

## CHAPTER 11

### THE ETERNITY OF GOD

In Chapter Nine, I concluded that Bernard Lonergan affirms several epistemic principles, which can also be found in Richard Swinburne's epistemic theory. A metaphysical (fully) explanatory theory must be complementary to unbiased common sense, and it must not implement general bias of any empirical science of unjustified generalizing of its own theories in the areas, which do not belong to a specific science. Moreover, an overall explanatory theory has to affirm as few unexplained brute facts as possible. Where Lonergan excludes any brute fact, Swinburne is not able to make any sense of such an absolute explanation. Thus he affirms one brute unexplained fact of the existence of God.

In Chapter Ten, I analyzed different theories of time. Lonergan implemented Minkowski's interpretation of Einstein's RT into his philosophy of time. Minkowski's interpretation as presented in Lonergan is somehow complementary to common sense, but he denies that there could be a unique time, or at least that there is evidence for such a time. At the same time, Lonergan does not deny the reality of common sense perception of the world-process, not even the reality of the world-process as such. He says, however, that (formal and complete) intelligibility of such a concrete world-process can be grasped in a timeless understanding. Swinburne adopts a time with

very different characteristics than the time of Einstein's RT, and he defends a tensed theory of time.

Different interpretations of the Einsteinian world of a multiplicity of inertial frames have important impact not only on understanding time, but also on understanding the nature of the divine eternity. If God is in time, then in which time is he? Which is God's 'now'? It is difficult to see how God confined to the time of one inertial frame could be causally sustaining events that are relative to other inertial frames, but are future or past relative to God's frame. Similarly, God's knowledge of what is happening now would be restricted to the temporal perspective of a single frame, leaving him ignorant of what is actually going on in other frames. It is also important, as Lonergan realizes, that so long as one maintains that no frame is privileged, one cannot identify the time of any inertial frame as God's time. Nor can one say that God exists in the 'now' associated with the time of every inertial frame, for this would obliterate the unity of God's consciousness. God would have an infinitely split personality. Some philosophers argue that if God's time cannot be identified with the time of a single frame or with a plurality of frames, then God must not be in time at all. Hence, he exists absolutely timelessly as a pure act. Clearly, this argument does not hold if it is logically possible or if there is empirical evidence for a unique privileged frame as we showed in the last chapter. It is important that even without this significant time-related argument there seem to be good reasons in Lonergan's philosophy for the affirmation of the divine eternity.

In order to reach a sound verdict about the two interpretations of the divine eternity, we need to evaluate critically the following crucial interrelated questions. First, is any of the two concepts of God incoherent as each of the two authors would

claim about the concept of the other? Second, does a complete explanation require a negation or affirmation of brute facts? In the same context, does it necessarily follow from Lonergan's and Swinburne's arguments for the existence of God (and their denial of the multiplicity of brute facts) that God has to be timeless or temporal? Third, is explanation of the relation between God and world-process in any of the two philosophies incoherent? If both of them are coherent, which concept is the most probably true? Considering common epistemic principles explored in Chapter Nine, different theories of time of Chapter Ten, the arguments for the existence of God, and the nature of divine omniscience, is there any reasonable conclusion about the timeless or temporal character of God?

### 11.1. The Concept of God

The concept of timelessness was introduced into philosophy of God for the very same reason that Lonergan introduced it; namely, it was believed that the perfection of such a being required absolute immutability. Traditionally, theologians such as Thomas Aquinas argued for God's timelessness on the basis of his absolute simplicity, immutability, and perfection.<sup>1</sup> While God's timelessness may follow from the divine simplicity and/or immutability, these two attributes became even more

---

<sup>1</sup> According to Swinburne, Aquinas seem to have mistakenly thought that if God is immutable, he is timeless. J.R. Lucas says, 'The timelessness of God is often confused with the changelessness of God, but it is an entirely different doctrine. If God is timeless, it makes no sense to ask whether He might change... if God is changeless, it makes perfectly good sense to ask the question, and the answer will always be No...' J.R. Lucas, *The Future: An Essay on God, Temporality, and Truth* (Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1989), p. 211.

controversial than the doctrine of divine timelessness.<sup>2</sup> Nowadays, the arguments based on the incompleteness of temporal life seems to be the strongest arguments for divine timelessness.

Lonergan does not start with the notions of immutability or simplicity or completeness of the divine life. His main reason for affirming divine timelessness follows from the analogy with human understanding and from his argument for the existence of God; more specifically, from the unrestricted character of divine understanding.

First, Lonergan works out an analogous conception of God as an unrestricted act of understanding that understands everything about everything. God is understood by means of analogy with the human way of knowing and human unrestricted desire to know. God is an unrestricted act of understanding, because it bears the same relationship to the unrestricted desire to know as a finite human act of understanding bears to a finite question. When Lonergan says that the unrestricted act of understanding is timeless, he uses the analogy with human understanding, which is able to grasp in an instant, and thus timelessly, different aspects of the concrete intelligibility of reality. This analogy clearly shows that Lonergan's conception of the unrestricted act of understanding is meaningful and coherent on Swinburne's criteria of coherence and his understanding of analogy.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> William Mann (in his article 'Divine Simplicity,' *Religious Studies* 21 (1985), pp. 299-318; 'Simplicity and Immutability of God,' *International Philosophical Quarterly* 23 (1983), pp. 451-471; 'The Divine Attributes,' *American Philosophical Quarterly* 23 (1983), pp. 261-276) and Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann (in 'Absolute Simplicity,' *Faith and Philosophy* 2 (1985), pp. 353-382) defend the doctrine of divine simplicity. For a criticism of some aspects of Stump and Kretzmann's view see William Hasker, 'Simplicity and Freedom,' *Faith and Philosophy* 3 (1986), pp. 192-201.

<sup>3</sup> This analogy does not show, however, that Swinburne's principle (1) about time (which states that nothing happens in an instant) is wrong. Human insight or grasp of intelligibility

Second, a strong affirmation of the timelessness follows from the *unrestrictedness* of the divine understanding. A complete spiritual intelligibility does not pursue any further inquiry, because it understands everything about everything. A being with unrestricted understanding must be absolutely perfect in all respects, because if there were an imperfection in it, the unrestricted act of understanding would not really be unrestricted. Anything missing in this primary being would be a restriction in the act of understanding. Therefore, according to Lonergan, absolute perfection in understanding necessarily implies perfection in all other attributes, and thus absolute simplicity, immutability, and timelessness.

It is important to notice that the argument presupposes that continuous (temporal) existence or a sequence of acts of understanding implies imperfection, in which there is some brute, unexplained fact. Swinburne will try to show that there is no unexplained fact in the temporality of God (on Swinburne's concept of time), because it could be a result of the divine reasonable choice to create a temporal being. It is also important to notice that on Swinburne's definition of time a temporal God could be in time and yet not pursue any further inquiry on the level of understanding. God may just 'observe' how his plan with creature and his understanding of creature is actualized, or he may continuously sustain his creature in a temporal actualization without any increment or change in his understanding.

Before we consider Swinburne's objections against a timeless God, it has to be emphasized that the affirmation of the timelessness cannot be deduced from the analogy with human understanding, even if this analogy gives meaning to the words

---

presupposes accumulation and relieve of a tension of inquiry, which necessarily requires time. The 'grasp' in human inquiry denotes an end to a period, and a beginning of a new period.

we use. The reason is that the same analogy can be used against the timelessness of God. Human beings may grasp intelligibility in no time period, and yet they exist in time. Thus timeless understanding seems to be compatible with a temporal existence of the subject. Furthermore, human spirit in order to grasp timelessly some concrete intelligibilities regarding the world-process or becoming has to grasp some tensed facts or temporal relations. Therefore, even though human mind may grasp some timeless (classical and statistical) intelligibilities in an instant (because there is no period of time of its occurrence), it cannot be concluded that a similar being without body, which performs similar acts, is absolutely timeless. God, even if he grasped all intelligibility of reality in an instant, could be in time. Lonergan says that since God is not intrinsically involved in the material (unlike human beings), there is no reason to say that he is in time. This would only follow if Lonergan's concept of time is assumed, and 'time-less' means the absence of physically verifiable time, and not an absolute timelessness.

Swinburne elaborated the notion of immutability in a weaker and stronger sense. Only some characteristics of temporally eternal being remain unchangeable, such as his perfect goodness, benevolence, omnipotence. All these characteristics constitute the unchangeable character of God. Some other characteristics, like knowing or willingness of some particular event, may change. They constitute his temporal character. Understanding of the intelligible nature of the universe may belong to the unchangeable characteristics, and understanding in the sense of knowing all concrete reality belongs to the changeable characteristics.

---

Yet it can be used as analogy to provide an explanation of the meaning of an unrestricted act

It is important to say that on Lonergan's definition of time, Swinburne's eternal being would be 'time-less.' If God has no body, and the changes in him were similar to human mental changes, there is nothing that would constitute time in Lonergan's sense. Clearly, for Lonergan such a being would not be God, because, according to him, it does not possess a unique unrestricted act of understanding, and it needs to inquire in order to know reality. According to Swinburne, such a temporally eternal being needs to inquire in order to know temporal reality, but at the same time one can say that this being is omniscient, because it knows everything, which is logically possible to know. Lonergan accepts that unrestricted act understands everything, which is logically possible to understand, but he assumes that it is logically possible to know and understand temporarily continuous reality in an absolutely timeless act. Swinburne argues that this is not logically possible. We will return to this problem in the third section of this chapter.

One of the main reasons why Swinburne adopts a temporal God is that he is not able to see any meaning in 'timeless being,' and that all attempts to define this meaning in terms of 'temporal instant' or 'period' or 'interval' are contradictory. In our understanding, Lonergan explained coherently the meaning of a timeless act of understanding in the analogy with human act of understanding. The second Swinburne's reason for refusal of timelessness is that there is no coherent and meaningful explanation of the relation between timeless and temporal being. Section Three of this chapter will be concerned with this question.

---

of understanding. (For more on Swinburne's principles about time see Section 8.2.)

## *Perfection of a Timeless Life*

Let us now consider Swinburne's objection against a timeless God, which states that a timeless being is a very lifeless thing; 'not a person who reacts to men with sympathy or anger, pardon or chastening because he chooses to there and then.'<sup>4</sup> This statement seems paradoxical considering that many philosophers like Brian Leftow (similarly as Boethius) argue for the timelessness of God, exactly because temporal life seems to them defective.<sup>5</sup> A temporal being cannot enjoy what is past or future: 'the past itself is *lost*, and no memory, however complete, can take its place....'<sup>6</sup> and the future is yet to come. The passage of time renders it impossible for any temporal being to possess all its life at once. God should live all his life at once, because he suffers no loss, and thus he has no past or future. Thus the most perfect being must be postulated as timeless. Because of its transitory and incomplete character, the most perfect life can never be enjoyed by any temporal being.<sup>7</sup>

One may affirm a God who has a complete life and yet being in time, if one postulates a tensless theory of time. In a static view of time, the past, present, and future are equally real. The difference between them is just a subjective illusion of human consciousness. A philosophically informed person would not regard something timely expired as not existing any more, but only as not present. A temporal being has

---

<sup>4</sup> Swinburne, R., *Coherence*, p. 221.

<sup>5</sup> See Brian Leftow, *Time and Eternity* (Ithaca, N.Y., Cornell University Press, 1991), p. 278-280.

<sup>6</sup> Leftow B., *Time and Eternity*, p. 278.

<sup>7</sup> The same conclusion is supported by E. Stump and N. Kretzmann: 'A perfectly possessed life must be devoid of any past, which would be no longer possessed, and of any future, which would be not yet possessed. The existence of an absolutely perfect being must be an indivisibly persistent present actuality.' E. Stump, N. Kretzmann, 'Prophecy, Past Truth, and

nothing to lose and nothing to gain. Similarly, a temporal God would exist at all temporal locations without beginning or end to his temporal extension, and he would not lose or acquire any portion of his life. We do not need to elaborate this suggestion any further, because we have already seen (in Chapter Ten) that this theory is generally abandoned by philosophers, and because neither Lonergan nor Swinburne are defenders of tensless theory of time.<sup>8</sup> According to Lonergan, there is a real temporal passage from the present to the past, which is timelessly understood by God, and, according to Swinburne, there is a real difference between the past, which cannot be changed, and the present.

Another way to avoid the affirmation of timelessness and yet adopt life in its fullness is to start with some psychological considerations. Our perception of the fleeting experience derives from 'specious present' of our awareness. Awareness of an average person is about a fraction of a second. The longer one's specious present, the less fleeting one's experience would be. If one has a specious present with the same duration as his entire life, such a person would experience his life all at once. God would have the specious present as the whole of time. If this model were acceptable, it would enable us to hold God's being as temporal, and yet experiencing his entire life at once as a whole. Clearly, the affirmation of 'specious present' is not at all close to Lonergan's concept of divine understanding; this 'present' could not be a unique act. In order to experience the entire life, God would need to exist in a continuum, and he would need to wait until the end of time, when he grasps everything at once. This God would not be timeless on Lonergan's definition of time,

---

Eternity,' *Philosophical Perspectives* 5 (1991), p. 395; or 'Eternity, Awareness, and Action,' *Faith and Philosophy* 9 (1992), p. 463.

and would be temporal on Swinburne's definition of time, because he somehow 'observes' particular events in their temporal occurrences.

For Swinburne, there is no reason to think that a temporal life of God would be less perfect than a timeless life. The continual passage of time means loss, because those who live in it get older and weaker as they draw nearer to death. There are indeed proper reasons for regretting the passage of time, 'But these are mere factual consequences of the passage of time for mortal finite man; an omnipotent being need not suffer them.'<sup>9</sup> It is true that some states, experiences, actions, etc. are individuated by the time of their occurrence, but there is no real loss in their passage, which may cause a regret for an omnipotent being. It is only a neo-Platonic dogma, which says that things which change are inferior to things which do not change. Perfection of a perfect being may consist not in its being in a certain static position, but in its being in a process of change. Even if there were some 'imperfections,' they would be a logically necessary consequence of him being alive and acting, and of his choices and reactions.

William Craig agrees with Swinburne that the arguments from the incompleteness of temporal life are essentially experiential in character. We have to keep in mind that God forgets nothing of the past, and he knows everything (logically possible) about future. 'To be sure, the past itself is gone (given a tensed or dynamic view of time), but His existence of the past remains as vivid as ever.'<sup>10</sup> R.W. Hepburn in his analysis of 'time-transcending' experiences in the arts explains that there is an

---

<sup>8</sup> William Craig explains that some letters by Albert Einstein suggest that he took this conception seriously. See Craig W., *Time and Eternity*, p. 69-70.

<sup>9</sup> Swinburne, R., *Coherence*, p. 227.

essential temporal element in some forms of arts: 'In reading a poem, ...appreciation attends to both the sensuous-temporal and the non-temporal emergent meaning. It attends also to the Distance between them.'<sup>11</sup> An 'aesthetic transcendence' without this temporal element would be in some forms of art necessarily incomplete.

If some essentially temporal experiences are really valuable and enriching, then there are two possibilities. First, one may say that a timeless God is not perfect because he cannot know them timelessly. Second, God knows them, but then he must be in time. Affirmation of the value of such temporal experiences may cause some logical limitations to the conception of God's perfection, and it could be used to support Swinburne's concept of God. Lonergan, however, would probably say that a timeless God knows how such experiences affect each individual. God timelessly understands what it is for human beings to have temporal experiences, even though his way of knowing is very different from ours. God knows everything in his own timeless way. We do not know *how* exactly he knows them, because we are in time, and we only have extrinsic denomination of the timeless attributes of God.

Overall, we have to conclude that even though Swinburne's (Craig's and Hepburne's) suggestion of the value of temporal life has some strength (probably more for common sense people), the argument from the imperfection of temporal life seems to be a sound argument, even though its strength may diminish with further elaboration of the value of temporal life. The objection of Swinburne is not strong enough to show that the argument from the imperfection of a temporal life should be abandoned. Lonergan's account, even though it seems to be coherent, presupposes a

---

<sup>10</sup> Craig, W., *Time and Eternity*, p. 72.

meaningful explanation of the apparent paradox between timeless knowing and temporal existence. In Swinburne's perspective, this presupposition increases complexity of the theory, which is evidence that it is less probably true.

### *Personal Consciousness*

Some philosophers argue with Swinburne that one of the strongest arguments for divine temporality is that since God is essentially personal, he cannot be timeless. The crucial property of a person is to have consciousness. Can someone be conscious and timeless at the same time?<sup>12</sup>

Before we start it is important to recall that in this section we consider divine nature apart from creatures, as if there were no universe. (In the Section Three, we will be concerned with the relation of a timeless being and temporal being.) Ordinarily, in order to be self-conscious, a being must hold beliefs about himself or herself not only from the third personal perspective, but from 'I' perspective. There is no difficulty with this kind of personhood in Swinburne's conception, because God

---

<sup>11</sup> R.W. Hepburn, 'Time Transcendence and Some Related Phenomena in the Arts,' *Contemporary British Philosophy*, ed. H.D. Lewis, Fourth Series (London, George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1976), p. 172.

<sup>12</sup> John Lucas says that this is impossible: '... St Augustine held that time was created by God at the creation of the world. Such a view is tenable, but denies that the ultimate reality is a person. To be a person is to be conscious and to be agent. Time is the concomitant of consciousness and the condition of agency... Time is... a category, a necessary concomitant of the existence of a personal being... God did not make it, but time stems from God.' See J.R. Lucas, *The Future: An Essay on God, Temporality, and Truth* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), p. 212. Richard Gale writes that consciousness is 'a temporally elongated process,' but he does not show that the temporal extension is an *essential* property of consciousness. God may not be disposed to engage in temporal activities at all, and thus be timeless. (See R.M. Gale, *On the Nature and Existence of God* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 52.

holds all true beliefs. Belief in Swinburne denotes a sort of assessment to truth, which in the case of God implies a full understanding, knowledge, and acceptance of truth.

Robert Coburn suggests that a person 'should be capable (logically) of, among other things, doing at least some of the following: remembering, anticipating, reflecting, deliberating, deciding, intending, and acting intentionally.'<sup>13</sup> The difficulty with Coburn's suggestion is that these properties do not seem to be essential to personhood. Furthermore, an omniscient person never forgets anything, and does not need to reflect or deliberate. Some of the properties like acting intentionally is not essential. God may only be *capable* of acting, but in fact he may not act, and yet be personal. In regard to intentionality, there is no reason to think that intentions must be future-oriented. Changeless intentions can be oriented to the present. God's decisions are not preceded by a period of ignorance and indecision.

If one abstracts from the reality of a temporal universe, Swinburne's God may fulfill the necessary and sufficient conditions of being a timeless person. A timeless person is *capable* of acting, deciding, and can have changeless intentions. Thus God postulated by Swinburne could be an absolutely timeless person, if there is no temporal creature. (One of the crucial reasons why he postulates God as temporal is that God decides to create, creates, and sustains a temporal universe in existence.)

Lonergan's God is personal in the sense that he completely grasps the intelligibility of all reality. Based on analogy with human beings, the primary being also affirms the truth and loves the good. Understanding, affirmation, and love as well as the complete intelligibility, truth, and the highest good, are united in a single act of divine existence. The unrestricted act understands, wills, and chooses being without

any increment or change in its own reality. The unrestricted act can be said to be a person with intelligence, reasonableness, and willingness. (For more see Section 3.5.) Considering the timeless being as such, there seems to be nothing contradictory in explanation of a perfect timeless person. We will have to return this concept in the context of our exposition of the relation between a timeless person and temporal creature in the third section of this chapter.

### 11.2. The Possibility of a Complete Explanation

We have seen that there are no *a priori* conclusive reasons (following from the concept of God alone) why a personal and living God could not be temporal or timeless. Both concepts seem to have a meaning given by analogy with human beings. The concept of a timeless God is preferable, when one considers perfection of personal life, because some essentially temporal aspects of human life do not make life considerably better in comparison with the life 'at once.' However, the concept of a timeless life requires an additional explanation of the limitations of extrinsic and intrinsic denominations. Before we consider the relation between timeless and temporal being, we have to examine Swinburne's affirmation of the ultimate brute fact of divine existence and Lonergan's denial of such a possibility. In this context, we also have to clarify whether the arguments for the existence of God imply the timelessness or temporality of God.

For Swinburne, the existence of God explains the existence, goodness, and beauty of creatures. His explanation consists of a set of inductive arguments, which

---

<sup>13</sup> Robert C. Coburn, 'Professor Malcom on God,' *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 41

conclude with an affirmation of a free, personal, omnipresent, omnipotent, omniscient, perfectly good, (temporally) eternal, and necessary being, which is a source of moral obligation and is worthy of worship. The theist's explanation is simpler, and it has more explanatory power than atheistic explanations. Furthermore, the theist's explanation explains some aspects of reality, which sciences cannot explain. It is a personal, analogical, partial, and non-standard explanation of what we experience. The existence of God is postulated as the ultimate brute fact, which explains everything else besides itself:

...he [God] will be the ultimate brute fact which explains everything else. God is responsible for the existence of everything else besides himself and for it being as it is and having the powers and liabilities it does; by his continual action at each moment of time, God's own existence is the only thing whose existence God's action does not explain. For that there is no explanation.<sup>14</sup>

Clearly, God's action cannot explain his own existence, but his existence and attributes explain his actions. Swinburne believes that there is no (causal) account of the existence of God.

Lonergan wants to elucidate deeper roots of such anthropomorphic concepts that Swinburne uses for God, and deduces his affirmation of the existence of God from deeper metaphysical and cognitive principles. One of them is that a metaphysical explanation cannot explain our experiences with an affirmation of brute facts. Brute facts cannot explain anything. If the existence of God is a brute fact, it cannot provide a really complete, ultimate, and absolute explanation (even though it may be full, complete, and ultimate according to Swinburne's definitions). According to Lonergan, if one remains in the domain of proportionate being, he or she has to

---

(1963), p. 155.

appeal sooner or later to mere matters of fact. Neither empirical nor a methodically restricted philosophy can have an adequate answer, they cannot account for existence. And this is what characterizes Swinburne's conception of theism, in which his personal explanation cannot account for the existence of God.

Both philosophers agree that God has to be capable of grounding the explanation of everything about everything else, and that he cannot be explained or necessitated by another being. However, Lonergan also adds that God must be self-explanatory, and that he cannot be contingent in any respect. Otherwise, he could not explain proportionate being, and the goal of theistic explanation would not be reached.

One of the reasons why there are no unexplained facts in Lonergan's overall explanatory theory is that God fully understands his own nature and existence. God in addition to the grasp of the generative principle, intelligibilities, and probabilities involved in the world-process, also grasps the intelligibility of his own existence. At first, one may perceive the existence of God as a brute fact, because a human intellect cannot fully understand what it is for God to exist. However, one should also consider the fact that if there is a God, then he must fully understand his own existence, and who he really is. Therefore, there are no brute facts in our explanation, because we clearly (without any unexplained fact) understand that there is an intelligence which understands them all.

Lonergan realized that human mind as such is not satisfied with an explanation in terms of brute facts. Some particular science may postulate some brute facts, but this is not a limitation for human mind, which naturally searches for an overall

---

<sup>14</sup> Swinburne, R., *Is There a God?*, p. 19.

explanation. It is difficult to conceive that there may be an unexplained fact in reality. In our limited human perspective, we do not understand fully the nature of the existence and attributes of God, but we (partially and analogically) account for them with an affirmation of the unlimited character of God's understanding. Swinburne does not seem to consider this aspect of the divine attributes. He writes about causal relations: 'it is not logically possible that any agent could bring about God's existence if God is necessary an eternal being.'<sup>15</sup> God cannot be the cause of his own existence, because the necessity of his existence implies that God does not depend for his existence on himself or on anything else. No agent or law or principle is responsible for the existence of God.<sup>16</sup>

The question is whether the existence of God is really a brute fact, even if we understand and explain that God is a necessary being, the existence of which cannot be caused. The fact that this affirmation makes sense (and is supported by Swinburne's account of necessity) seems to be the evidence that the existence of God is not an unexplained brute fact. The fact that there is no causal explanation is a necessary consequence of who God really is. Therefore, one should not conclude with Swinburne that since there is no account for the cause of the existence of God, his existence is a brute unexplained fact. But rather that a question about the cause of God's existence does not make sense. Put in more traditional terms, it is contradictory to ask about the cause of the first cause. An appropriate question would be, what is the meaning of the 'first cause'? Once the meaning of the term is grasped, the meaninglessness of the question about the cause of the first cause becomes obvious. Similarly, once Swinburne concludes with an affirmation of a necessary being, the

---

<sup>15</sup> Swinburne, R., *The Coherence of Theism*, p. 265.

question about the cause of a necessary being loses its meaning, and thus there is no brute fact of divine existence any more. Lonergan seems to be right in saying that there are no brute facts in reality. There are brute facts in strictly empirical (animate or inanimate) explanations, if one defines explanation in terms of causal interactions between two or more objects. Metaphysical considerations, however, should not be confined with such a restriction.

Swinburne explains that also human free choices are necessarily brute facts. Free choice in metaphysical sense implies that it cannot be fully explained, because no cause makes one to do what he or she chooses to do. Therefore, there is no full explanation for a free action. He recognizes, however, in the case of the most perfect being, there always is a rational justification for the choice as the best possible course of action. God cannot do of logical necessity what is not reasonable (reasonably justifiable), or what is not morally the most valuable course of action. With this explanation Swinburne explicates the peculiarity of God's freedom that there really are no brute facts regarding divine choices. God's choice is always rationally justified, even though God is the only cause of his actions, and nobody else can force him to do so.

The affirmation or denial of brute facts in the two overall explanations of being varies with the definition of 'explanation.' If one defines explanation as a description of causal relations between two or more objects, obviously, there is no such account either for human and divine free choices or for the existence of God. If one accepts Lonergan's more general understanding of explanation defined in terms of the relations between explanatory conjugates, one can explain the 'brute facts' of

---

<sup>16</sup> See Swinburne, R., *The Coherence of Theism*, p. 277.

Swinburne's account. It is not clear why Swinburne affirms brute facts, because he acknowledges that a freely chosen action of a reasonable person is explained by his or her capabilities and reasons for doing that action. Analogously, the nature and existence of God is explained by his understanding of his own divine intelligence. Even though this is only a partial, analogical, and extrinsic explanation, it seems to be meaningful, reasonably well justified, and satisfactory. Since Swinburne's understanding of the nature of explanation implied in his affirmation of brute facts is quite reductive (because 'explanation' is reduced to his understanding of scientific explanation, which cannot even explain emergence of the complex systems in the world-process), and since he does not say much about God's understanding of his own understanding and existence, we have to conclude that the existence of God is not a brute fact, and that the question about the cause of the existence of God does not point to a brute fact, but it is meaningless (because God is a necessary being).

One may object that if there is God, there may not be brute facts in reality, but there are necessarily brute facts in our explanations, because our intelligence is limited, and our explanation is only partial and analogical. At this point, we have to recall that our intelligence is only limited in the sense that we can ask one question at a time. We cannot grasp all the intelligibility at once. But our intelligence is not limited in the sense that there would be a limitation to our questioning and discovering different aspects of reality. There are no real brute facts, with which our questioning and explaining would stop. We have a clear account why our conception of God is only partial and analogical. If there is no 'dead end' in humanly known intelligibility, there is no reason to think that the divine intelligence (and thus

intelligibility of reality) is somehow restricted by brute facts. If there is a God, he must fully understand the nature of his own existence.

Even though Lonergan seems to be right in his denial of brute facts, we have to say that he does not make clear the distinction between what Swinburne calls 'full,' 'complete,' and 'ultimate' explanation, and 'absolute' explanation. One of the canons of empirical inquiry states that the goal of empirical inquiry is the complete explanation of all phenomena. (For more see Chapter One.) Since this canon is affirmed in the context of strictly empirical sciences and not in the context of general empirical method, someone may easily conclude that strictly empirical sciences mediate a complete explanation of reality. Specification that a theory must be explanatory (relate explanatory conjugates) is not sufficient to explain the difference. Both (strictly) scientifically and metaphysically complete theories are explanatory.

#### *Arguments for The Existence of God*

I have showed that Swinburne's affirmation of the unexplained fact of divine existence is not sufficiently well justified. God's understanding is unrestricted, and he understands everything, which is understandable or logically possible to understand. Therefore, God must understand himself and his own existence, and thus his existence cannot be just a brute fact. This conclusion will be significant in later considerations on the eternity of God. Now, after we have reached some partial conclusions about the two systems, we have to examine whether the two arguments for the existence of God somehow imply that God has to be postulated as timeless or temporal.

Lonergan's argument starts with an affirmation that there is at least one being, and with the cognitive principle that matters of (brute) fact cannot provide a complete (in Lonergan's sense) explanation of reality (because all meaningful questions about being must have meaningful answers). Complete intelligibility requires the existence of a supreme being, which is self-explanatory and explains everything else. The affirmation of the existence of God emerges in the context of a complete (analogical, partial, extrinsic) explanation. The partially unknown aspects of this theory are explained and justified with an exposition of the limitations of human intelligence and language.

There are several aspects which need to be emphasized. Even though Lonergan's argument is an argument for the existence of God, it is also intended as a general form of all *a posteriori* arguments for the existence of God. It is intended to explicate general principles implied in all *a posteriori* arguments, such as the assumption that investigator should search for a *complete* explanation of reality. Swinburne's arguments should not be considered as radically different from Lonergan's, but rather a specific instance of such a search. Clearly, the crucial difference is that Swinburne stops at the ultimate explanation (because he is not able to make any sense of an absolute explanation).

Lonergan's argument as such seems to be meaningless and useless for common sense people. One of its most important premises, which denies the existence of any brute fact, is out of reach of common sense knowledge, because a common sense person is concerned with the concrete and particular and not with universal statements. The argument does not seem to bring any light into the concerns of an ordinary believer. For a common sense person, it would be difficult to understand

how an absolutely timeless God could know such simple things as what happened yesterday, or what time it is right now. According to Lonergan, God in his timeless 'now' knows and understands everything, which is for us past, present, or future. One can notice, however, that a timeless God cannot be properly said to know what we know today about yesterday or tomorrow, because he cannot know what 'today's' knowledge of 'tomorrow' and 'yesterday' is. He cannot be properly said to know the future, because, as Lonergan says, the metaphysical condition of his knowledge is actual happening, and God knows it only when it is occurring. From our temporal perspective an event becomes a part of his timeless 'now' only after it has occurred. Defenders of a timeless God say that God in his own mysterious (for us somehow unknown) way knows all concrete events and intelligibilities 'at once.'

We have to acknowledge that Lonergan's theory is somehow limited, because it is out of reach of ordinary people, and even for philosophers, it brings many difficulties. Swinburne's theory has the same scope, but it is simpler, and it seems to have more explanatory power. Furthermore, Swinburne's arguments for the existence of God, even though they are closer to common sense (ordinary language), they are explanatory in the same sense as empirical sciences and criminal or historical investigations are explanatory. Their essence is that the probability that there are various phenomena (like the existence of the universe, its order and beauty, the existence of animals and people, etc.) is higher if there is a God, than if there is not. Hence the existence of contingent beings increases significantly the probability that there is a God.

If we accept Swinburne's principle of simplicity as a criterion of truth, while the other criteria are equally well satisfied, we have to measure the two theories in the

following three respects: The simplicity of the arguments for the existence of God as such, simplicity of the concept of God, and simplicity of the explanation of the relation between God and the universe.

We have already shown that explanation of the concept of a timeless God is more complex than explanation of the concept of a temporal God. In regard to the simplicity of the arguments as such, Lonergan needed less maneuvers, because of his relatively simple cognitive theory. Swinburne's usage of the probability theory is much more complex. The difficulty of Lonergan's argument is that it is not accessible for common sense people. A common sense person cannot assess whether there may be no brute fact in reality. Swinburne's argument can be formulated for both common sense and people and scientists. For many (strictly) scientifically oriented people familiar with the basics of the probability theory, and for common sense people with some basic grasp of the terms 'probability' and 'simplicity,' Swinburne's argument is more accessible and acceptable than Lonergan's argument. If the goal of the argument is to provide a metaphysical foundation for theology, however, Lonergan's argument may be better, because it points to profound principles involved in human understanding in all *a posteriori* arguments for the existence of God.

Swinburne would refuse Lonergan's argument and the concept of God, for the same reason as he refuses all ontological arguments. For such arguments are mere philosopher's arguments, which do not codify the reasons, which ordinary people have for believing that there is a God. He would also refuse it for the same reason why he refuses all deductive arguments; namely, even though they may be valid, their premises are far from being generally accepted. Swinburne's refusal of all non-

common sense arguments seems to be biased, since he refuses them only because they do not belong to the category, which he considers more significant.

Let us summarize our partial conclusions before we proceed with the decisive considerations on the relation between the timeless and temporal being. It does not necessarily follow from the attributes of God, from the nature of complete explanatory theory, and from the arguments for the existence of God, that God should necessarily be postulated as (absolutely) timeless or temporal. There is some support of the timelessness from the imperfection of a temporal life, and from the unrestricted character of divine understanding. According to Lonergan, if God were in time-continuum his understanding would consist of a series of acts of understanding, and thus it would somehow be restricted and not perfect. For Swinburne, there would be nothing unintelligible about such an 'imperfection,' because it is explained by God's own (well justified) choice to create a temporal universe. The unrestricted understanding would grasp perfectly why it is temporal (in a minimal sense), and hence there is no (non-logical) restriction on his understanding. God would understand everything which is (logically) possible to understand (as both Lonergan and Swinburne claim about God).

We have not find any contradiction in Swinburne's conception of the temporal divine attributes, but we did not conclude with Swinburne that the concept of a timeless God is meaningless. The concept of a personal timeless being as such, as Lonergan understands it, seems to be meaningful based on analogy with human being (especially with human act of understanding). The concept of an omniscient temporal being seems to be also coherent based on the analogy with human person.

If one accepts Swinburne's principle of simplicity and explanatory power as criteria of truth, both theories have to be evaluated in three crucial respects: The arguments for the existence of God, the concept of God, and the relation between God and temporal creature. Swinburne's concept of God and his arguments are easier to grasp for a common sense person and also for an intellectually oriented person. Lonergan's argument is not a common sense argument, but it is based on the basic principles of the *a posteriori* arguments for the existence of God, and thus it may be valuable for some intellectually oriented people. We cannot discard this argument with Swinburne only because it is a different kind of argument than Swinburne wants to make. The decisive question is which of the two theories explains better or it has more explanatory power in regard to the relation between God and the concrete reality of world-process.

### 11.3. The Relation Between Temporal and Timeless Being

The major difficulties with the concept of a timeless God seem to arise when one attempts to relate the attributes implied in this concept to the temporal world-process. It is the concern of this section to evaluate the explanatory power of Lonergan's eternity-time (ET) theory, and compare it with Swinburne's theory.

To begin with Lonergan's account of the timeless (formal) intelligibility of reality, we have to recall (from Chapter Two) that a classical and statistical grasp of the schemes of recurrence abstracts from the concrete occurrences of the events. Classical and statistical investigation also abstracts from the concrete events, and it considers ideal correlations and probabilities of the events. Qualitatively different and

systematically unrelated schemes of recurrence interact in their mutual spatiotemporal relations. An unrestricted understanding, Lonergan says, grasps fully their concrete intelligibility:

If there is an unrestricted act of understanding, then it will understand everything about everything, with no further questions to be asked. But concrete patterns of diverging series of scattering conditions are each intelligible, and so an unrestricted act will understand each of them. Moreover, to understand each complete pattern entails knowledge of the totality of events relevant for each pattern, for the concrete pattern includes all the determinations and circumstances of each event.<sup>17</sup>

With our limited intelligence, we do not find anything unintelligible in the particular instances or concrete patterns of the world-process, and we can understand why particular events occur or reoccur. An unrestricted understanding grasps fully all the concrete intelligibilities in their particular (actual, probable, and possible) circumstances.

In Chapter One, I explained that, according to Lonergan, there is an important aspect of reality left behind in human intellectual inquiry; namely, empirical residue. It consists of empirical data, which do not possess any intelligibility on their own. For example, particular places and particular times differ as a matter of fact. In the divine understanding, there is nothing left behind. There is no empirical residue in divine knowledge and understanding. The reason why human understanding cannot grasp concrete intelligibility and leaves empirical residue behind, is the mutual conditioning of the laws (patterns of experience) and relevant events. Relevant events or data can be chosen only if the correct pattern is already known, and correct pattern is recognized based on relevant events.

---

<sup>17</sup> *CWL 03 (Insight)*, p. 673.

An unrestricted act of understanding grasps intelligibility of the concrete, coincidental manifolds, and developments, because it understands fully all the laws involved in the concrete process. The unrestricted understanding, according to Lonergan, in addition to a grasp of the intelligibility of actual events and their seriations (in schemes of recurrence), also grasps intelligibility of all probable and possible events and seriations. The concrete instances of our temporal reality are understood in a similar way as we grasp the generative principle (function) in a series of numbers. For instance, once we understand what  $y=3x^2+5$  means, we understand all the series of particular numbers of  $y$  for different values of  $x$ . The grasp of such an intelligibility of the world-process presupposes both unlimited (non-abstractive) understanding and complete understanding of itself.

As we have already explained, one of the reasons for affirmation of divine timelessness followed from the analogy with human (timeless) grasp of a timeless (classical and statistical) intelligibility of the world-order implied in the world-process. Our understanding is one of many, it is immaterial (for it abstracts from the empirical residue), it is not involved in the continuous time of local motion, and it is not spatial.

It is crucial to notice that in this explanation of divine and human understanding, which is the basis for Lonergan's affirmation of a timeless understanding, one aspect is omitted. Lonergan says in the last quote that the divine understanding *entails* knowledge of the totality events. Human understanding, in order to grasp the intelligibility of different aspects of reality, has to collect data about the concrete events. Even if we had no body and we had no need of any measuring instruments, and thus we could grasp somehow the intelligibility of each particular

situation directly, yet we would need to wait until a particular event occurs, in order to understand the intelligibility of this particular event. Clearly, it remains true that we grasp timelessly a timeless (abstract) intelligibility of real events, but we cannot conclude that we would be absolutely timeless. We would be 'time-less' on Lonergan's definition of time, but not on Swinburne's definition of time (in a minimal sense).

Lonergan does not seem to explain how an absolutely timeless God could know that some temporal events really occur (in addition to understanding their intelligibility). God, in his timeless 'now,' understands, affirms, and wills that Alexander's horse Bucephalus existed for a short period of time. In the same 'now,' God knows our temporal now. The future does not exist yet, but it somehow exists in the divine 'now.' It is difficult to see what Lonergan could mean by saying that God grasps timelessly all the possibilities and probabilities of all future developments (in addition to the past and the present). Real developments, possibilities, and probabilities seem to necessarily imply, in addition to a possible timeless understanding of the temporal correlations, also a future oriented intellect. A more complex explanation is required in order to explicate how a timeless God could sustain temporal being in the actual existence. The search for coherence of such an explanation forced Swinburne to abandon the concept of a timeless God.

If we return to the last quotation where Lonergan says that 'to understand each complete pattern entails knowledge of the totality of events relevant for each pattern,' there is no problem with saying that an unrestricted understanding can timelessly understand all intelligible patterns of concrete reality. The same is somehow true about a physicist who changelessly understands all the laws of physics and probability

calculus, but he does not know what is going on in the concrete. In order to know the concrete, he needs to do temporal observations, which may not change his understanding of the nature, and yet they require time and temporal existence. The difficulty resides in explaining how an absolutely timeless understanding would know the concrete temporal facts (which this act fully understands).<sup>18</sup>

Lonergan explains these difficulties with a 'second order' explanation saying that they originate in our language (extrinsic denomination) and partial restrictedness of human mind. Intellectual, explanatory, and metaphysical theory requires timelessness, because of an absolute perfection of the unrestricted act of understanding, and because such a being cannot be neither measured nor limited by time. (For more see Chapter Four.) W. Hasker summarizes the same principle when he says that 'metaphysical categories should be subordinated to God rather than subsuming God under the categories...' <sup>19</sup> (This is a principle defended by William P.

---

<sup>18</sup> There was an important attempt to explain eternity-time (ET) relation by E. Stump and N. Kretzmann, who define ET simultaneity without using the word 'time,' and they appeal to the analogy with STR when they introduce two reference frames (timeless and temporal) and two observers (one in eternity and one in time). We do not need to go deeper into their argument, because already many critics have pointed out that there is a problem here with the meaning of 'observation,' when something is being observed as timelessly present relative to some moment of time. (Stump, E. - Kretzmann, N., 'Eternity,' *Journal of Philosophy* 78 (1981), pp. 492-458.)

Stump and Kretzmann revisited their definition of ET-simultaneity and instead of observation language they used causal relations. (Stump, E. - Kretzmann, N., 'Eternity, Awareness, and Action' *Faith and Philosophy* 9 (1992), pp 477-478.) he problem is, Craig explains, that the argument becomes circular: 'Our original problem was to explain how God could be both timeless and yet creatively active in the world. That is hardly explained by saying that a timeless God is ET-simultaneous with His effects in time and then defining ET-simultaneity in terms of the ability of a timeless being to be causally related to temporal effects.' (Craig, W., *Time and Eternity*, p. 92.)

<sup>19</sup> Hasker, W., *God, Time, and Knowledge* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), p.181.

Alston.<sup>20</sup>) However, Hasker explains that if this principle is applied universally, ‘we will be left with nothing that we can say about God at all.’<sup>21</sup>

According to Swinburne, we can avoid these difficulties, because there is nothing unintelligible about a God who is temporal. ‘Imperfection’ of a temporal existence is explained by the divine choice to create a temporal being. In Lonergan’s terms, even if some questions may arise in God, they are justified by his reasons to create a temporal being. One can notice that this is only a ‘second order’ or ‘partial’ explanation of the fact that God’s knowledge is somehow limited. He goes, however, one step further. He says that his temporal God knows everything, which is logically possible to know. If God know everything, which is logically possible to know, he knows directly all actual events, real probabilities and possibilities. He may not know with absolute certainty some outcomes of future human choices, but this follows from the nature of free will, and thus it is explained by his creative act of free human agents.

Another reason for the affirmation of timelessness was that God is intrinsically immaterial. The difficulty is that the absolute timelessness does not seem to necessarily follow from the affirmation of intrinsic immateriality. Lonergan says, God is intrinsically independent on anything material or temporal, and thus there is no reason why he should be postulated as temporal. The deduction of the timelessness from non-materiality presupposes a specific definition of time (of a local motion).<sup>22</sup>

---

<sup>20</sup> Alston, W.P., ‘Does God Have Beliefs?’ *Religious Studies* 22 (1987), pp. 287-306.

<sup>21</sup> Hasker, W., *God, Time, and Knowledge*, p.181.

<sup>22</sup> Lonergan sometimes defines time in Aristotelian terms as a ‘number or measure determined by the successive equal stages of a local movement.’ (Lonergan, B. *Method in Theology*, p. 176.)

An immaterial being could have a temporal existence along with another temporal and changing beings (even if it timelessly understood everything about the concrete).

It is good to notice the importance of a different definition of time in Swinburne. In Chapter Ten, we concluded that the evidence of the CBR in modern cosmology suggests that there is a privileged reference frame, and thus Swinburne's assumptions about a unique time or reference frame is not an illusion.<sup>23</sup> Therefore, a unique and sufficiently vast temporal intelligence could grasp all the concrete temporal relations in one temporal act of understanding. It is true, and one could argue, that even if there is a unique time, this does not mean that God has to be postulated in time. It is important, however, that the new evidence removes one of Lonergan's most important reasons for his affirmation of timelessness.

---

<sup>23</sup> Craig explains that in the twentieth century experiments run on Bell's theorem were crucial in the decision between Lorentz and Einstein's interpretations of relativity. J. Cushing connects the universal preferred frame defined by the CBR with the unique frame, in which absolute simultaneity is required by the experimental results of Bell's theorem. (See Cushing, J.T. 'What Measurement Problem?' *Perspectives on Quantum Reality*, ed. R. Clifton (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1996), p. 76.) Craig concludes that 'none of this proves that Newton was right in thinking that God is in time; but it does undercut the claim that STR has proven Newton to be wrong.' Craig, W., *Time and Eternity*, p. 57.