sharing of fellowship with God, the gift of divine life and the divine nature to creatures. But to say that creation is good overall, I think, can't commit us to adding, all that happens must be for the best. Not only is that often not true; even when we can make the best of a bad situation, that doesn't mean that it had to happen or that it was good that it happened. I look here to those who have written out of very dark places of the modern experience. ... [using the example of people writing from imprisonment and death in German concentration camps] what I understand them to be saying is not, Well, it's all OK, there's a reason for my being here, but rather, Here is something which for all its utter unqualified horror, I can by God's grace give a future to, open up to God. And in that sense, I think, the Christian looking back over a life containing suffering and tragedy and trauma can say that it has all been drawn together by grace, rather than that it's all vindicated or justified.¹³⁸

This is a way to 'go on'; this is a way within a horizon of hope to carry forward the question of natural evil.

¹³⁸

Burrell, *Deconstructing Theodicy*, 117, citing Rowan Williams in Rupert Shortt, "Belief and Theology: Some Core Questions," in *God's Advocates: Christian Thinkers in Conversation* (London, UK: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2005), 12-13.

CONCLUSION

What can we conclude from the foregoing? The question of natural evil needs to be reframed. I would suggest two main things. Firstly, the *question* of natural evil, as commonly expressed, is a non-question. Posing it exposes a fundamental misconception in our presuppositions about the God we worship. There is NO explanation for natural evil. I have contended that the *problem* of natural evil does not exist; it is a mistaken human construct confusing God and creatures. However, the *fact* of natural evil remains; there remains the harsh raw suffering resulting from some of these events; evil is not something to be endured stoically, it provokes outrage; and it continues to raise questions for understanding. Therefore, secondly, although natural evil does occur, what is called for is a response, not explanation, and a response on many levels. The *challenge* of natural evil is not so much to seek explanation but to understand and, more importantly, to respond. I suggest that the response is at an existential level, my very existence is gift and God in giving existence to things is more intimate to me than any thing else, God *is* with me, God enables me to 'go on'. Let me now elaborate on these, on what we have discovered.

My thesis, argued in this dissertation and based on a reading of David Burrell, is that Burrell's refined understanding of creation and existence provides a way of advancing the question and exploration of natural evil, principally in the way he conceives of creation as relation and how his notion of relation bears on our understanding of the goodness of God as creator and the goodness of the universe as creation.

Further, based on David Burrell, this dissertation is an essay in the mode of a philosophical theology. It presumes faith and uses philosophical tools and perspectives in order to help us understand the questions that faith gives rise to, to help us understand, to the extent possible, what it is we profess faith in, what we believe about the God we worship. Burrell's perspective is one which he defines as philosophical theology, i.e., an acknowledgement that one is indeed doing *theology* although in the course of philosophical inquiry wherein revelation guides how one uses philosophical tools as the basis for examining the traditional considerations of God and aspects of God's creation, all of which gives us a broad perspective on God. Burrell's approach to philosophical theology, one rooted in revelation yet one which expands the categories of thought, invites us to examine how his reflections on creation retrieve critical features in our understanding of the relationship between God as creator and the world, the universe, as created. This relationship and, particularly its implications, form the basis of this dissertation.

We began our consideration of natural evil by examining some aspects of the question of natural evil. We examined aspects of the question from the ancients to the modern day and found that evil is not a single problem but part of various issues. From this we examined the notion of theodicy, an attempt at explaining evil, particularly attempts at vindication of God in view of natural evil. We examined various approaches as to their adequacy and found them all lacking in some way or other. The primary argument against theodicy is that it treats evil as an abstraction ignoring its harsh facticity and treating the reality of evils as evidence against 'the God-hypothesis', as if it were a hypothesis subject to verification or falsification. The literature indicates an

impasse. There is a need for new ways of looking at the problem of natural evil, a way of framing the question of natural evil differently. One such approach is that of the consideration of the notion of creativity and we have examined this notion, particularly in the writings of some modern theologians, those with a strong scientific bent. We have also seen that creativity is a notion, which, it appears, can be compatible with some contemporary retrievals of Thomism. This dissertation has followed David Burrell, in a mode of philosophical theology, in his contemporary retrieval of Thomism, in particular his notion of creation which maintains continuity with the neo-Thomist tradition, and one which opens a new and promising way to engage with the finding of modern science. I have tried to advance and develop its implications by drawing on Burrell's reflections on God as creator and God's creation and their import for addressing our question. From this, I have attempted to show that for our age, one can affirm the goodness of God and the goodness of creation amid the challenges to such belief.

We began our reading of Burrell by turning to his understanding of God and God's creation stressing the distinction between them. We explored the metaphysical thinking underlying this understanding. In particular we retrieved the notion of existence and essence: in God – one, in us – separable. God's essence is God's existence; God's to be is to-be. As we found, the notion of existence implies every creature exists only by participating in the inexhaustible act of existing which is the creator. This helps assure that God does not create from necessity, creation is contingent, it is a gift. This is the notion of 'free creation', God's acting in the universe, participation and order. This is in contradistinction to those who, implicitly, conceive of God as in some manner comparable to the universe and end up with a god that is 'the

biggest thing around’¹ in contrast to the God who created freely; the universe need not have been, it is purely gift. Further, this understanding anchors the distinction, i.e., God is God and we are creatures. From this perspective, creation is that which defines how we are to understand God, the world, the relationship between the world and God, and thus, the way we discuss God as creator and the world as created.

From this we were able to consider creation more deeply, particularly creation as the relation between God and what God has created, among others, us. We explored this notion of creation as a relation, particularly as to the nature of the relation, we are related to God as our source and as our goal, but God is not related to us; at this level the relationship is one of non-reciprocal dependence. Yet we found that we can consider the relation as a personal relation. I would argue that the key in our understanding is this relationship; it is not a relation that implies the remoteness of God but rather one that stresses the intimacy of the relationship between God and what God has created. We also examined the question: why did God bother? and concluded that God creates out of God’s love of God’s goodness, sheer gift, it is intentional, God desires that we be.

From this foundational basis we then began to consider how we could talk of ‘the unknowable God. We examined what are called ‘formal features’ and what are known as the ‘perfections’ of God. In particular we paid attention to the notions of simpleness, which underlies all the others; goodness, which ties into the nature of the relationship; God’s existence in things, leading to a further discussion of the nature of the relationship; and eternity, as an attempt to counter our own tensed thinking and hence, part of our confusion in talking of God. We then considered an understanding of God’s acting in the world, considerations of knowing, providence, agency and God’s loving of

what God has created. Finally, we examined more deeply the notions of free creation and *creatio ex nihilo*, and an understanding of the intelligibility of the universe, the integrity of a world to be understood. All this was preparatory to our discussion of the root of the impasse in our talk of natural evil, to bring together some somewhat disparate elements into relationship with each other in order to construct the argument for my thesis.

My reasoning in selecting these aspects of the tradition ties into the basic contention that Burrell brings to the discussion, our need to think the question differently. Our current cultural perspectives privilege the kind of thinking that presumes ‘scientific’ thinking, that starts with the universe as the ground for looking at the world, and hence a presumption (usually unexamined) in our discussions on these matters. As I have noted earlier, underlying a rather ordinary, even innocent, distinction, that of God and the world, is a tacit presumption of the two in parallel and somehow in competition, yet the integrity of the ordering of the universe cannot be a prior limit to an understanding of God’s action. Burrell’s adoption of Sokolowski’s ‘distinction’, that of the utter transcendence of God, underlies his examination of creation and provides a different framework for examining the universe and natural evil within it. Hence this retrieval of the tradition.

As a final preparatory step in the argument we re-examined the use of language, particularly ‘language in divinis’ our way of talking about God. We explored the nature of analogy with Burrell as our guide, the language which we can use to discuss ‘the unknowable God’. For Burrell, the issue here is not our notions of world or of God, but how we speak about God and how such language draws on strategies such as analogy to

introduce correctives to habitual presuppositions, to enable us to ‘think differently’. We revisited the notion of ‘perfection’ in God and from this considered the notion of ‘creativity’ or ‘creativeness’ as a perfection in God, analogously to the other perfections, and conclude that, analogously, this was reasonable; this we did in response to the thrust in the literature examined at the beginning.

An important discussion was that of participation in the perfections of God, a notion that stems from our understanding of creation, where “every creature has its own nature in so far as it participates in some way the likeness of the divine essence”¹ from which I concluded that things, creatures, not only ‘rational creatures especially’, have their own particular activities as a result of participating in being, their ‘is-ness’. Creativity is a God given feature of the created order. This allowed us to consider the notion of emergence, the profusion and variety of life in the order of the universe. The contention of some was that the notion of creativity could help explain natural evil.

In our examination of natural evil, however, we identified a deeper obstacle to explanation. The *problem* of natural evil lies in its specificity, its particularity. Which brings us back to one of Tilley's basic problems, one he argued against strongly, the issues raised by purely speculative efforts. All these discussions can themselves carry echoes of theodicy, that is, participation in not “merely an assertive discourse, but to declare that evils are mere abstractions to be dealt with only by theory. ... a practice that creates more evils than it explains.”² ‘Evil’ becomes a bloodless abstraction which ignores the harsh facticity and specificity of evil. The propositional approach, the

¹ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 4, KNOWLEDGE IN GOD, 1.15.2.

² Tilley, "The Problems of Theodicy: A Background Essay," 47.

scientific approach does not work.

Throughout this dissertation I have been speaking of the need to think the question of natural evil differently, a perspective based upon David Burrell's particular approach to philosophical theology with its rich resources. As Burrell has stated, the affirmation that the universe has been "freely created by a transcendent being ... carries with it the conviction that the world is intelligible while also suggesting that our conceptualities will be inadequate to its primal intelligibility."³ From the scientific side, reality is the objective of the desire to understand, our drive to deeper and deeper explanation. However, in our attempts at explanation we seem to be trying to understand being itself, existence, trying to use the tools for the 'what-ness' to understand the 'is-ness'. This latter, however as we have seen, is a metaphysical question, it is beyond physics, and from that perspective this endeavour is a blind alley. As Burrell has observed, it is his "contention that this ingression of scientific reason into the way we live our lives is an inversion of priorities, and gains its plausibility by pre-empting all critical powers to itself."⁴ From his perspective, "For Aquinas, the ability to ask questions which one *can* answer finds its source in the power to ask questions which cannot be answered. Or to put it another way, the drive to more and more comprehensive explanatory systems is rooted in the demand for a total explanation."⁵ This latter is the drive of scientific enquiry. Yet there are the limitations as to what constitutes a scientifically meaningful question. Hence the need for metaphysical statements which "tell us nothing *about* the intelligibility of the world;

³ Burrell, "Philosophy and religion," 122.

⁴ Burrell, "Religious Life and Understanding," 678.

⁵ Burrell, "Aquinas on Naming God," 203.

they simply state *that* it is intelligible. They cannot characterize the order of all things to a principle, but only affirm that *there is* such an order” and “contents itself with asserting the consequences of the affirmation that *there is* such a principle to which all things are ordered.”⁶ We have to go beyond our normal mode of questioning, our emphasis on the ‘what-ness’, an emphasis which should be the “penultimate rather than the final response to the original *elan* of the inquiry.”⁷ Thus, we need both perspectives, metaphysical and physical to help our understanding; neither is complete nor normative, and even taken together our understanding is incomplete; hence the desire to understand more.

However, it should be clear, because of the limitations to our understandings, we cannot, with any certainty, *explain* natural evil. As noted earlier, a fundamental question raised by an encounter with natural evil is ‘Why?’ or even ‘Why me?’, a seeking for an explanation. Yet, as we have seen, there is no explanation. We can understand the occurrence but not the ‘why now’, ‘why here’. The impasse remains. Hence our first major conclusion: There is NO explanation for natural evil.

As I have reiterated in this dissertation, based on Burrell’s retrieval of the tradition, we are dealing with the experiences, evidences, and the questions of the evils of our time which raise strong challenges to the confession of the goodness of God and God’s creation; in particular, those aspects commonly termed natural evil. This leads to questions as to the goodness of creation, and as to whether or not God causes evil.

⁶ Burrell, "Aquinas on Naming God," 205-206.

⁷ Burrell, *Knowing the Unknowable God*, 37.

We found that God is good but not necessarily as we might think; the notion of good is being used analogously and does not correspond to our tendency to align *our* use of terms to *our* needs, as *we* perceive them, to *our* mode of signifying, an implicit anthropocentrism.⁸ We cannot call God morally good nor morally bad or indifferent. Rather, good is being used as a perfection term, not an assessment term, referring to God's causing of all creaturely goodness and not to God's carrying out of moral obligations. We found that goodness, belonging to God by nature, can be tied to the giving of existence;⁹ to exist is inherently good; the contrary is nothing, *nihil*.

Yet, as Burrell noted, God in causing each thing to be, acts in the things acting causing them to be what they are,¹⁰ leading us to conclude that "God's acting in creatures, therefore, must be understood in such a way that they themselves still exercise their own operations."¹¹ This notion could be seen as an attempt to account for the reality of evil but it still runs up against an impasse, one which implies that things pursuing their own good may cause evil to other things, and the results are to be expected; there are going to be victims.¹² However, this is an abstract conclusion, one which again invites us to think the question differently, or to reframe the nature of the question of natural evil.

There is a further perspective, a variation on the preceding: evil as a privation, in particular, a privation of being,¹³ the notion of something not being what it should be by

⁸ Burrell, "From Analogy of 'Being' to the Analogy of Being," 122.

⁹ Burrell, *Knowing the Unknowable God*, 60; Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action*, 34.

¹⁰ Burrell, *Freedom and Creation in Three Traditions*, 68-69.

¹¹ Following from Burrell, *Freedom and Creation in Three Traditions*, 68-69, referring to Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 14, DIVINE GOVERNMENT, 1.105.5, emphasis added.

¹² Davies, *Thomas Aquinas on God and Evil*, 68.

¹³ Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action*, 104.

nature, evil as a diminution or privation of the good of something, yet accompanied with an implicit notion of the goodness of creation. The notion of privation is explicable in terms of the good that is created; that is, natural evil is a consequence of something being good or seeking its perfection in its way sometimes causing bad to something else in its way. This notion is not a theodicy as such, it takes us away from that aspect of the impasse, the emphasis is on God's goodness. However, again, an impasse, an abstract conclusion.

We have seen that our endeavours to address natural evil have led to an impasse in which neither the scientific approach nor the purely philosophical approach adequately addresses our concerns, abstract understanding does not really help and explanation is in vain; as has been said, we have to frame the question of natural evil differently. The *problem* of natural evil lies in its specificity. Burrell observes that understanding serves us best when “at the service of life;”¹⁴ there is the call for a response, not a solution. We have to turn to theology itself, theology as practice, a practice that is fundamental to our lives, to practical reason.

We found both Tilley and Ricœur, for the one an evil in itself and for the other a scandal, in broad agreement on the futility of the practice of theodicy and its like and implicitly asking us to rethink the question of evil. Rather than speculation we need a response, not an explanation. There are the obvious steps to be taken: safety, physical support, food and water, and shelter. There is also the need for emotional support. Importantly we must help the sufferer to get beyond any whys, attempts at some sort of explanation, and beyond a sense of guilt for the suffering or death of the others; victims

¹⁴ Burrell, "Religious Life and Understanding," 678.

should not blame themselves. We should help the in the sufferer's lament and transform it into complaint, a reasonable reaction to their suffering, which can lead to mourning, and get beyond this to the discovery that belief in God has nothing in common with the need to explain the origin of suffering. We must avoid the "why?" there is no consolation in attempts at explanation. Above all, we should offer presence with the sufferer and, where appropriate help them see God with them. The notion of presence begins to take on a new meaning, not only as a practical response but one grounded in a theological intelligibility, i.e., God as Creator, it can take us further.

In the case where we, as believers, are the sufferers, we have the understanding of God with us, more intimate to us than any thing else. We have the gift of God's name: "I am who I am" (Exodus 3:14), that is 'I am present'¹⁵ And we can speak to God. God does speak to us and we can "dare to enter into this founding relation with our creator who gives each of us our very being, and should we do so, the personal boundlessness of that relation will allow us to 'go on'."¹⁶ We also, through such dialogue, can be friends with God and, even more striking, understand that God is a friend with us, we can trust God. Such is grace. And all this is helped by being in community.

There is an aspect of the fundamental relation between us and God that is of great importance to us and particularly for the argument of this dissertation, in essence, the basis of my thesis. God "is in us making us to be" and hence God "is with us in our

¹⁵ An awareness developed out of the experience of a confrontation with evil and death.

¹⁶ Burrell, *Deconstructing Theodicy*, 109-110.

suffering as nothing else is.”¹⁷ God being with us, we are invited to ‘see’ a presence where there appears to be absence, particularly in the midst of suffering.¹⁸ We cannot conceive of this intimacy as merely an intellectual understanding of God’s presence to all of creation, it is existential;¹⁹ “whatever is, is so in its being present to its creator.”²⁰ We find that God offers presence, not answers and this is the gift of existence. Fully advertent to the nature of the relation between us and our creator, the incommensurable good, helps us appropriate the relation such that “it is overall incommensurably good *for the participant*.”²¹

Finally, we have the example of those who undergoing great suffering yet can exclaim “It still all comes down to the same thing: life is beautiful. And I believe in God – right in the thick of what people call ‘horror,’”²² a remarkable transforming of the suffering of evil into something essentially good. We can ‘go on’.

My original conjecture was that David Burrell’s refined understanding of God as Creator and the universe as creation as part of a world view or world order, provides a way to advance a reflection on the question of God, and, in particular, the question of natural evil. In contrast to the narrowness of a solely logical propositional perspective I believe that the perspective presented herein, a perspective based upon Burrell’s approach to philosophical theology, gives us the richness of an understanding rooted in

¹⁷ Davies, *The Reality of God and the Problem of Evil*, 168.

¹⁸ This is a relationship in contrast to, for example, the free-will defence which could appear to place Creator and creature in competitive positions; see Burrell, “Creatio ex Nihilo Recovered,” 18ff.

¹⁹ Burrell, “Indwelling: Presence and Dialogue,” 16.

²⁰ Burrell, *Freedom and Creation in Three Traditions*, 110, referring to Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 4, KNOWLEDGE IN GOD, 1.14.13.

²¹ Burrell, *Deconstructing Theodicy*, 108, referring to McCord Adams, *Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God*, 155, emphasis in the original.

²² Burrell, “Assessing Statements of Faith: Augustine and Etty Hillesum,” 252.

the tradition which can rise up to the insights and achievements of modern science in such a way as to see how these are grounded in a fundamental conviction of modern science, namely, that the world is intelligible. Such a perspective, based on the traditional understanding of the relationship between the natural and supernatural, but now conceived on a wider and more promising basis, helps us in contending with natural evil.

In this dissertation I have tried to examine this understanding and its implications for our question, a way of thinking about God and the universe God created. The question of *natural* evil entails some view of the universe, some view of reality. I have found that this examination has given me a richer perspective such that starting with what we can say about God, in consonance with the tradition, I can expand my perspective to understanding “that the mainstream of that tradition coheres with the emerging worldview so mightily informed by natural science,”²³ an understanding encompassing both theological and scientific modes of understanding. This provides comprehensiveness encompassing the common criteria for scientific theories and a broader perspective encompassing more of our understandings, not merely data, theories, but also revelation, belief.

There is an aspect of this dissertation that has a bearing on the science-faith discussions. In the science and theology discussions of the past half-century there has been a proliferation of work, very interesting and at times quite subtle, delving into aspects of God’s action in the world, Divine Action, the ‘how’ of providence. At root, much of this work is engaged in the ‘explanatory mode’. From the scientific side, reality

²³ Larson, "Reifying Analogy in Natural Theology," 339.

is the objective of the desire to understand, our drive to deeper and deeper explanation. However, in our attempts at explanation we seem to be trying to understand being itself, existence, trying to use the tools for the 'what-ness' to understand the 'is-ness'. The perspective presented in this dissertation offers another way of trying to understand. The question arises, is there a way of harmonizing these diverse approaches, delving deeper both into the understandings of the universe and the understandings of what we can say of God?

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