

Does God exist? Professor Swinburne is not concerned with this question, or so I infer from his new book, the real topic of which is the belief that 'there exists now, and always has existed and will exist ... a spirit, that is a non-embodied person who is omnipresent' (p 90). This non-embodied person is very simple, 'a person of an incredibly simple kind' (p 95), 'a person of a very simple kind' (p 102). He also has beliefs (p 95), reasons for acting as he does (cf pp 154 ff), intentions (p 95), and a highly developed moral conscience. 'He is a being who does no morally bad actions, and does any morally obligatory action' (p 92). He is, in fact, the sort of thing you would expect to bring about a world like ours. And he is, so Swinburne assures us, there. Or, to put it more accurately, he is probably there. We have no deductive case for his existence, but we can argue for him inductively. His existence would explain certain puzzling facts, that, for example, there is a finite and complex universe (cf Chapter 7), or that the universe exhibits a high degree of order (cf Chapter 8). Such facts are more likely to obtain if he exists than if he does not, so the over-all probability of his existence is well away from 1 or 0. And, given the evidence of religious experience, his existence is overall probable.

Swinburne presents his case with great clarity. He also makes some very effective points in doing so. Chapter 1, for instance, firmly and properly chastises those who deny that while arguments for some conclusion might carry little weight when taken individually, matters can be very different when they are run together. And in Chapter 8 there are some telling objections to Hume's treatment of Cleanthes in the *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*. Hume, for example, thinks that Cleanthes has no reason for denying the existence of a pantheon of deities: but what of Ockham's razor? As Swinburne rightly says, 'Hume's hypothesis is very complicated – we want to ask about it such questions as why there are just 333 deities (or whatever the number is), why do they have powers

of just the strength which they do have, and what moves them to co-operate as closely as obviously they do?' (p 141).

So I am very impressed with much that Swinburne says. But I also have my doubts. I am, for instance, doubtful about Swinburne's conclusion that the only available case for the existence of his non-embodied person is inductive. Swinburne is pretty confident that a deductive case is unavailable, but how can he be as sure as he is? According to him it is not obviously incoherent to say, for example, that his non-embodied person does not exist while the universe does (cf pp 119 f). Or again, it is not obviously incoherent to hold that the universe is very orderly but that his non-embodied person is not responsible for this fact (cf pp 143 f). Yet these suggestions surely beg the question. It may not be obvious that 'Swinburne's non-embodied person does not exist, but the universe does' is incoherent. Nor may it be obvious that the same is untrue of 'Swinburne's non-embodied person does not exist, but the universe is very orderly'. Yet both assertions could be incoherent, and a deductive argument might well establish that they are such. There may, of course, be no deductive argument capable of doing so; but it seems rash to say that there is not without considering any proposed deductive argument to the contrary. And, in any case, is Swinburne's account of incoherence acceptable? According to Swinburne 'the only way to prove a proposition to be incoherent is to deduce from it an *obviously* incoherent proposition' (p 119). But how can one deduce anything from an incoherent proposition? How, for example, can one deduce anything from 'All square triangles are lecherous'?

Another difficulty with Swinburne's book brings us to the question of explanation and the non-embodied person postulated by Swinburne to account for the existence and order of the universe. According to Swinburne there are two kinds of explanation: scientific explanation (in terms of scientific laws) and personal ex-

planation (which appeals to the intentions of a person). These are quite different, and, since there can be a scientific explanation for the existence and order of the universe (a point on which I agree with Swinburne, who makes it very well), there must be a personal explanation if there is to be an explanation at all. But is that really so? Cannot the existence and order of the universe be brought about by what main-stream Christian orthodoxy calls 'God'? Cannot it be brought about by the Creator *ex nihilo* whose 'thoughts are not your thoughts' and whose 'ways are higher than your ways'? And if the existence of an orderly universe requires explanation in terms of a person's intention, why is there not a person whose intentions result in the fact that there is a person whose intentions result in the existence of an ordered universe? Swinburne might say that his non-embodied person is ultimate, and that, while one can ask why there are persons acting intentionally within the ordered universe (which is surely what one must be asking in asking for an explanation of the existence of an ordered universe), there is no need to ask why it is that this particular person exists. But on the supposition that he is really a person whose existence seems probable in the light of what we know about persons in the universe, that seems false. If the universe contains persons, if the universe must be brought about by P, and if P is really a person, then why cannot P also be said to be brought about by a person? It seems to me that Swinburne can only successfully reply by playing down (and playing down with a vengeance) the similarity

between P and the persons who operate within the universe and who are normally referred to by those offering what Swinburne calls personal explanation. But he is not prepared to do this, which means, I think, that his argument for an extramundane person is unconvincing, as, in the end, is that of Cleanthes.

There are various aspects of Swinburne's book of which I have said nothing. This is not to say that I am happy with them, but they demand a discussion more detailed than is possible here. One final point ought, however, to be briefly mentioned. This is that Chapter 13 ('The Argument from Religious Experience') is indiscriminating to the point of naivety. The chapter has some very sensible things to say about the reasonableness of believing on the basis of experience, but it pays no adequate attention to texts either Christian or non-Christian, and nothing much is said about the relationship between experience and interpretation. Instead we are treated to an assessment of assertions like 'I talked to God last night', 'I saw Poseidon standing by the window' (p 254), 'it seemed to Joseph that an angel was talking to him' (p 251) and 'it seems to the subject, perhaps very strongly, that he is aware of God or of a timeless reality or some such thing' (p 251). Swinburne is disposed to be sympathetic to such assertions. I should say he needs to think more about them, to study in detail the people (if any) who make them, and to think about a lot else besides.

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RIGHTEOUSNESS IN MATTHEW AND HIS WORLD OF THOUGHT by Benno Przybylski. SNTS monograph 41. C.U.P. 1980. pp xiii + 184. £9.50.

Benno Przybylski developed this study when he was a research student of E. P. Sanders. The main thesis is that those scholars who have imposed a Pauline understanding of righteousness as God's gift on the Matthean use of the term, especially Fiedler, have seriously distorted Matthew's meaning, and this is convincingly argued, although Fiedler's thesis had already been

demolished by A. Sand in *Das Gesetz und die Propheten* 1974. It is a pity that the polemical form has narrowed the perspective of Przybylski's study. Instead of asking 'What does righteousness mean?' he narrows the question to 'Does righteousness refer to God's gift to man or to God's demand upon man?' He answers that it means God's demand, but when the reader asks