

# On the goods of the religious life: contextualizing the approach of Richard Swinburne

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**Abstract:** In this article, I seek to extend Richard Swinburne's discussion of the practical reasonableness of the religious way of life, by locating his account of the goods of that life within a larger context. Drawing on Thomas Aquinas's category of infused moral virtue, I sketch an account of the motivational lure of the religious life which supplements Swinburne's emphasis on the fulfilment of moral obligation, by considering the significance of, for example, distinctively theological aesthetic goods.

## **Richard Swinburne on the reasonableness of the religious way of life**

Richard Swinburne was for many years the Nolloth Professor of the Philosophy of Christian Religion at the University of Oxford. And during those years, and earlier, he fashioned what is widely regarded as the most persuasive apologetic for Christian orthodoxy since the middle ages.<sup>1</sup> Much of the discussion of Swinburne's work has concentrated on his defence of the probability of theism, and of specifically Christian doctrinal claims, such as the claim that Christ was raised from the dead. However, on Swinburne's own account of the matter, when we assess the reasonableness of adopting the Christian, or some other religious, way of life, it is not only such probabilities that are relevant, but also the goods that would be secured by that way of life, should the relevant doctrinal claims prove to be true. Here is how he frames the issue:

[W]hen we are considering whether to pursue a religious way, and which one to pursue, two different factors are relevant. First, how good are the goals which the religion puts before us – how important are the obligations which it affirms (given that its creed is true and so that there are these obligations), and how valuable is the salvation and other goals which it offers? And

secondly, how probable is it that the creed of the religion is true and so that following its way (rather than some other way) will enable us to fulfil those obligations and enable us to attain those goals? . . . if the salvation offered to those who pursue a certain religious way is a good state which people can see would fulfil their deepest needs, then it may well be good to follow that religious way in order to attain that salvation, even if it is not very probable that we shall succeed.<sup>2</sup>

So on this account, the reasonableness of a religious way of life depends both on the probability that the relevant doctrinal claims are true, and on the goods that would be realized by that life, should those claims be true. Elsewhere, Swinburne has argued at length that the existence of God, and the resurrection of Christ from the dead, are respectively (relative to different background assumptions) 'more probable than not' and 'very probable'.<sup>3</sup> And if this case can be sustained across a wide enough range of creedal claims, then perhaps a defence of the Christian way of life could for the most part take the form of establishing the probability of the Christian world-view, and then simply deducing various conclusions about how we ought to live, granted the truth of that world-view. We could read Swinburne's own approach, in certain passages, in these terms. For instance, he notes that:

If there is no God, humans have no obligations to give their lives to prayer or philosophical reflection or artistic creativity or helping to enrich the spiritual, intellectual, and physical lives of others, good though it is that these things be done. But if all talents depend totally on God, and if doing these things is the way to form our characters and those of others over a few years of earthly life to fit us for the life of heaven, then to use our lives in some such way passes into the realm of the obligatory.<sup>4</sup>

Earlier in this same paper, Swinburne draws a helpful distinction between 'subjective' and 'objective' guilt that is relevant to the interpretation of this passage. A person is subjectively guilty, he proposes, if they fail to act on what they take their obligations to be, and objectively guilty if they fail to act on what are in fact their obligations, whether or not they acknowledge those obligations.<sup>5</sup> Following this distinction, we should say that in this text, Swinburne is proposing that if there is a God, then we human beings are objectively obliged to give our lives to activities such as prayer. And in the case of the person who joins Swinburne in assigning a reasonably high probability to the existence of God, this truth will establish a further truth: such a person will be – not only objectively but – subjectively obliged to give their lives to prayer or other such activities. So here the subjective obligatoriness of the Christian, or at least a theistic, way of life follows directly from the relevant probability judgement.

However, it is clear from the passage with which I began that Swinburne allows for the possibility of another way of upholding the Christian life, one which grants that the probability of the relevant creedal claims may be fairly low, and then seeks to uphold the reasonableness of that life by showing that the goods that would attach to it, if those claims should be true, are very significant. On this approach, the 'expected value' of the Christian way of life is taken to be relatively high, when

compared with the expected value of other such ways, although the probability of the Christian world-view is thought to be, potentially, relatively low.<sup>6</sup>

In this article, I want to consider how we might develop an apologetic strategy of this second kind, that is, a strategy that rests more fundamentally upon a judgement about the goodness that will attach to the Christian, or some other, way of life, if the relevant doctrinal claims hold true, than upon a judgement about the probability of those claims. Such a strategy will not be relevant to all human beings. The person who is persuaded by Swinburne's case for the probability of God's existence may be able to derive the reasonableness of the Christian, or at least a theistic, way of life by way of the two-step process I have just described. But evidently not everyone finds themselves in this position, not even all of those who have studied Swinburne's works, and who would count as roughly his intellectual peers on these matters (so far as anyone is). So there is some reason to explore the viability of this second kind of apologetic strategy, following Swinburne's own invitation. As he says:

if the salvation offered to those who pursue a certain religious way is a good state which people can see would fulfil their deepest needs, then it may well be good to follow that religious way in order to attain that salvation, even if it is not very probable that we shall succeed. (Swinburne (2005), 167)

Later in the article, I shall consider Swinburne's understanding of the nature and extent of the good that will attach to the Christian way of life, if the requisite doctrines prove true. But first of all, I am going to introduce another account of these matters, by turning to Thomas Aquinas's discussion of the goods of the 'infused' moral virtues. Having expounded, and then elaborated on, Thomas's perspective, I shall return to Swinburne's discussion of the goods of the religious way of life, and examine the implications of both accounts for the second of our apologetic strategies.

### **Thomas Aquinas on the infused moral virtues**

In his treatment of the relationship between the acquired and infused moral virtues, Thomas Aquinas outlines a simple and instructive way of tracking the relationship between those goods that are accessible to human beings on the basis simply of their natural endowments, and those that are achievable only if relevant parts of the Christian world-view hold true. The key elements of this account are evident in the following text. To see the sense of this passage, we should recall that, for Thomas, acquired temperance is, of course, governed by a 'rule of reason', while infused temperance is subject to a 'divine rule'. Aquinas writes:

It is evident the measure of desires appointed by a rule of human reason is different from that appointed by a divine rule. For instance, in eating, the measure fixed by human reason is that food should not harm the health of the body, nor hinder the use of reason; whereas [the] divine

rule requires that a man should chastise his body and bring it into subjection [1 Cor 9:27], by abstinence in food, drink and the like. (*ST* 1a2ae. 63. 4)<sup>7</sup>

Here, the ‘rule of reason’ provides the basis for a judgement about the way of life that is fitting for creatures of our nature: a certain pattern of consumption of food and drink is appropriate for human beings, for the reason that this pattern is, for a creature of our nature, conducive to bodily health. By contrast, a ‘divine rule’ concerns the way of life that is appropriate for us not simply relative to our human nature, but on the basis of some revealed, theological truth. If we place the passage from 1 Corinthians that Aquinas cites here in its original literary context, then it is clear that the relevant theological truth concerns our participation in the beatific vision, post mortem.<sup>8</sup> So the divine rule marks out a good that will be attainable through the leading of a Christian way of life if, and only if, relevant elements of the Christian world-view are true.

So, in general, the distinction between the acquired and infused forms of a given virtue, such as temperance, is this: the acquired form of the virtue will be governed by a rule of reason, and aimed at a good that is relative to human nature, while the infused form of the virtue will be answerable to a divine rule, and aimed at a good that is relative to our theological context. From Aquinas’s example here, it is fairly clear what it is for a good to be relative to our human nature, as when a particular habit of eating proves to be appropriate for individuals of our bodily constitution, but more needs to be said about what it is for a good to be relative to our theological context, and I shall return to that question shortly. But first let’s consider how Aquinas distinguishes the infused moral virtues from what he calls the ‘theological virtues’, that is, from faith, hope, and love. As with the acquired moral virtues, this difference can be expressed in terms of the goods that are the objects of these virtues. Aquinas puts the point thus:

The theological virtues are enough to shape us to our supernatural end as a start, that is, to God himself immediately and to none other. Yet the soul needs also to be equipped by infused virtues in regard to created things, though as subordinate to God. (*ST* 1a2ae. 63. 3 ad. 2)<sup>9</sup>

So we can think of the infused moral virtues as directed at a kind of hybrid good: like the acquired moral virtues, these virtues concern our relation to ‘created things’, such as food and drink, but as with the theological virtues, the goods of the infused moral virtues are grounded not in our human nature, but in relationship to God. So the infused moral virtues share their subject matter with the acquired moral virtues, and their teleology with the theological virtues. That is, they require the person to be appropriately oriented relative to God – not directly, as with the theological virtues, but mediately, that is, via their relation to created things.

So if we follow Aquinas’s account, we should say that the religious way of life is capable, in principle, of realizing a set of distinctive goods, which are not otherwise realizable: some of these goods will consist in our standing in the right relation to created things, where the measure of the rightness of this relation is provided by

our relationship to God, while others will consist in our standing not mediately, but directly in the right relation to God. Let us consider next how we are to understand the idea that a world-directed way of life can be more or less appropriate relative to our theological context. For an example of how Aquinas approaches this question, we can turn to his account of neighbour love.

Aquinas's treatment of neighbour love falls under his discussion of the theological virtues, but for our purposes we can place this virtue in the same general category as the infused moral virtues, for the reasons Aquinas gives in the text we have just discussed: like infused temperance, neighbour love concerns our relation to created things (specifically, our relation to human beings and other rational creatures), where the measure of the appropriateness of that relation is provided by relationship to God. In the following text, Aquinas is addressing the question of whether neighbour love properly extends to the angels, but the considerations he mentions here are of the same type as those he cites when discussing the scope of neighbour love in other respects – as when he asks whether it rightly extends to our bodies, or our enemies, or to the demons. So his comments in this text are relevant to the question of what, in general, makes a thing properly the object of neighbour love. Aquinas writes:

[T]he friendship of charity is founded upon the fellowship of everlasting happiness, in which men share in common with the angels. For it is written (Mt. 22:30) that 'in the resurrection . . . men shall be as the angels of God in heaven'. It is therefore evident that the friendship of charity extends also to the angels. (*ST* 2a2ae. 25. 10)<sup>10</sup>

Here, Aquinas appears to ground the appropriateness of love of the angels not in the thought that such love will make any difference to the likelihood of our participating (or their participating) in the beatific vision, but in the idea that we will one day share with the angels in the 'fellowship of everlasting happiness'. We are all familiar with the case where we take truths concerning the history of our relations to another human being as a measure of how we ought to relate to that person in the present. And here Aquinas seems to be taking this familiar past-referenced form of reasoning, and extending it, by supposing that truths concerning the future, the eschatological future, of our relations to other rational creatures can determine how we ought to relate to them in the present.

So here is one way of representing the ground of the goods of the infused moral virtues: these goods will be realized in so far as our relations to created things (be it food and drink, our neighbour, or other created things) are properly ordered to our theological context, where the relation of being properly ordered can be understood in terms of what we might call existential congruence. To take the case of neighbour love, Aquinas's claim seems to be: if it is true that I will one day be related to another human being in a relationship of deep-seated friendship, in the beatific vision, then that truth will exercise a claim on me in the present, since my relations to the person here and now can then be assessed as more or less congruent with this fact. It appears that we don't make much use of this

sort of future-directed reasoning in our everyday moral deliberations, perhaps because we suppose that we cannot anticipate the future in relevant respects. But there is perhaps at least an analogue for this case in a parent's sense of the bond they have with their new-born child. I remember very well the profound sense of connection I felt towards my son when I first held him, despite the fact that I had, at that point, no history of relating to him in, fully, interpersonal terms. In such circumstances, the parent's attachment seems to derive, at least in part, from their anticipation of a future that they will share with the child: they may not be able to foresee that future in any detail, but they have some reason to suppose that it will be long-lasting and existentially significant, and this expectation establishes the moral context for their dealings with the child in the present.

Elsewhere, it is less clear that Aquinas is operating with this understanding of the ground of the goods of the infused moral virtues. Certainly, the case of infused temperance, as cited above, could be read differently. The Pauline text that Aquinas quotes, from 1 Corinthians, could be taken to mean that by practising the requisite spiritual discipline, I will improve my chances of attaining the beatific vision, in rather the way that engaging in a regime of physical exercise can make it more likely that I will prevail in an athletics contest. On this interpretation, the fittingness of a given way of life relative to theological context is more a matter of what we might call its causal, rather than existential, appropriateness: that is, on this approach, a way of life will be appropriate in so far as it establishes the causal, or metaphysical, pre-conditions for the attainment of some spiritual good.

At points in his discussion of neighbour love, Aquinas implies that the practice of neighbour love is grounded not so much in the truth that we will one day share with others in the beatific vision, as simply in the possibility that we may do so. Hence, when considering whether neighbour love should be shown to the demons, he writes:

In this life, men who are in sin retain the possibility of obtaining everlasting happiness: not so those who are lost in hell, who, in this respect, are in the same case as the demons. (*ST* 2a2ae. 25. 11 ad. 2)<sup>11</sup>

So the demons are not properly the object of neighbour love, for the reason that they cannot share in the vision of God. By contrast, a human being who is 'in sin' is still rightly regarded as my neighbour, because it remains possible for them to attain the beatific vision. So here neighbour love turns out to be a fitting acknowledgement not of an already established eschatological truth, but of a potentiality in the individual in the present. On one natural reading, Aquinas takes this potentiality to hold both epistemically and metaphysically: not only is it the case that for all I know, this person is able to attain the beatific vision; relative to the Christian story of redemption, it is in fact possible for them, granted their present circumstances, to share in everlasting happiness.

So far, I have been expounding what I take to be a central thread in Aquinas's treatment of the infused moral virtues, and their relation to the acquired moral and the theological virtues, and exploring the relevance of this discussion for our understanding of the goods that attach to the religious way of life. In the next section, I want, briefly, to propose an extension of Thomas's account.

### **Elaborating on Aquinas's account**

Earlier, I noted the possibility of a two-step approach to the justification of the religious way of life, where we begin by establishing that certain creedal claims hold with a fair degree of probability (suppose we take them to be more probable than not), and then ask how we are to live granted the truth of those claims. We might wonder whether Aquinas's treatment of the way of life that comprises the infused moral, and the theological, virtues is to be read in these terms. On his view, are we to begin by establishing the likelihood of, say, the Christian account of the beatific vision, and then to deduce the character of our subjective obligations, granted the truth of this account? Given what he says about the voluntariness of Christian faith, it seems that Aquinas is committed to the thought that key Christian creedal claims cannot be shown to be more probable than not, which suggests that he would have some sympathy for the second of our apologetic strategies.<sup>12</sup> But let us bracket this exegetical question, and concentrate once again on the nature of the goods that will attach to the religious way of life, granted the truth of relevant doctrinal claims.

In his discussion of infused temperance, and neighbour love, Aquinas at least implies that it is possible to assess a person's thoughts and actions, attitudes and desires as more or less appropriate relative to their theological context. For instance, if I am to love my neighbour, then I need to behave towards them in the right sort of way – minimally, I need to treat them beneficently in relevant circumstances, and to act accordingly. I also need to have the right attitude towards my neighbour – for instance, to think of them as, in the relevant sense, my friend. (See again Thomas's comment about 'the friendship of charity' in the passage I cited above.) And, more generally, my thoughts and desires should be such as to ensure that I meet these behavioural and attitudinal requirements. So if we follow Aquinas's account of the infused moral virtues, then we should say that the religious way of life can realize various goods, depending on whether it is our behaviour, thoughts, attitudes or desires that are properly aligned to our theological context. I want to note, very briefly, two further such goods that, so far as I can see, Aquinas does not introduce, not even by implication.

Religious traditions commonly take an interest in the regulation of their adherents' bodily comportment. This is true most obviously when the devotee is required to adopt the relevant bodily posture in worship or other devotional activity. But the same sort of concern is evident in iconographical traditions of representing, say, the bodily disposition and facial expressions of Christ or the

Buddha. Or again, we might think of the attention to bodily demeanour that is evident in depictions of the annunciation, such as Botticelli's *Cestello Annunciation*.<sup>13</sup> Of course, the ethical dimension of neighbour love demands of the Christian that they should move their body in the ways that are required to show beneficent concern to their fellow human beings. But the interest in the disposition of the body that is evident in Botticelli's painting, or more generally in representations of the saints, is not simply, if at all, of this instrumental kind, where the disposition of the body is deemed appropriate in so far as it is morally efficacious. Instead, we should say that, in Botticelli's painting, the inflexions of Mary's body are fluidly and gracefully adapted to the angel's address, and succeed, thereby, in realizing a good – the good of congruence with their theological context – that is fundamentally aesthetic, and one that these same movements, however graceful by other measures, could not have realized were there to be no God. The cases I have cited – of the annunciation, worship, and the appearance of figures such as Christ – may suggest that the regulation of the comportment of the body is a rather specialized concern, relevant only to certain individuals or in restricted domains of life, but it is not hard to see how the bodily demeanour (as distinct from the morally efficacious behaviour) of everyday people in everyday situations can be assessed as more or less appropriate relative to theological context, just as styles of dress and of speech can be evaluated in these terms.<sup>14</sup>

To take a second kind of good, reports of conversion experience commonly indicate that the convert finds themselves not simply with a new attitude towards God, or their neighbour, but also a new perceptual relationship to the everyday world. Summarizing the drift of such reports, William James writes:

When we come to study the phenomenon of conversion or religious regeneration, we . . . see that a not infrequent consequence of the change operated in the subject is a transfiguration of the face of nature in his eyes. A new heaven seems to shine upon a new earth.<sup>15</sup>

Or as one of the reports James cites puts the point: 'Natural objects were glorified, my spiritual vision was so clarified that I saw beauty in every material object in the universe. . .'<sup>16</sup> From the vantage point of the convert, it seems that this perceptual change typically involves a brightening in the appearance of things, and a deepening and reordering of the patterns of salience by which the perceptual field is ordered. And we should suppose that, in these respects too, our everyday relations to the world can be assessed for appropriateness relative to theological context. For instance, the patterns of salience that structure the perceptual field, following conversion, are capable, in principle, of tracking a divinely ordered scale of values, so that what now stands out, or is relatively salient, for the convert in their experience of the world is what is properly most deserving of attention, granted the truth of the relevant theological doctrine.<sup>17</sup>

So in these ways, we can extend Aquinas's account of the goods of the infused moral virtues, by showing how it is not only a person's world-directed thoughts,



feelings and actions, for example, that can be assessed for appropriateness relative to theological context, but also their bodily demeanour (as distinct from their morally efficacious behaviour) and experience of the everyday sensory world.

### **The attractiveness of the religious way of life**

Following Swinburne, we have noted the possibility of an apologetic strategy that turns, most fundamentally, not on judgements about the probability of various creedal claims, but on a conception of the extent and nature of the goods that will attach to the religious way of life if those claims should hold true. And we have noted Thomas Aquinas's way of representing the goods that can attach to the religious way of life. Next I want to introduce Swinburne's discussion of the goods of the religious life, and to consider how his account compares with that of Aquinas, and whether any differences between their approaches suggest a difference of view about the significance of the religious way of life.

In his essay 'The Christian scheme of salvation', Swinburne gives this account of the goods that will attach to the religious life, if there is a God.

The greatest human well-being is to be found in friendship with good and interesting people in the pursuit of worthy aims. God is a better friend, with more interesting aspects of himself to reveal than human friends (given his necessity and perfect goodness an infinitely better friend with infinitely more aspects) and he has worthwhile tasks which humans can share with him in bringing themselves and others to reconciliation with each other and God, to growth in the contemplation of God and the universe which he made, and to beautifying that universe. If there is a God, such tasks will necessarily be vastly more worthwhile than secular tasks – for there will be a depth of contemplation of the richness of life of a person, God, open to us which would not be open if there is no omnipotent and omniscient being; and there will be the infinite time of an after-life which God, seeking our well-being, is able to make available to us to help in the beautifying of the world and the spiritual healing of our fellows. And God, unlike human beings, is a necessary being, who is the ultimate source of being and therefore of a kind quite other than finite things; the entering into contact with him has a richness and mystery and meaning which Rudolf Otto so vividly described as the 'numinous'.<sup>18</sup>

Some of the goods of the religious life that Swinburne lists here resemble the goods that Aquinas associates with the theological virtues: for instance, the good of 'entering into contact with' the 'richness and mystery' of God appears to be such a good, so far as that contact involves an encounter with God that is direct, rather than mediated via our relations to created things. Other elements of Swinburne's account recall Aquinas's discussion of the goods of the infused moral virtues. For instance, the contemplation and beautification of the universe is a world-directed activity, whose goodness, Swinburne is suggesting, can be deepened if it turns out to be fitting relative to its theological context. Lastly, Swinburne also identifies the kind of good that is the object of the acquired moral virtues. For instance, in his second reference in this passage to 'beautifying the world', he is appealing not to the thought that this activity will realize an additional kind of goodness if there is a God, but to the idea that, if there is a God, then

there will be additional opportunities to realize the sort of goodness that will attach to the activity even if there is no God, because there will then be an afterlife.

So on the basis of this passage, we might say Aquinas's discussion offers a helpful scheme for classifying the various goods that Swinburne mentions, but that there is no fundamental difference in their assessment of the goods of the religious way of life. However, their respective positions do suggest some differences of view concerning the nature of those goods, and I turn now to this matter. On our rendering of his approach, for Aquinas, the goods of the infused moral virtues are grounded in the relation of congruence with theological context, and specifically with the beatific vision, and we might ask whether some such perspective is implied in Swinburne's discussion. I shall suggest that Swinburne's account differs both on the question of congruence, and on the question of how the relevant theological context is to be construed.

When explaining why certain world-directed activities, for instance contemplation of the universe, should be capable of realizing a further kind of good if there is a God, Swinburne remarks: 'for there will be a depth of contemplation of the richness of life of a person, God, open to us which would not be open if there is no omnipotent and omniscient being'. Here, the significance of these world-facing activities seems to be understood in terms of the thought that they are capable of drawing us into, or perhaps becoming part of, the contemplation of God. For instance, it may be urged that if there is a God, then in contemplating the universe, we will be contemplating what God has made, and thereby, indirectly, we will also be contemplating the divine mind, since God's creative intentions are revealed in the world, since those intentions are the source of the world.

So drawing on this example, and some of the others he gives in this passage, we might attribute to Swinburne a principle of this form: world-directed activities have an additional significance if there is a God, because they can then draw us into the contemplation of – or more generally, we might say, into relationship to – God. Is there any significant difference between this account and the approach we have associated with Aquinas? One relatively minor difference is evident in Aquinas's discussion of neighbour love. Here, it is the quality of our relations with other rational creatures in the eschaton, rather than directly any aspect of our relations to God, that is held to ground the appropriateness of neighbour love. The principle I have attributed to Swinburne could no doubt be invoked to similar effect, but because it is cast in terms of relations to God, that would require a somewhat different, and more elaborate, story. So in this respect, the two accounts are not trivially equivalent in their implications.

A further, more significant difference between the two approaches is evident if we return to a passage I cited earlier, where Swinburne comments:

If there is no God, humans have no obligations to give their lives to prayer or philosophical reflection or artistic creativity . . . But if all talents depend totally on God, and if doing these things is the way to form our characters and those of others over a few years of earthly life to fit

us for the life of heaven, then to use our lives in some such way passes into the realm of the obligatory. (Swinburne (2009), 305)

Here again, we find the idea that if there is a God, then some world-directed activities, such as artistic creativity, will bear an additional dimension of significance, because they will then be in some way relevant to our relationship to God. The background idea here is that these activities rightly form part of relationship to God because they are owed to him, since he is the source of our talents, and therefore our benefactor. And it is implied, then, that the failure to engage in such activities would involve some significant breach in that relationship. So, on this account, it seems we should consider these world-directed activities as what I have termed causal or, better, metaphysical preconditions for sharing in the life of God. By contrast, the principle of existential congruence that we introduced earlier, when discussing Aquinas's treatment of neighbour love, measures the appropriateness of a thought or action by reference to what is taken to be an already established truth concerning human beings' participation in the beatific vision.

The question of which of these approaches is to be preferred is a large question – certainly too large to be settled here – but on this point, Swinburne's approach and the approach we have associated with Aquinas's treatment of neighbour love seem to involve different assessments of the significance of the religious way of life. On the one account, what is most fundamentally at stake in that life is whether we will share in the life of God; on the other, what is at stake is whether we will live congruently with the truth that we will one day share in that life. Of course, Swinburne's perspective on this matter is not arbitrary, and reflects commitments for which he has argued at length in his wider corpus.<sup>19</sup> And no doubt he could urge, with reason, that his view is closer to the mainstream of Christian opinion.<sup>20</sup> In my closing remarks, I will suggest a possible compromise between these views, which grants Swinburne's account of our obligations to God, and what is at stake in the fulfilment of those obligations, while supposing that it is, nonetheless, other considerations that provide, most fundamentally, the motivational lure for the religious life.

Let us note two further points of difference between our Thomistic reading of the goods of the religious way and Swinburne's discussion of this question. First of all, the elaboration on Aquinas's view that I proposed suggests that the relation of existential congruence with theological context can be exemplified across a very wide range of contexts. On this approach, we should say that a person's thoughts, attitudes, feelings and behaviour, and also their perception of the everyday world, and their bodily demeanour, can all be assessed for adequacy relative to theological context, and accordingly, the goods of the infused moral virtues can be realized in our lives not just in this or that localized circumstance, but pervasively. The general principle that I have associated with Swinburne's account could be used, I take it, to make a similar sort of point about the range of the goods that can attach

to the religious way of life. But while he does list quite an assortment of world-directed activities that can acquire an additional dimension of significance if there is a God, Swinburne does not, so far as I can see, seek to establish the claim that the goods of the religious way extend across all the central domains of human thought, experience, and activity. This claim will be of some importance if we wish to develop the second of our apologetic strategies, and to determine the magnitude of the good that is at stake, potentially, in the choice of a religious way of life.

To conclude, let us return to the question of the role of obligation in motivating the religious life. As the passage I have just cited indicates, for Swinburne, the goodness of engaging in activities such as prayer derives in significant part from the fact that we are obliged so to act, if there is a God.<sup>21</sup> This appeal to obligation may work relatively straightforwardly if we suppose, as Swinburne does, that we, or at least many of us, are subjectively obliged to engage in prayer and other such activities. But if we are working within the terms of the second of our apologetic strategies, and supposing, therefore, that relevant elements of the religious world-view have, so far as we can tell, a relatively low probability, then we will not, I take it, be subject to such an obligation. In that case, we could say that the aim of the religious way of life is to ensure that we do not violate our *objective* obligations to God, if, improbably, there should be a God. Perhaps a life could be ordered on this basis without any failure of reason. But when expressed in these terms, the religious life seems to have acquired a rather negative cast: we are to be motivated by the goal of not breaching a merely possible obligation. Alternatively, we could expand on the second apologetic strategy by foregrounding aesthetic rather than moral goods, and appealing to the beauty of a life that is congruent with the Christian, or some other, world-view.

As we have seen, in his account of the goods of the religious life, Swinburne does appeal to beauty, when noting that 'artistic creativity' will be additionally good if there is a God, because it will then satisfy an obligation to God, and that 'beautifying the universe' will be additionally good if there is a God when it is in some relevant way incorporated into our friendship with God. In these cases, the creation of beauty is given a theological rationale. But on the account we have been developing, we should say that our theological context doesn't just give us additional moral reasons, or reasons relevant to the cultivation of friendship, to beautify the world, but makes possible a new variety of beauty. Perhaps this claim can be presented most straightforwardly for the case of bodily demeanour. If we think again of Botticelli's depiction of the annunciation, the inflexions of Mary's body can be seen as beautiful, no doubt, from a purely secular point of view. But granted the relevant theological context, they will exhibit an additional kind of beauty, because her demeanour will now count as graceful considered as a response to the angel's address: so here there is a kind of beauty that can only obtain relative to theological context. We can, I suggest, develop a similar account for certain ways of perceiving the sensory world, building on the strongly

aesthetic dimension of reports of conversion experience, and what James calls, in the passage I cited above, 'the transfiguration of the face of nature' that is integral to many conversion experiences.<sup>22</sup> And perhaps we can proceed similarly for other modalities of human life. If there is a distinctively theological beauty of this kind, then it will involve, evidently, a particularly weighty aesthetic good, since this good will consist in the appropriateness of the person's demeanour, and so on, relative not simply to some creaturely context, but to God. So here is a further point of difference: on the Thomistically inspired account we have been developing here, we can represent the religious way of life as motivated in significant part by the prospect of securing a range of distinctively theological aesthetic goods.

In this article, my aim has been to take up Richard Swinburne's invitation to consider the viability of an apologetic strategy that rests fundamentally not on various probability judgements, but on an account of the goodness of the religious way of life. To this end, I have discussed, and sought to deepen, Aquinas's account of the goods of the religious life, and compared that account with Swinburne's treatment of these matters. In conclusion, what I would like to propose is not that Swinburne's conception of, say, the role of obligation in motivating the religious life is simply mistaken, but that this view might be located within a larger story of the goods of religious practice, one which will differ somewhat in tone from his account. According to this larger story, in central respects anyway, the religious life aims at existential congruence with an already established theological context, where this relation can be exhibited pervasively in our dealings with created things, and has a strongly aesthetic dimension. That is to put the point rather abstractly. The real motivational pull of such a vision is perhaps most evident, once again, in the enacted example of the saints, or in depictions of a scene such as the annunciation, where the relevant thoughts and gestures aim, most fundamentally, do they not, not at the satisfaction of some obligation towards God – allowing that there may be such an obligation – but at the acknowledgement of a divine address, and its disclosure of an already established divine regard. If our concern is to identify the motivational structure of the religious life, then should we not look here, to the example of those who paradigmatically embody that life?

In my judgement, Richard Swinburne has, indeed, produced the most persuasive apologetic for the Christian faith since the middle ages. But for the reasons we have been considering, there is evidently more to say if we are to assess the attractiveness, and in turn the reasonableness, of Christian, and other, forms of religious life for many of our contemporaries. Here as elsewhere, I have been suggesting, Swinburne's work points the way.

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## Notes

1. Indeed, writing in the *Times Literary Supplement*, Alvin Plantinga has remarked that Swinburne has provided 'the most sophisticated and highly developed natural theology the world has so far seen'. See: <<https://global.oup.com/academic/product/the-existence-of-god-9780199271689?cc=gb&lang=en#>> [accessed 28 December 2016].
2. Swinburne (2005), 167.
3. See respectively Swinburne (2004), 342, and Swinburne (2003), 203.
4. Swinburne (2009), 305.
5. *Ibid.*, 295.
6. Swinburne allows that the person of Christian faith may hold simply that the Christian world-view is more probable than any rival world-view, specified at a similar level of detail, without being committed thereby to the claim that it is more probable than not. See *ibid.*, 155.
7. Aquinas (1964–1974).
8. In the New International Version, the text reads: 'Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last, but we do it to get a crown that will last forever.' The reference to a 'crown that will last forever' indicates that Paul's concern here is with the good of the afterlife.
9. Aquinas (1964–1974).
10. Aquinas (1947).
11. *Ibid.*
12. See *Summa Theologiae* 2a2ae. 4. 1.
13. See <<https://www.virtualuffizi.com/the-cestello-annunciation-by-sandro-botticelli.html>> [accessed 7 April 2017].
14. For a related example from the ethical domain, see Raimond Gaita's account of how the 'demeanour' of a nun and the 'inflections of her body' 'revealed' to him the 'full humanity' of the patients on a psychiatric ward (Gaita (2000), 18–19). Similarly, C. S. Lewis suggests that the 'new' humanity of Christians is evident in their bodily comportment: 'Their very voices and faces are different from ours; stronger, quieter, happier, more radiant' (Lewis (1944), 186). Compare Aristotle's account of the bodily demeanour of the properly 'proud' or great-souled man: Aristotle (1980), Book IV, Section 3.
15. James (1911), 151.
16. *Ibid.*, 250.
17. For further discussion, see Wynn (2017).
18. Swinburne (2009), 304–305.
19. See for instance Swinburne (1989).

20. Indeed, Aquinas himself can be cited on Swinburne's side of this debate, to the extent that he is not a universalist about salvation. Nonetheless, in the ways we have discussed, the principle to which I am appealing can be grounded in his work.
21. The centrality of obligation for Swinburne's account is also evident in the first of the texts I cited in this article, where he associates the goodness of the goals of a religious way with, first of all, the question of 'how important are the obligations which it affirms' (Swinburne (2005), 167).
22. For a fuller account of this case, see Wynn (2018).