


Article

The Necessity of an Incarnate Prophet

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Abstract: This article aims to provide an a priori argument—termed the Flourishment Argument, for the veracity of the Christian conception of the Abrahamic religion that centres on God’s action of sending a divine and atoning prophet into the world. This specific informal argument will be presented through the formulation of a set of a priori reasons for why God would seek to interact with the world—developed in light of the work of Richard Swinburne, John Finnis, Linda Zagzebski and Alexander Pruss—which, in combination, will provide individuals with grounds for believing in the veracity of these important Christian teachings.

Keywords: prophet; exemplarism; morality; natural law; agápē

1. Introduction

1.1. The Nature of the Abrahamic Religions

According to the Abrahamic religions: Judaism, Christianity and Islam,¹ God has intervened in our spatiotemporal reality in a particular manner that distinguishes this group of faiths from the other world religions. More specifically, the Abrahamic religions (hereafter, ARs)—understood to be the specific world religions that take the prophet Abraham (Hebrew: אַבְרָהָם and Arabic: إبراهيم) as the forefather of their religion—affirm a specific conception of God’s spatiotemporal intervention, which can be stated succinctly as follows:

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| (1) (Abrahamic Religion) | (i) <i>Intervention:</i> God has intervened in our spatiotemporal reality in a ‘mediated’ manner through the use of prophets. |
| | (ii) <i>Foundational:</i> Among these prophets, God has sent a foundational prophet with a specific propositional rev-elation that is to be communicated to others. |

Among the collection of world religions, the non-Abrahamic religions—such as Buddhism, Hinduism and Sikhism—do not affirm the fact of God having interacted with our world in the manner as stated in (1)—with Buddhism (in its traditional forms) denying the existence of God, Hinduism (within its major variations) conceiving of God’s interaction as being mediated through Avatars, and Sikhism conceiving of this mediation as being through that of (non-prophetic) Gurus, with the most recent (and ‘eternal’) Guru being the text termed the Guru Granth Sahib. Thus, the ARs’ conception of God’s interaction within creation is unique in affirming the fact of this mediated action being through particular ‘prophets’—where we can take a prophet to be an *authoritative representative of God*. These prophets were tasked with the role of communicating to particular communities (or the world as a whole) a ‘propositional revelation’ that would serve the role of guiding God’s creation by this revelation unveiling what God’s will is for them. Hence, each of the ARs affirms, firstly, the fact of there having been several prophets sent throughout ‘salvation history’—with Islam specifically taking there to have been a prophet sent to every nation in the world, as stated within the Qur’an: ‘And We certainly sent into every nation a messenger, [saying], “Worship Allāh and avoid Taghut”. And among them were those whom



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Allāh guided, and among them were those upon whom error was [deservedly] decreed. So proceed through the earth and observe how was the end of the deniers' (*Sūrat An-Nahl* 16.36). Whereas Judaism and Christianity have affirmed a more limited number of prophets and regions that these prophets have been sent to—namely, the Land of Israel.² Secondly, these ARs affirm the fact of God having sent (what we can term) a *foundational prophet*—an individual that has fulfilled the role of communicating God's propositional revelation *and* has played a foundational role in establishing a specific religious creed and community. Hence, first, for Judaism, this individual is identified as Moses (Hebrew: Moshe (מֹשֶׁה)), who fulfilled the role of communicating the *Torah* (i.e., the Mosaic Law), and played the foundational role of establishing the *Judaic* creed and Jewish community. Second, for Christianity, this individual is Jesus of Nazareth (known as Jesus Christ: the 'anointed one'), who fulfilled the role of communicating the *Gospel* (i.e., the message of the kingdom of God), and played the foundational role of establishing the *Christian* creed and community. Third, for Islam, this individual is Muhammad (ibn 'Abd Allāh ibn 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib ibn Hāshim), who fulfilled the role of communicating the *Qur'an* (i.e., the literal word of *Allāh*), and played the foundational role of establishing the *Islamic* creed and community. Each of the foundational prophets of the ARs fulfils a unique role; however, Christianity, in particular, conceives of this uniqueness not only in that of Jesus of Nazareth (hereafter, Christ), having been tasked with the role by God of communicating his propositional revelation, but also in him *existing* and *acting* in a *unique way*. That is, Christians affirm the fact, as taught by the Christian Creed, of God having intervened in human history by sending his 'Son', the second person of the Trinity who, existing eternally and consubstantially with God, became a human (i.e., incarnate) being—referred to as the person of Christ—in order to provide an atonement (i.e., a means for humans and God to be reconciled). Christ is thus conceived of by Christians to not be a *mere prophet* (i.e., merely an authoritative representative of God who communicates his propositional revelation) but a *divine* and *atonement* prophet.

This conception of the nature of the foundational prophet—which we can term the 'Christian Position'—posits the fact of Christ being a divine and human person, with him having fulfilled the unique role of providing a means of atonement, which is (plausibly) the primary distinguishing factor between the Christian position and the positions of the other ARs, with Islam, for example, most explicitly rejecting the veracity of the Christian Position in stating within the Qur'an: "O People of the Book! Commit no excesses in your religion or utter anything concerning Allah but the truth. The Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, was only a messenger of Allah, His Word that He sent to Mary, and a Spirit from Him [that He sent]" (*An-Nisa* 4.171–172). Christians thus make a claim—that God has sent a divine and atoning prophet—which is not recognised by the other ARs.³ Hence, one can ask the important question: what reasons are there to affirm the divinity and atoning work of this prophet? More specifically, why should one believe that the foundational prophet sent by God has this nature and fulfils this role, given the fact that the majority of ARs disaffirm this position? In answer to this question, one could indeed point to the authoritative texts found within the Christian propositional revelation—such as the following verses found within the Christian scriptures (i.e., Holy Bible), which indicate the divinity of God's prophet (i.e., Son) and his atoning work:

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| (2) | (Christian Scripture) | (i) | <i>Philippians</i> 2:5–7: Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. |
| | | (ii) | <i>John</i> 3:16–17: For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him |
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These types of scriptural passages form the revelatory basis of the Christian Position; however, using them in this specific context—namely, that of demonstrating the *veracity* of the Christian Position—is indeed a problem, given the fact that all of the ARs agree on the fact of God having sent a prophet, but each disagrees as to the nature of the propositional revelation that accompanies this prophet. Hence, the scriptural passages under question would thus not be authoritative for the adherents of faiths outside of Christianity, and thus one would not have reason to affirm its teaching. In a similar manner, one could also attempt to perform this task by pointing to a historical event that indicates (in an ‘indirect’ manner) that a certain individual was a prophet and was divine, and provided an atonement. That is, a Christian could point to the resurrection of Christ, which is taken (again in the Holy Bible) to be an indicator of the divinity of Jesus, and the efficacy of his atoning work.⁴ However, again, the adherents of Judaism and Islam would not affirm the veracity of these scriptural statements, given the fact that the propositional revelation expressed by this statement is not authoritative and, more importantly, given the fact that their authoritative propositional revelations explicitly disaffirm this event having happened.⁵ Hence, it seems to be the case that one must provide an alternative reason—independent of the Christian propositional revelation—in support of the claim that God has sent a prophet (with a propositional revelation) who is divine and will provide a means of atonement for humanity. Thus, doing this will provide grounds for one to believe in the veracity of the Christian Position (i.e., the ‘incarnation’ and ‘atonement’ extensions that are provided to (1)). Now, this independent, alternative reason can take the form of certain a priori reasons. At a general level, the way in which the terms ‘a priori reasons’ is being defined here is that reasons that are, on the one hand, independent of experience, yet, on the other hand, hold based on specific conditions that are dependent on certain experiences that support the position that is being argued for. That is, these reasons will be a priori in a certain sense by taking the following form: if x (e.g., God) exists and y (e.g., a world of sin and suffering) takes place—the condition of x existing and y holding are derivable from our experience—then z (e.g., God becoming incarnate) will necessarily happen—which is then the a priori entailment from conditions x and y being the case. Hence, the argument being formulated here is more accurately taken to be ‘partially’ a posteriori—concerning the existence and holding of certain conditions—and ‘partially’ a priori—concerning the entailments derivable from the existence and holding of certain conditions. Given this schema, we will now turn our attention to understanding the nature of these a priori reasons within the current context.

1.2. Reasons for the Christian Position

In the contemporary literature, an interesting set of a priori reasons have been provided by Richard Swinburne (1994, 2003, 2007) in support of the doctrine of the incarnation. More specifically, according to Swinburne, if there is a God, defined, at a minimum, as an essentially bodiless person who is omnipotent, omniscient, perfectly free, and perfectly good, and if we are situated in a world of sin and suffering, we have three a priori reasons for expecting that this God would ‘become incarnate’ (and ‘provide an atonement’),⁶ which can be stated succinctly as follows:

(3) (A Priori)	God would send a divine prophet in order to share in human suffering, provide a means of atonement and theological and moral instruction.
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In Swinburne’s thought, God would seek to become incarnate in order to dispense an obligation to share in human suffering, to provide a reparational sacrifice that can be utilised by humans to make an atonement and to provide theological and moral instruction by living a perfect human life. Swinburne takes each of these reasons to be, at a minimum, an ‘equal best action’. However, he intuitively believes that the first action is indeed a ‘unique best action’, and the second and the third actions might plausibly be so as well.

An action is a unique best action if it is an overriding action—which is an action that is ‘sensible’ (i.e., acting on good judgment), ‘appropriate’ (i.e., right for a particular situation), and ‘reasonable/rational’ (i.e., in accord with reason) (Swinburne 1994). That is, taking all reasons into account, it is better to perform the action than not to perform it, due to there being no other action that has these specific features (i.e., no other action that is as sensible, appropriate, rational/reasonable to do). Thus, by an action having these specific features, God would be inclined to perform the action, if he is unimpeded by non-rational forces to choose to perform a less good action (Swinburne 1994). However, as God is essentially perfectly free, he would not be so impeded, and as he is also essentially omniscient, he will know the moral truth value of an action resulting in him inevitably performing a unique best action if there is one (and perform no bad actions). Hence, any action that is a unique best action will be inevitably performed by God—in other words, this action would be an *act of essence* (i.e., an action necessarily stemming from the essence (or nature) of God).⁷ Thus, taking the three reasons together as one action, Swinburne believes that there is strong reason to believe that if there is a God, as a unique best action, he will become incarnate in order to identify with our suffering and for at least one of the other two reasons. One can ask, however, an important question: why did God, due to human sin and suffering, choose to address these issues by performing the action of becoming incarnate rather than any other action? Plausibly, the answer would be that each of these actions is a unique best action and thus would require God to inevitably perform them. However, it seems to be the case that it is, in fact, the *actions* of addressing human sin and suffering, which are indeed unique best actions, and not necessarily the *way* of God addressing them through an incarnation. That is, it could be the case that it is a unique best action for God to share in human suffering by experiencing this suffering in an un-incarnated state (through, for example, his ‘omnsubjectivity’).⁸ Which would enable God to subjectively experience the suffering that he allows humans to endure, even without having become incarnate. Secondly, it could also be the case that it is a unique best action for God to deal with human sin, and provide theological and moral instruction, by providing a means for an atonement and a life that is morally exemplary by sending another individual to do these things rather than him becoming incarnate. As it stands, these alternative ways of addressing human sin and suffering are as equally plausible as the way favoured by Swinburne, and thus should at least be taken to be equally best actions alongside that of God becoming incarnate. However, as Swinburne (2003, p. 34) himself writes, when actions are equally as good as each other, “one must be $1/n$ ”. In addition, where there is an infinite number of incompatible good acts, each less good than some other one—which could be the case in our situation, where there are countless ways in which God could have, in fact, dealt with human sin and suffering—it will be, as Swinburne (2003, p. 34) further writes, “equally probable that he will do any one such act, and so the probability that he will do a particular one will be infinitesimally small”. If these three reasons do not, *contra* Swinburne, render the action of becoming incarnate as a unique best action, but simply as an equal best action among an infinite set of other possible actions, then one has not been provided with good reason to believe a priori that God would indeed become incarnate. Though the push back from Swinburne on this point would plausibly be that the actions of God, in an un-incarnated state, sharing in human suffering and him having sent someone to address the issues presented by human sinning, are not, in fact, unique best actions, or even equal best actions. According to Swinburne, for the first issue, the obligation to share in human suffering cannot be dispensed secretly, as he writes, “the sharing needs to be not entirely incognito. The parent needs not merely to share the child’s suffering, but to show him that he is doing so” (Swinburne 2003, p. 45). Furthermore, regarding the second issue, God’s rights, according to Swinburne (2003, pp. 42, 48), are restricted for the manner in how he is to deal with human sin, as he also writes:

God has no right to send (or permit) someone else to do this job for him . . . The officer has no right to command (or even permit) a private to fall on a grenade to save other

soldiers if he could fall on it himself. God cannot command or even permit some volunteer to undertake so serious an act. If it is to be done, he must do it himself.

Thus, according to Swinburne (2003), God would not have the right to ask any other individual to perform the actions of dealing with human sin and thus must do this himself by becoming incarnate. However, a further obvious question here: for the first issue, why could God not simply tell us that he has (and is) sharing with human suffering through his omnisubjectivity? In so doing, the obligation—and the need for it having been fulfilled by God—would be made available to humans. Furthermore, for the second issue, one could also ask why God does not have the right to deal with human sin in the way that he pleases? As, plausibly, taking Swinburne’s analogy as the basis of his argument against the above suggestion, the general would clearly lack the right to do this due to the fact that, though he (or she) has the authoritative position of being a general, he (or she) also fulfils the more basic role of being a soldier, which would be a role that they share equally with their fellow subordinate comrades. In addition, there is thus an expectation that the general would be required to perform the function of a soldier in the same manner that their subordinates would if the situation calls for it. The general would not have the right to dispense with the obligations that are binding on his (or her) role as a soldier. However, would the same right be binding on two individuals who do not fulfil the same role and thus have a clear and distinct authoritative status distinction, such as a King and his subjects? In this case, the existence of rights and duties binding the King to perform the same actions as his subjects are indeed more blurred. Moreover, it is also plausibly the case that the King would actually have the right to command his subjects to perform an action that he himself could do. Thus, given this, and the fact that the distinction between God and human beings is clearly more akin to the latter example than the former, Swinburne’s analogy does not seem to provide much reason in support of it not being an equal best action for God to instruct another individual to address human sin. Thus, unless further reason can be given in support of the action of becoming incarnate, and that action alone, being a unique best action, which would result in all other actions being less-than-best, we are still left in a situation of not having been provided with any reasons to privilege the action of becoming incarnate as one which God would use to address the problem of human sin and suffering.

One must thus look elsewhere for some other a priori reasons or argument in support of the Christian Position. In doing this, however, one does not have to make a wholesale rejection of Swinburne’s argument; rather, one can still utilise certain strands of Swinburne’s thought—specifically that of his conception of the ‘nature of God’, ‘revelation’ and the ‘human condition’—and place them within a different theoretical structure,⁹ which will provide the needed a priori reasons in favour of the Christian Position. In proceeding forward to achieve this end, we can take the following a priori reason to be a potential candidate in support of the Christian Position:

(3) (A Priori*)	On the basis of the nature of God and the human condition, we should expect (with a level of certainty) that God will send a divine and atoning prophet into the world in order to realise his ultimate aim for creation: flourishing.
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This a priori reason—which, when further unpacked in an ‘informal’ manner,¹⁰ we can refer to as the ‘Flourishment Argument’—can be understood more precisely as follows: all of the Ars—Judaism, Christianity and Islam—affirm the fact of God being an omnipotent entity,¹¹ and thus is an entity that can actualise any state of affairs that is logically possible for him to actualise. Hence, as nothing external to God can impede his action, he will always achieve his actualisation goals so long as he has formed an intention to do so. That is, whether God does, in fact, actualise a given state of affairs that is logically possible for him to do will depend on whether he chooses to do so or not. Now, as noted earlier, God, as an omnipotent entity, would also know the nature of the alternative actions that he

can choose from, which would result in him being omniscient and perfectly free—that is, him knowing the truth of all proposition and being free from any non-rational influence determining the choices that he makes. Furthermore, being omniscient and perfectly free, God would also be perfectly good in the sense that he will always perform the best action (or kind of action), if there is one, many good actions and no bad actions (Swinburne 2016). More specifically, given the exemplification of omniscience, God would know the nature of each available action that he can choose from and thus would possess knowledge of whether each action is good or bad, or is better than some incompatible action. Moreover, in recognising an action as good, God would have some motivation to perform that action, and in recognising an action as being better than another action, God would have an even greater motivation to perform it (Swinburne 2016). Hence, given the exemplification of perfect freedom, if God is situated in a scenario in which there is a unique best action (or best kind of action) for him to perform, then God will inevitably perform that action (or kind of action)—that is, as noted previously, it is an act of essence (i.e., a necessary act of his nature). Now, how one can acquire knowledge concerning God’s intentions is by assessing whether the purported intended act is a morally good act. That is, given our understanding of God’s perfect goodness, we can ascertain knowledge concerning the type of aims and actions that God would fulfil and perform—with an action that seems to be an overriding action (i.e., a sensible, appropriate, reasonable/rational action) being one that we can judge that God would inevitably perform. Plausibly, on the basis of his perfect goodness, a central aim that God would seek to fulfil concerning human beings, is that of what we can term his ‘flourishment aim’,¹² which comes in three strands that can be stated more succinctly as follows:

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| (4) | (Flourishment Aim) | (a) | <i>Personal Flourishment</i> : God aims for humans to flourish personally, to the maximum level, by participating in the basic goods. |
| | | (b) | <i>Creative Flourishment</i> : God aims for humans to flourish creatively, to the maximum level, by participating as a ground of morality and sharer of goodness. |
| | | (c) | <i>Relational Flourishment</i> : God aims for humans to flourish relationally, to the maximum level, by their participation in an everlasting relationship of love with him. |
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Based on the inherent goodness of this aim for humans to flourish in three ways: personally, creatively and relationally, God would inevitably seek to bring them about—that is, it would be a unique best action for God to bring these types of human flourishing about and thus God would inevitably seek to provide the opportunity for humans to live personally flourishing lives, participate in the creative role that he exercises in spreading goodness in our world, and being in an everlasting loving relationship with him. Therefore, what will be argued for here is that of the conditional: *if* these aims are to be realised, then there is a requirement for God to also inevitably perform the action of sending a divine and atoning prophet. In addition to the (personal, creative and relational) flourishing of humans, it would also be a unique best action for God to perform this further action on the basis of what, following Swinburne (1989), can be called the ‘human condition’. More specifically, assuming the human condition—and the fact that, as all of the ARs affirm, God primarily interacts with humans through his prophets—God will need to send a prophet, with a propositional revelation, who is of a certain type: a divine prophet, and who performs a certain type of action: providing an atonement. Now, before we proceed on to show why this is, in fact, the case, it will be important to further flesh out the human condition that will then be taken on board as a (plausible) working assumption.

The condition of humanity, according to Swinburne (1989), is such that human individuals, on the basis of having ‘libertarian free will’, are inclined towards wrongdoing, with

this inclination being inherited genetically and socially. We can state the human condition more succinctly as follows:

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| (5) (Human Condition) | The condition of humanity is such that each individual human with libertarian free will has genetically and socially inherited a proneness to wrongdoing. |
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In understanding (5) more fully, one first, as [Swinburne \(1989\)](#) emphasises, needs to draw a distinction between two different types of good action: ‘obligations’, which are good actions that one has a duty to perform (or a duty not to perform); and ‘supererogatory’ actions, which are good actions that are non-obligatory. When an individual performs a supererogatory action (such as falling on a grenade to save a comrade), praise is due to the person. However, if one fails to perform a supererogatory action, that person is not blameworthy, as no wrongdoing has been performed ([Swinburne 1997](#)). Whereas, if an individual fails to perform an obligatory action (or performs an action which they are obligated not to perform), then that person has wronged, and are blameworthy for not performing that action (or for performing it)—that is, they are blameworthy for having performed wrongdoing. The notion of wrongdoing, according to [Swinburne \(1989\)](#), can itself be divided in two ways: first, objective wrongdoing, which is a failure of one in fulfilling their obligations (whether one knows of this or not). Thus, for example, an individual performs an objectively wrong act if they fail to educate their children properly, even if they do not believe that they have a duty to educate their children, or if they believe that sending them to a certain school is educating their child properly when, unknown to them, the school is, in fact, totally incompetent in achieving this aim ([Swinburne 1989](#)).

Second, subjective wrongdoing corresponds to failure to try to fulfil one’s obligations. Thus, for example, if an individual believes that they have a duty to educate their children and neglects to fulfil that end, then they have performed a subjectively wrong action, even if in some way they end up acquiring a good education through the agency of someone else ([Swinburne 1989](#)). The framework established by these distinctions can now provide grounds for understanding the human condition as follows: humans have ‘libertarian free will’; libertarian free will can be understood, as noted by [Swinburne \(2004, p. 113\)](#), as the “freedom to choose whether or not to bring about some effect (such as e), where the totality of causes that influence him (making it harder or easier for him to make a particular choice) do not totally determine how he will choose”. In making free choices, humans are influenced in the formation of their purposes by their desires, which are in-built inclinations to perform one action over another ([Swinburne 2008](#)). Human desires are such that they are formed due partly to one’s physiology (e.g., the desires for food, drink, sleep, sex, etc.) and also partly due to one’s societal context (e.g., the desires for fame and fortune) ([Swinburne 2008](#)). Alongside the desires experienced by a human person in forming their purposes to make a free choice, one is also presented with reasons for choosing one action over another. However, as [Swinburne \(1989, p. 46\)](#) notes, for one to “recognize a reason for doing A is only to have an inclination to do A, other things being equal. However, other things may not be equal. There may be other and better reasons for not doing the action”. For someone to believe that there is an overall reason for them to perform one action over another is for them to believe that this action is, as noted previously, the most sensible, appropriate, or reasonable/rational action to perform. However, despite the weight of reason being in favour of one performing that specific action, one might still not perform that action, because they yield to non-rational forces (i.e., desires) that influence one in forming their purpose. Yet, if one believes that there is a balance of reason in support of performing an action, and thus they are inclined to perform that action, then they would do it if they are left unimpeded by their desires ([Swinburne 1997](#)). It thus follows from this, as [Swinburne \(1997, p. 92\)](#) notes, “that if an agent is to have the option of doing what he regards as less good or bad actions—and so, on the assumption that he has true moral beliefs, doing less good or bad actions—he must be subject to a stronger desire to do an alternative action.

(The alternative may, of course, simply be the action of ‘doing nothing’). Hence, only by an individual having such desires can they then have the free choice of whether to pursue the best action or not to do so. Thus, free choice can only arise in two situations: one in which an individual has a choice between two equally best actions that they also desire equally. Second, and more importantly, the other situation is one in which an individual has a choice between two actions, one of which the individual desires to perform more than the other, but where they believe the other one to be better to perform (i.e., there is more reason to perform it in the sense of it being the more sensible, reasonable/rational action). This situation, as Swinburne (1997) terms it, is the situation of ‘temptation’.

Temptation itself can also come in three forms—where the desire to perform an action other than the one that the individual believes to be best is of a strength that is greater than the latter constitutes a desire to do: first, a less good action, second, a bad but not wrong action, and third, a wrong action. In these three forms, individuals have different degrees of free will in performing an action, where the desire to perform a less-than-best action, bad but not wrong action, or wrong action may be only marginally stronger than their desire to perform the best or good action, in this situation, it would not require a great amount of effort on the part of an individual for them to conform to the good. However, when the desire to perform the less-than-best action, the bad but not wrong action, or the wrong action is almost irresistible, a great amount of effort would be required for one to conform to the good. Thus, given all of this, for a human person to have libertarian freedom to choose between what is believed to be good and what is believed to be bad would require that the individual have a strong desire for the latter. That is, without this temptation—a strong desire to do what is bad—then one would not have a free choice between what is good and what is bad—in short, free moral choice requires that one has an awareness of the good and bad, and a desire to perform the latter (Swinburne 2008). Thus, reality is such that free human choices are made in light of certain moral beliefs (i.e., beliefs about what is morally good to do) and under the influence of desires that incline individuals to perform actions that have strengths that are independent of the believed moral worth of those actions—these desires as inclinations thus make it easier for an individual to perform a certain action (Swinburne 1989).

Now, each individual can act at a specific time to gradually form their character; however, as Swinburne notes (Swinburne 1989, p. 111), “nature and nurture, our genes and our upbringing that is, begin to form our character before ever we can ourselves try to mould it; and as it forms it makes it harder or easier for us to act to change it according to the sort of character we acquire”. Humans are different from one another in many physical and psychological ways, yet there is a shared feature among them all concerning their desires—namely, the strongest desires of humans are related to their believed enjoyment (Swinburne 1989). That is, as Swinburne (1989, p. 111) further writes, “The bodily desires for food, drink, and comfort and the more sophisticated desires for power and admiration, love and company which evolve in us independently of language and culture (as we can see from the fact that the higher animals also have such desires) are self-centred desires, desires centred on oneself receiving bodily satisfaction and certain attitudes of respect and affection and obedience from others”.¹³ Given this, human desires are often in conflict—in the sense that if an individual’s desire is fulfilled, another individual’s cannot be. Such conflicting desires are not learnt—that is, they are not of nurture (i.e., the environment) but of nature (i.e., genes), as is evidenced by their existence in babies and other animals. This conflict stems from the basic feature of human desire that each individual desires only that which he believes that they would themselves enjoy (Swinburne 1989). In addition, while two individuals might have as the object of their desire the same thing, it is often the case that only one of them would have the right to it. Yet, the selfish desires of humans are of a strength that they often influence individuals to satisfy them, even when it is wrong for them to do this.

Hence, humans thus have a *proneness* not only to performing generally bad actions, but also a *proneness to (objective and subjective) wrongdoing* (i.e., the proneness to performing

an action that is morally blameworthy). As human desires are often selfish and operate in situations where selfishness is objectively wrong, humans are subject to wrong desires that often lead them to spontaneously perform actions that are objectively wrong (Swinburne 1989). Moreover, as Swinburne (1989, p. 113) notes, “a desire is combined with the belief that the action desired is wrong, we get an inclination to do what is believed wrong”. Thus, as it is plausibly the case that humans are subject to ‘weakness of will’, the consequence of this is that individuals would not only do wrong actions spontaneously, but will also perform many intentionally—that is, subjectively—wrong actions. In addition, this proneness to wrongdoing is further reinforced by individuals refusing to acknowledge to themselves their moral beliefs, or refusing to discover the consequences of their actions and coming to the realisation that they are in this state. Thus, for example, as Swinburne (1989, p. 113) writes, “This is the process which produces the wickedness of the obedient official who organizes the Holocaust. He hides from himself the consequences of his actions (he doesn’t know, he says, what happens to the Jews whose transport he has been arranging), and he pretends to himself that he does not have obligations to any wider community, acknowledging only his duty to his superiors”. The temptation for self-deceit—that is, for one to conceal from themselves the moral obligations that they have—is an evident fact of human living, and is the specific process that transforms mere moral weakness (such as that of one failing to perform an action on the moral obligations that they acknowledge) into what would be deliberate wickedness, if it were not for the individual being successful in deceiving themselves concerning the moral nature of the action (Swinburne 1989). Hence, for the propensity for wrongdoing, it is necessary for there to be moral belief and a self-centred desire, and the transmission of the former (i.e., moral belief) is a cultural phenomenon, whereas the transmission of the latter (i.e., the proneness to wrongdoing) is biological, through genetic transmission.¹⁴ For the moral beliefs of individuals, the specific beliefs that are held by individuals are often limited by which ones are transmitted within society—and thus, if society fails (deliberately or through ignorance) to teach the correct moral distinctions (such as what constitutes morally obligatory, wrong, or good or bad actions)—it may fail to commend courses of conduct that are the natural extrapolations from these distinctions (Swinburne 1989). Hence, by society doing this—that is, teaching an inadequate or incorrect morality—society will fail to provide individuals with reasons to pursue the good and will provide them with reason to pursue the bad (Swinburne 1989). Therefore, false moral beliefs will then strengthen wrong desires and increase objective wrongdoing. Furthermore, false moral teaching may also lead to individuals having a general disregard for the moral teaching of society, in cases where this teaching conflicts with the individual’s moral intuitions, and thus, in combination with their own doubts about their own moral intuitions, this may contribute to the weakening of the will of humans and thus again increase subjective wrongdoing. The proneness to wrongdoing may have its power strengthened or weakened, not only by false moral teaching, but also by bad examples. That is, as Swinburne (1989, p. 115) writes:

Even if the society’s moral teaching is correct and so regarded by some man, it may be treated with such casualness and levity that the desire to imitate other men which would otherwise reinforce pursuit of the good now acts in a contrary direction, making it easier to yield to temptation. Conversely the power of good example is of course enormous.

Therefore, the central aspect of the proneness to wrongdoing is transmitted genetically; however, the societal environment of an individual can play an important role in determining the strength of its effects. An ideal education system would work to help teach and provide examples that can aid the process of weakening the bad desires of humans and reinforcing good ones. Yet, this type of ideal system of education is indeed rare, and there is a reason for this being so—namely, that of the genetically transmitted proneness to wrongdoing (Swinburne 1989). As individuals are prone to yield to bad desires—due to their genetic inheritance—they are also prone to yield to desires that lead to them failing to take on board ideas that will lead to their morality being a less selfish one with respect

to society, and thus they are also prone to yielding to desires that may lead them to treat morality with unseriousness, thereby becoming a bad example to others (Swinburne 1989). In summary, the human condition is thus one in which libertarian free creatures such as human beings have an inherent proneness to wrongdoing that centres on the badness of desire, the weakness of will, and false moral beliefs, with this genetically transmitted proneness to wrongdoing thus producing and encouraging a socially transmitted proneness to wrongdoing as well. We can thus illustrate through Figure 1. the working assumption that will be made here concerning the human condition focused on the possession of libertarian freedom (and the needed temptation for this), leading to humans having a (genetically and socially inherited) proneness to wrongdoing:

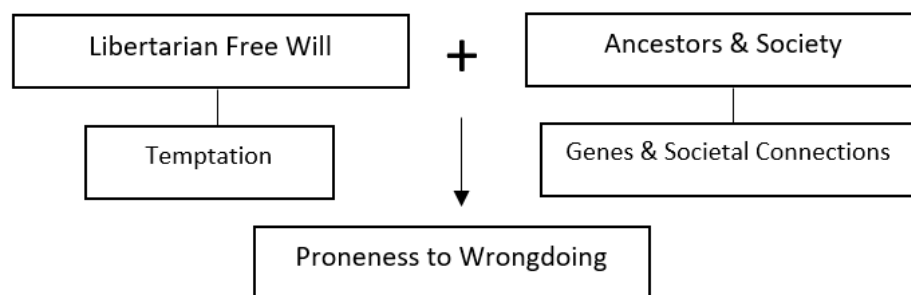


Figure 1. Human condition.

Hence, on the basis of this working assumption that the nature of humans is construed in this way, the central focus of this article will be on showing how, given that it is a unique best action that God fulfil his flourishing aim, and that humans have inherited the condition detailed above, it is also a unique best action for God to send a prophet to the world, with a propositional revelation, who is divine and provides a means of atonement for humanity. In addition, one therefore has good a priori reason to believe in the veracity of the Christian position. At a more specific level, the manner in which this conclusion will be reached will be by utilising three theories in the field of contemporary normative/applied ethics: the moral theories of natural law provided by John Finnis and Exemplarism provided by Linda Zagzebski, and the theory of *agápēic* love provided by Alexander Pruss.¹⁵ These theories, in combination, will ultimately provide a framework in which one can thus understand the veracity of (3), and thus the truth of the conception of the ARs that is provided by the Christian Position. Now, in proceeding, our constructive task will be performed in a step-wise manner over three phases: first, phase one focuses on introducing the theory of natural law, and applying it within a theological context to provide a reason for God to send a (foundational) prophet into the world—whereby, through this action, God will be able to achieve his personal aim (i.e., the aim for humans to personally flourish to the maximum level). Second, phase two focuses on explicating the theory of Exemplarism and applying it within a theological context to provide a reason for God to send a prophet into the world that is divine—whereby, through this action, God will be able to achieve his creative aim (i.e., the aim for humans to creatively flourish to the maximum level). Third, phase three focuses on detailing the notion of *agápē* and applying it within the present theological context to provide a reason for God to send a divine prophet that will provide a means of atonement for humanity—whereby, through this action, God will be able to achieve his relational aim (i.e., the aim for humans to relationally flourish to the maximum level).

Thus, the plan is as follows: in Section 2 ('Personal Flourishment: The Necessity of Prophet'), I provide an explication of the theory of natural law provided by John Finnis, and then apply it to the task of showing how the maximisation of human personal flourishing requires that God sends a prophet. In Section 3 ('Creative Flourishment: The Divinity of the Prophet'), I provide an explication of the notion of Exemplarism provided by Linda Zagzebski, and then apply it to the task of showing how the maximisation of

creative personal flourishing requires that God sends a divine prophet. Then, in Section 4 ('Relational Flourishment: The Atonement of the Prophet'), I provide an explication of the notion of *agápē* provided by Alexander Pruss, and then apply it to the task of showing how the maximisation of relational flourishing requires that God sends an atoning prophet. After this section, there will be a final section ('Conclusion') summarising the above results and concluding the article.

2. Personal Flourishment: The Necessity of the Prophet

The first phase of our constructive task focuses on the aim of *Personal Flourishment*—which we can term God's 'personal aim', in order to emphasise the fact that this aim is for the personal, or individual, flourishing of human beings. This aim, once further precisified, will be shown to require God to send a prophet into the world, with a propositional revelation, in order for this personal aim to be fulfilled. The specific precisification of this personal aim can now be re-stated within the present context as follows:

(6) (Personal Aim)	God aims for humans to flourish personally, to the maximum level, by participating in the basic goods, in line with the requirements of practical reasonableness.
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For God's personal aim, God desires for humans to flourish personally by living lives that, in conformity with the requirements of practical reason, enable them to further participate in the basic goods. However, given the human condition, the realisation of this aim requires that God send a prophet with a propositional revelation that will inform individuals on how to best do this, and to motivate them to achieve this end. At a philosophical level, this aim can be precisified in several ways through different ethical theories; however, it will be helpful to further detail the central elements of this aim, by utilising the ethical theory of 'natural law',¹⁶ which will provide a theoretical basis for further understanding why God would be required to send a prophet into the world with a propositional revelation.

2.1. The Nature of Natural Law: Basic Goods and Practical Reasonableness

According to John Finnis (2011, p. 23), the theory of natural law provides a means for one to formulate a rational basis for action grounded on "a set of basic practical principles which indicate the basic forms of human flourishing as goods to be pursued and realized, and which are in one way or another used by everyone who considers what to do". Within a natural law framework, the primary purpose of life is centred on human flourishing through self-determined, practically reasoned decisions that lead one to participate in the 'basic goods'. In understanding this further, Finnis (2011, pp. 59–60) believes that there is a distinction to be drawn between 'theoretical reason'—reasoning that concerns factual and descriptive matters about reality—and 'practical reason'—reasoning that describes how one must act within reality. Practical reason begins with *self-evident* knowledge of the basic goods whose reality is unreasonable to deny—such that if one was to deny them, then one would not be able to make decisions about what is best for their life. Thus, as Finnis (2011, p. 65, square parenthesis added) writes, the basic goods "cannot be demonstrated, but equally [they need] no demonstration". Hence, on the basis of this preliminary characterisation of the notion of practical reasoning and the basic goods, one can thus understand the theory of natural law more succinctly as follows:

(7) (Natural Law)	(i) <i>Basic Goods</i> : There is a set of seven basic goods that constitute the various forms of human flourishing that are to be pursued and realised.
	(ii) <i>Practical Reasonableness</i> : There is a set of nine basic methodological requirements of practical reasonableness, which constitute a life plan that enables an individual to pursue and realise the basic goods.

Focusing on (i) of (7), at a general level, a basic good is a specific value that is an aspect of an individual's well-being that can be participated in, and is to be pursued as an objective, universal and intrinsic good. These goods are universal in the sense that they are applicable to all human individuals and cultures at all times. In addition, these goods are basic in the sense of them not being inferred from something else, as stated by [Finnis \(2011, p. 66\)](#), "no value can be deduced or otherwise inferred from a fact or set of facts". Thus, the basic goods are good in and of themselves and are to be sought for their own sake—with the specific seven basic goods being that of *Life, Knowledge, Play, Aesthetic Experience, Sociability, Practical Reasonableness* and *Religion*. We can now understand the nature of these basic goods in more detail as follows: first, the basic good of 'Life', involves everything that is needed to allow a human being to make free, self-determined decisions about their existence. That is, it includes physical and mental health and also freedom from pain caused by illness or injury. Thus, as [Finnis \(2011, p. 86\)](#) writes, "the first basic value, corresponding to the drive for self-preservation, is the value of life". The term 'life' signifies every aspect of vitality (*vita, life*), which puts a human being in good shape for self-determination. Thus, the good of life here would include physical and mental health, and freedom from illness or injury. Second, the basic good of 'Knowledge' involves the good of speculative knowledge—theoretical knowledge that seeks truth—which is a good that is sought for its own sake. Thus, this good would include gaining knowledge about areas such as science and philosophy to other areas such as history and current affairs. Third, the basic good of 'Play' focuses on the performance of actions for their own sake and enjoyment, which has value, in a self-evident manner, as [Finnis \(2011, p. 87\)](#) notes, as "each one of us can see the point of engaging in performances which have no point beyond the performance itself". Hence, the good of play would include solitary or social tasks, and intellectual or physical activities, that are of a strenuous or relaxed nature. Fourth, the basic good of 'Aesthetic Experience', involves the appreciation of beauty, which can be either outside of oneself—leading to action—or the internal appreciation of that beauty. Thus, this specific good can be found and enjoyed in wider creation or be the active appreciation of some work of a significant and satisfying nature. Fifth, 'Sociability' is the ability of an individual to live alongside other individuals in a peaceful manner, or the forming of an intimate relationship with another individual where one acts for another individual's purposes or well-being. Hence, the good of sociability will be realised minimally in the peace and harmony established among persons and can be found in different forms within the wide scale of human communities, ranging up to its strongest form in the development of full friendships. Sixth, 'Practical Reasonableness' involves an authentic and reasonable self-determination that focuses on seeking an intelligent and reasonable order to one's actions and life. That is, as [Finnis \(2011, p. 88\)](#) notes, it is the process and ability to bring "one's own intelligence to bear effectively (in practical reasoning that issues in action) on the problems of choosing one's actions and life-style and shaping one's own character". Hence, the good of practical reasonableness, at an internal level, involves one ordering their emotions and dispositions, and, at an external level, it involves a realisation of an individual's self-determined evaluations, preferences and hopes. Thus, for one to participate in this basic good is for one to actively work out how they are to participate in the other basic goods by guiding one's choice of commitments and the projects that one seeks to undertake. Seventh, 'Religion' is the basic good that involves reflecting on the metaphysical aspect of reality where one actively seeks to realise that there is a distinct order to reality that is beyond everyday experience and thus, this raises, as

Finnis (2011, p. 89) states, “questions of the origins of cosmic order and of human freedom and reason”. Thus, with the good of religion, one seeks to understand the source of the existence, order and meaning beyond humanity, and to come to a realisation of if one’s life and actions are in conformity to it.¹⁷

This is the nature of the seven basic goods, which, as a set, are taken to be exhaustive in the sense that other objectives or forms of good are simply ways (or combinations of ways) of pursuing and realising one (or more) of the seven basic goods.¹⁸ Finnis (2011, p. 92) summarises this well in stating “those seven purposes are all of the basic purposes of human action, and that any other purpose which you or I might recognize and pursue will turn out to represent, or be constituted of, some aspects(s) of some or all of them”. The seven basic goods are thus to be conceived of as self-evident such that their veracity, as Finnis (2011, p. 59) writes, is “obvious. . . even unquestionable”. That is, the basic goods are considered to be self-evident in the manner that every reasonable individual would assent to the inherent value of these basic goods as the objects of human striving and flourishing. Moreover, these goods are basic due to their irreducibility where none of these goods can be reduced to one of the other goods, as Finnis (2011, p. 92) notes, none of the basic goods “can be analytically reduced to being merely an aspect of any of the others, or to being merely instrumental in the pursuit of any of the others . . . each one, when we focus on it, can be reasonably regarded as the most important”. Hence, because of this, there is no hierarchy of goods where an individual basic good might be regarded as more important than another. While it is true that certain life events might shift an individual’s focus to prioritise one of the goods and thus treat it as superior to the others, nevertheless, each of the goods is as fundamental as the others, and thus there is no priority of value in an objective sense concerning them. Furthermore, the basic goods are pre-moral—in that they do not presuppose any moral judgement in the sense of being moral principles that dictate what ought to happen. Rather, it is through the basic good of ‘practical reason’ that one is provided with a structure for the pursuit of the other basic goods. That is, as noted by Finnis (2011, p. 442), “The basic practical principles pick out the basic values as *goods and to be pursued* (pursuit-worthy)—that is, they are normative principles which, in informing us, *direct us*”. More specifically, as noted previously, ‘practical reasonableness’ is the basic good that an individual participates in by making rational decisions that aim at maximising one’s participation in the other basic goods. Practical reason is thus the type of reasoning that enables one to make decisions about how to act and order their lives in correspondence to the basic goods—such that the basic goods explain *why* individuals undertake certain activities in their lives (e.g., preserving life or gaining knowledge) and the nine requirements of practical reason detail *how* an individual is to partake in these activities. The basic goods thus acquire moral force, as the ‘natural (moral) law’, once they are put into practice through certain actions and projects undertaken by an individual, as Finnis (2011, p. 443) writes, “Though they only have a moral force or moral normativity once they are modulated and regulated by practical reasonableness, they do have that force when so regulated and so are not merely pre-moral but also—so to speak, eventually (and always incipiently or *virtualiter*)—moral”. We can thus illustrate this point here through Figure 2., concerning the transition of the basic goods from pre-moral to moral principles, through practical reasonableness:

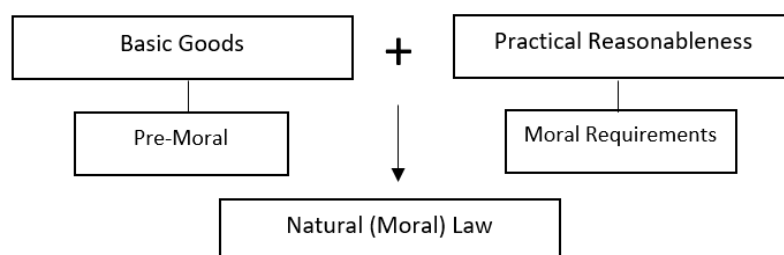


Figure 2. Natural law.

Therefore, this transition is made possible by the methodological requirements of practical reasonableness that are expressed through nine basic and self-evident practical principles:¹⁹ *Coherent Plan, Arbitrary Value Preference, Arbitrary Person Preference, Detachment and Commitment, Efficiency Within Reason and Conscience*. At a more precise level, we can understand the nature of these requirements in more detail as follows: first, 'Coherent Plan' expresses the importance of having a coherent plan for one's life, where one does not go through life living merely from moment to moment but structures their life as a coherent whole where the activities that are participated in are harmonised in a manner that allows their whole life to participate in the basic goods. Second, 'Arbitrary Value Preference' expresses the fact that one must not actually preference one good over another. Third, 'Arbitrary Person Preference' expresses the importance of not showing preference to one individual over another in a manner that does not enable them to participate in the basic goods. Fourth, 'Detachment and Commitment' express two complementary positions: the importance of one not becoming overly invested in one activity to such an extent that this activity is undertaken even if it does not allow for one to participate in the goods. In addition, the importance of one being committed to an activity in a way whereby one should strive to complete it—and thus not carelessly abandon the project when it proves challenging. Fifth, 'Efficiency Within Reason' expresses the requirement that one must consider—to an extent determined by reason—the specific consequences of their actions such that one can choose to perform the action that provides the most efficient way for them to participate in the basic goods. Seventh, 'Basic Value Respect' expresses the requirement that one must not choose to perform an action that damages or forestalls an individual from participating in one or more of the basic goods. Eighth, 'Common Good' expresses the requirement that one must promote the good, through cooperation, collaboration, and coordination, with everyone within their community, where everyone has a right to participate in the basic goods in the manner that they see fit and their equal validity for all the activities that one partakes of. Hence, given these conditions, organisation and an authority structure are needed in a community where every individual is able to participate in the basic goods at any time and in the specific way that they choose. Ninth, 'Conscience' expresses the requirement that one must follow their conscience in situations when it reasons that a specific action is required and must be performed. In summary, humans (personally) flourish through their participation in the universal, self-evident, and equally fundamental basic goods—with the requirements of practical reason being of great importance in determining how individuals must act in order for them to achieve this end of participation, and thus ultimately flourish as humans. Now that we have detailed the nature of the ethical theory of natural law, it will be important to see how, in assuming the holding true of this theory in the world, God would seek to fulfil his personal aim by performing the unique best action of sending a prophet with a propositional revelation, who would, therefore, be able to ultimately aid humans in maximising their personal flourishing.

2.2. Fulfilment of Personal Aim: Natural Law and a Prophet

As noted previously, God is to be conceived of as an omnipotent entity—which, when further fleshed out, entails the fact of him being an omniscient, perfectly free and perfectly good creator and sustainer of all things. As the creator (and sustainer) of all things, God has made certain conscious entities (i.e., humans) with specific capacities that enable them to exercise their self-determination as libertarian free creatures. Given this specific aspect of the human condition, it seems to be the case that it would be the most sensible, appropriate, reasonable/rational action for God to allow these entities to personally flourish and thrive as a species—rather than them not doing this, and to seek a maximisation of this. More fully: personal flourishing centres on the participation of humans in the basic goods. In addition, it is thus a unique best action for God to fulfil his personal aim of humans personally flourishing, to the maximum level possible, by participating fully in the basic goods. To motivate individuals to focus their life on seeking this participation, God could

order reality to be such that there is a potential for those who fully participate in the basic goods to continue to do so after their physical death in the form of them living a supremely worthwhile life in Heaven. That is, one can take it to be the case that participating in the basic goods is a *minimum* requirement for participating in a worthwhile life with God in Heaven, such that it is thus a *necessary* (though not sufficient) requirement for one participating in this to be able to be rewarded with the preservation of their life in the place (or state) of Heaven (and thus to ward off a life spent in Hell).²⁰ Now, God could have created individuals already formed with characters that are inevitably inclined to participate in the basic goods and help others to do so; however, it is indeed a good thing, given their possession of libertarian freedom, that God should provide individuals with the opportunity to choose—in an undetermined manner—what type of person they are to be and what type of life they are to have (i.e., that of a life of personal flourishing or not)—which, through their own deliberate choice, helps them to form a character and life that is suitable for Heaven. Hence, based on the unique goodness of God performing the action of providing individuals with this opportunity, he would thus seek to create individuals who can then freely choose to pursue the path of personal flourishing. That is, part of God’s ‘personal aim’ would be for humans to personally flourish by living lives that participate in the seven basic goods, in line with the nine requirements of practical reason. These basic goods, as noted previously, are self-evident, and thus knowledge concerning them is easily accessible. Yet, given the other aspect of the human condition—namely, proneness to wrongdoing, where humans have an inclination towards performing bad or wrong actions, and hide from themselves the moral worth of their actions—if individuals are to truly have the opportunity to make the choice of how to fully participate in these goods, then they will need further information. We can thus illustrate the position reached here through Figure 3., where the personal flourishing of humans is to be had by them participating in the basic goods, as expressed through the nine requirements of practical reasonableness (where ‘proneness’ stands for ‘proneness to wrongdoing’):

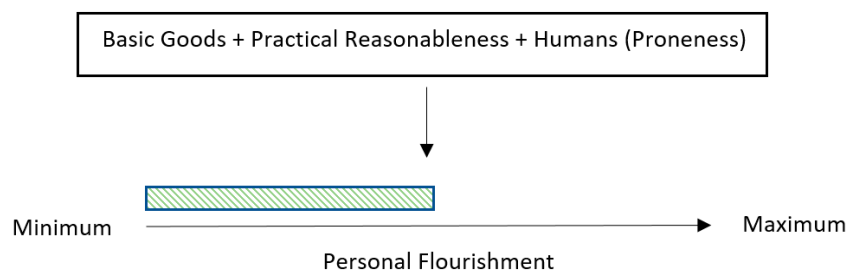


Figure 3. Personal flourishing (i).

Participation in the basic goods, in line with the nine requirements, provides a means for one to personally flourish. However, the level of flourishing that is to be attained by humans, given their condition, can indeed be increased. Thus, in addition, God, as a perfectly good being, would seek, through performing a unique best action, to help humans to maximise their personal flourishing. It would be a unique best action for God to aid humans in their condition towards maximum personal flourishing by *revealing* a certain body of information that could aid their quest to participate in the basic goods and thus further flourish as individuals. Hence, given that God is perfectly good and the unique goodness of this action (i.e., it being sensible, appropriate, reasonable/rational to perform this action)—he would then *inevitably* provide this revelatory information (i.e., propositional revelation)—the content of which will be of three kinds: *moral information*, *eschatological information*, and *theological information*. First, for moral information, God would seek to provide a revelation that includes propositions concerning the nature of the basic goods—such as detailed information concerning what the correct understanding of each of the basic goods is—and which particular actions and requirements one needs to perform in order to participate in them—namely, the nature of the nine requirements.²¹ Now, natural

reason can indeed discover the basic goods, given their self-evidence; nevertheless, by God providing a revelation concerning their nature and the means of participating in them, one's understanding of what the correct conceptualisation of these goods is (such as, for example, if the basic good of life is to be extended to the unborn or the elderly), and the confidence that one has in their truth, would also surely be able to be increased as well—which would be important in helping individuals to not merely do what they believe to be good but to actually *do what is, in fact, good* (Swinburne 2007). Second, for eschatological information, God would seek to provide a revelation that includes propositions concerning the existence of an afterlife—such as there being a Heaven for those who have lived flourishing lives,²² and that there is a Hell for those who have not. More precisely, the primary reason for participating in the basic goods is intrinsic to these goods—namely, that participation in them allows a human to personally flourish in their lives. However, God will seek to provide a revelation containing this type of information in order to provide encouragement for individuals to continue seeking participation in all of the basic goods. As, at a more general level, it is normally the case that human parents regularly, as Swinburne (2007, p. 84) notes:

encourage their children to do good actions by providing subsidiary motives for so doing, making it easier for their children to do good while they are young. Parents offer rewards for well-doing—both rewards of a crude material kind and the reward of their approval—and they threaten punishments—both of a crude material kind and the punishment of their disapproval.

In a similar manner to the human case, God, too, may seek to encourage humans to perform good actions—that is, actions that enable one to participate in the basic goods—and discourage humans from performing bad actions—that is, actions that curtail one from participating in the basic goods—by providing certain rewards and punishments for these actions. These actions, as with all actions, play a role in forming one's character such that the more one performs actions that enable them to participate in the basic goods, the more their character will be conformed towards these goods. As noted previously, it could be such that God rewards those individuals who live their life in full conformity to the basic goods with the opportunity to go on to live (after their physical death) a supremely worthwhile life in Heaven—and those who do not live this life miss out on receiving this reward of an afterlife in Heaven, potentially being punished for doing so in Hell. Hence, if God does provide this reward (i.e., the opportunity to live a worthwhile life in Heaven) and (potential) punishment (i.e., living a life in Hell), then he will need to tell humans that he will provide these things; otherwise, these rewards and punishments would not have an effect in motivating people to seek participation in the basic goods—as, without this information, individuals would not know, from reason alone, that there is, in fact, a reward (or punishment) that is associated with the type of life that they live.

For theological information, God would seek to provide a revelation of propositions that concern the existence and nature of God—which will enable individuals to interact with him better. That is, this information would not be provided so as to enable individuals to fully participate in the basic goods—as with the moral and eschatological information that has been revealed—rather, this information would be provided in order to enable humans to participate in one of the specific basic goods: the basic good of religion. More specifically, one of the ways in which humans flourish is through their participation in the basic good of religion—which is a basic good that is as fundamental as the other basic goods and thus has equal, objective value as each of the other ones and is as important for human flourishing as them. Now, matters concerning religion—where one participates in this good by reflecting and having an awareness of the cause of order in the world—would need to be further clarified by God. That is, if one is to correctly participate in the basic good of religion (where within the current context, the cause of order in the world would be identified as God) individuals would need to know more about God's existence, nature and activity. Evidence from the natural world can indeed show that it is probable that there is a God who has a certain nature (i.e., a divine nature) and has performed certain actions (e.g.,

creating the cosmos). Yet, there seem to be individuals who possess strong evidence against God's existence from their experience of evil. Thus, individuals will need to be provided with help to see that the arguments to God are cogent and the argument from evil is not a cogent argument (Swinburne 1989). Moreover, as God is a being who is ontologically different from humans, he would have elements of his nature that humans are simply not equipped with the ability to discover themselves (Swinburne 2007). Furthermore, if an individual has the level of ability and intelligence to weigh the veracity of theistic belief, given that humans are also subject to a proneness to wrongdoing, individuals can be led to hide from themselves what reason, in fact, shows. Yet, as it is good that humans should know more about God—so that they are able to interact with him better, worship him more appropriately, and thus participate in the good of religion more fully—they need more information about his existence, nature and activity than what can be provided by natural reason alone.²³

Hence, for each of these three kinds of reason—namely, the need for moral information, eschatological information and theological information—to develop one's understanding of the basic goods and to motivate one to participate in them it seems that the provision of a propositional revelation is an action that is sensible, appropriate and reasonable/rational, and thus we have good reason to believe that God's inevitable action of providing individuals with the opportunity to live personally flourishing lives (by them participating in the basic goods) would be able to be maximised by him also ensuring that individuals have access to this body of information that would be accessible through a propositional revelation. One can now ask the important question of: what would the form of this revelation be like? It is quite clear that the form of propositional revelation that God would seek to provide would be that of a 'culture-relative revelation'—which is a revelation that is expressed in the scientific, historical and theological presuppositions of the culture in which the revelation was addressed, and it would provide moral instruction (concerning basic goods) that is directly applicable to the situation of the individuals within that cultural setting. The expression of the content of this culturally relative revelation, according to Swinburne (2007, p. 99), would be such that

the doctrine of creation might be expressed on the presupposition that the world was as described by the then current science, for instance, as a flat Earth, covered by a dome, above which was Heaven—"God made the Heaven and the Earth". On the presupposition that the world came into existence 4000 years earlier, it would teach that it was then that God caused it to be. It would teach that God had made atonement for our sins, using the analogies of sacrifice and law familiar to those in the culture. It would teach the moral truths which those living in that culture needed to know (e.g., those concerned with whether people ought to pay taxes to the Roman emperor, or to obey the Jewish food laws); but it would contain no guidance on the morality of artificial insemination by donor, or medical research on embryos. It would offer the hope of Heaven to those who lived the right life. And it would express this hope using a presupposition of the culture that Heaven was situated spatially above the Earth.

This form of revelation would be effective at providing its *immediate* recipients with the needed guidance for how to participate in the basic goods, and how to attain the goal of getting to Heaven—in short, it would provide the needed information (noted previously) on how they are to live personally flourishing lives. Yet, the fact that its information and moral instruction is limited to those aspects which are relevant to the culture that it is revealed within—and that this might include false scientific and/or historical presuppositions (such as that the Earth is non-spherical or that there was a global flood sometime in the past)—would not make any difference to the religious content of the message—namely, regarding the kind of life that one is to live and the worship that is to be offered to God—nor would it lessen the worship worthiness of God and the desirability of attaining the goal of living in Heaven. Thus, where the problem will, in fact, lie with this type of revelation would be the fact of it *not* being possible to be transmitted, as it is, to those of another culture or

of a distant generation—it would not be a *cross-cultural* or *transgenerational* revelation. As Swinburne (2007, p. 120) notes, “Such a revelation would be of little use to the philosophers who met on Mars’ Hill, Athens, in the first century AD; let alone to literate and numerate Anglo-Americans of today”. In addition, why this would be the case is due to the fact of it being ‘clothed’ in the presuppositions of the culture that it was revealed—which, on the one hand, allows the message to be communicated more effectively to its recipients (by the (potentially false) assumptions that the revelation is cast in being understood by them). However, on the other hand, unless there is a clear public means by which one can distinguish presupposition from the message being communicated (e.g., information concerning the nature of God, and the means by which he is to be worshipped—rather than information concerning the nature of what and how he created things) cultures and generations far removed from the one in which the revelation was provided would not be able to access this message. This revelation would not be of use outside of this culture (and in a distant generation)—as other cultures (and distant generations) potentially might not know what is taken for granted by the culture (and generation) under question or what information are common assumptions of that culture (and generation), and thus should be taken as presuppositions rather than the message of the propositional revelation.

Two ways in which this issue could be dealt with would be: first, God providing a ‘culture-independent revelation’, rather than a culturally relative one, and, second, by God providing an accompanying ‘authoritative mechanism’ that could effectively, and continually, communicate the culturally relative revelation cross-culturally and transgenerationally. Through a process of elimination, we can see that God would seek to use the second way of dealing with our problem—and thus would not seek to utilise the first option: a culture-independent revelation. A culture-independent revelation is one that could take the form of a creed formed of sentences that do not utilise any scientific or historical propositions. Thus, for example, as Swinburne (2007, p. 101) writes, with a culture-independent revelation, “God would aim to give us the doctrine of creation without using any such cultural presupposition as that the universe consists of a flat Earth covered by a dome by giving us instead the sentence ‘God created everything’”. Now, why God would *not* seek to provide this type of revelation is due to the fact that this type of revelation would not serve the purpose for which it was provided—namely, that of providing sentences that are effectively communicable across cultures and generations. In addition, why this would be so is simply because of the removal of presupposition—and thus the increase in the logical rigour of the sentences that would be had by a culture-independent revelation—would, first, make it less accessible to the relatively uneducated members of society (which would be a large percentage of the population)—which can be seen, for example, in the increase in rigour that is had with the statement ‘God created everything’ to ‘God causes or permits other beings to cause or permit the occurrence of all logically contingent events apart from any, the occurrence of which is entailed by his own existence’.²⁴ Second, it would also open the possibility of misunderstanding, especially if it is translated into other cultures and languages that will interpret the terms in potentially differing ways than what was intended. One could indeed avoid the latter problem by making the culture-independent revelation more logically rigorous; however, as there is no maximum degree of rigour, the possibility of misunderstanding will still remain, as new questions and issues are raised against the more rigorous terms. Thus, as Swinburne (2007, p. 102) writes:

New cultures always raise new questions of interpretation, and the consequences of unreformed old sentences for their concerns become unclear. Yet, sentences of a human language only have meaning to the extent to which its speakers can grasp that meaning; and as (being only human) they cannot conceive of all the possible concerns of future cultures, they cannot have sentences whose consequences for the concerns of those cultures are always clear.

Hence, as God has chosen to provide a revelation through the vehicle of human language—which is something that is indeed a ‘feeble’ vehicle for conveying an unequivocal message cross-culturally and transgenerationally—through a process of elimination,

it is clear to us that God will utilise the second option of providing an accompanying authoritative mechanism—namely, that of an *authoritative representative*, which we previously termed a prophet. More specifically, God would inevitably seek to provide a propositional revelation that includes information that can improve an individual’s understanding of the basic goods, provide encouragement for them to continue seeking participation in all of the basic goods, and information that will help one to understand God’s existence, nature and actions better, so as to more appropriately interact with him. This all to potentially maximise the personal flourishing that can be experienced by an individual. This revelation would require an authoritative representative (i.e., a prophet) that can, through their communication of this revelation, help provide authoritative declarations concerning the correct interpretation of this revelation, guide its transmission across cultures and generations, and provide further evidence in support of the veracity of the propositions that the revelation includes. Hence, one has good reason to believe that it would be sensible, appropriate and reasonable/rational for God to not only provide a revelation, but to send a prophet to accompany it, so as to enable individuals to pursue the goal of living full, personally flourishing lives—where without this information and the authoritative mechanism provided by an accompanying prophet, individuals across cultures and generations would not know, from reason alone, how to best live a (personally) flourishing life to the fullest, or they would not be wholly motivated to do so. We can thus illustrate the position that has now been reached here through Figure 4., where the personal flourishing of humans is now to be increased (i.e., potentially maximised) by the sending of a prophet with a propositional revelation:

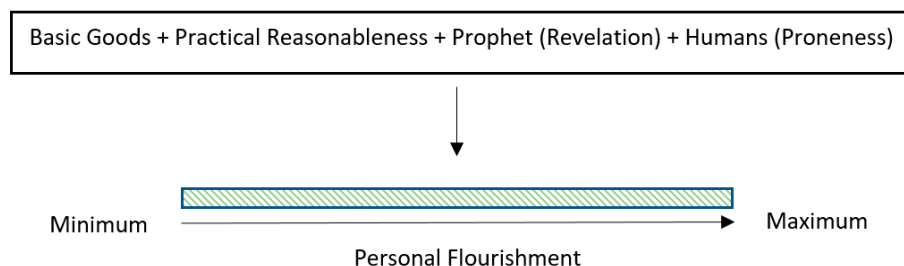


Figure 4. Personal flourishing (ii).

By God sending a propositional revelation to be communicated by a *prophet*, he would be able to provide all humans who are recipients of the revelation with the opportunity to maximise their personal flourishing by fully participating in the basic goods. In addition, God, as a perfectly good being, would indeed seek to make sure that they can achieve this end. As it a unique best action for God to realise this personal aim—by it being, as noted previously, sensible, appropriate and reasonable/rational for God to provide the opportunity for humans to personally flourish, provide a revelation to aid them in doing so and send a prophet to communicate that revelation to help them to do this to the fullest—we have good reason to believe that he would inevitably perform this action. In short, it is an act of essence. In summary, in order for humans to personally flourish they need to be partakers of the basic goods. However, due to the human condition, humans cannot do this. Thus, there is a requirement for God to send a prophet that can provide a revelation so that humans can truly access these goods, and thus fully partake of them.

Now that the requirement for God to send a prophet in order to fulfil his personal aim has been detailed, it is important to turn our attention to the next phase of our constructive task, which focuses on God’s fulfilment of his creative aim and the need for a certain *type* of prophet—namely, a divine prophet—in order for this specific aim to be realised.

3. Creative Flourishment: The Divinity of the Prophet

The second phase of our constructive task focuses on the aim of *Creative Flourishment*—which we can term God’s ‘creative aim’, in order to emphasise the fact that this aim is

for the creative flourishing of human beings. This aim, once further precisified, will be shown to require God to provide a *divine* prophet into the world in order for this creative aim to be fulfilled. The specific precisification of this creative aim can now be re-stated within the present context as follows:

(8)	(Creative Aim)	God aims for humans to flourish creatively, to the maximum level, by participating as a ground of morality and sharer of goodness in the role of an exemplar.
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For God's creative aim, God desires for humans to flourish creatively by them participating in his creative role of spreading goodness and grounding morality in the world. However, given the human condition, the realisation of this aim requires that God send a divine prophet. As in the previous phase of our analysis, this aim can be precisified at a philosophical level in several ways through different ethical theories; however, it will be helpful to further detail the central elements of this aim by utilising the ethical theory of 'Exemplarism',²⁵ which will provide a theoretical basis for further understanding of why God would be required to send a divine prophet.

3.1. The Nature of Exemplarism

Exemplarism is a moral theory that is foundational in structure—in that it has a single point of origin. However, unlike other moral theories, Exemplarism's foundation is not conceptual; rather, the construction of the theory is centred on direct reference to exemplars of moral goodness, that are picked out by the emotion of (reflective) admiration. We can summarise the theory of Exemplarism succinctly as follows:

(9)	(Exemplarism)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) <i>Exemplars</i>: A foundational moral theory that grounds the meaning of the central concepts of our moral practice in exemplars of goodness, who are conceived of as individuals that are most admirable. (ii) <i>Admiration</i>: Exemplars of goodness are directly referred to and are identified through the operation of the emotion of (reflective) admiration.
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In understanding (6) in greater detail, one can understand that the starting point in Zagzebski's construction of the theory of Exemplarism is the semantics of moral terms that are modelled on the theory of direct reference for natural kind terms introduced by Hilary Putnam (1975) and Saul Kripke (1980). Prior to the work of Putnam and Kripke, the dominant theory of meaning was the descriptivist theory. According to the descriptivist theory, the meaning of a specific term is the description that it has in the mind of an individual. For example, the term 'nail' means something like 'a small metal spike with a broadened flat head, driven into wood to join things together or to serve as a hook'. This is the dictionary definition of this term, and a descriptivist theory might be plausible for a term such as 'nail', but it is not plausible for other referral terms such as proper names and natural kind terms like 'water' or 'gold'. For example, as Zagzebski (2017, p. 11) notes:

water cannot be 'colorless, odorless liquid in the lakes and streams and falling from the sky,' or any other description that we use in ordinary discourse to pick out water. That is because we can imagine that something other than water looked like water and fell from the sky and ran in the streams.

The theory of direct reference explains this important feature of 'water' and other natural kind terms.²⁶ Hence, what the positive proposal provided by the theory of direct reference is that of it taking it to be the case that a natural kind term like 'water' or 'gold' refers to whatever entity is the same kind of entity as some indexically identified instance (Zagzebski 2017). Hence, gold is whatever is the same element as *that*, and water is

whatever is the same liquid as *that*, wherein each of these instances, the demonstrative term 'that' refers directly to an entity—which is expressed in its simplest form by pointing (Zagzebski 2010). The primary benefit of adopting this account of reference is that of the fact that individuals are often in situations in which they do not possess knowledge about the nature of the referent, yet are still able to formulate a definition that matches with the referent's nature. For example, for a very long period of time, individuals did not have knowledge of water's (chemical) structure—yet this did not prevent people from defining 'water' in a way that fixed the reference of the term and continued to do so after the chemical structure of water (i.e., H₂O) was discovered (Zagzebski 2017). Hence, the theory of direct reference provides an explanation for how the term 'water' referred to the same thing before and after the discovery of the chemical structure of water. Furthermore, the theory of direct reference also provides a way for one to understand how the competent speakers of a given language can use certain terms to successfully refer to things without having a descriptive meaning of it at hand. For example, as Zagzebski (2015, p. 264) notes, if one were to compare a term like 'hammer', one can see that when someone says 'hammer', they are referring to "whatever satisfies a description given in advance. Presumably, you cannot talk about hammers unless you grasp that description". However, this does not need to be the case for natural kind terms like 'water' and 'gold', where speakers do not need to associate descriptions with these terms in order to successfully refer to the right kinds. Rather, one can successfully refer to these natural kinds even in a situation where one associates the wrong descriptions with the terms like 'water' and 'gold' (Zagzebski 2010). Moreover, it is not even required for the speaker to be able to identify these natural kinds reliably themselves so long as some speakers in the community—the experts—are able to do so, with the other individuals relying upon their judgement (Zagzebski 2017).

The primary semantical point that is derived from the theory of direct reference is that of the term 'good person' not referring through a descriptive meaning—that is, a person fulfilling a certain description. Rather, one should conceive of the term 'good person' as referring to persons like *that*—be it individuals such as Mother Teresa, Gandhi, the Dalai Lama, Socrates, etc. That is, at a more specific level, the basic moral concepts are anchored in particular exemplars of moral goodness, direct references to whom are taken to be foundational in the proposed theory and stated as follows: good persons are persons like *that*—where, again, as in the case of natural kinds, the demonstrative term 'that' refers directly to an entity. By picking out exemplars in this specific way, one can fix the reference of the term 'good person' without having to use descriptive concepts (Zagzebski 2015, p. 264). In other words, it is not required for ordinary individuals to know the nature of good persons—that is, what makes them good, rather than not. That is, as Zagzebski (2013a, p. 199) noted, it is not required for any individual to know "what makes a good person good in order to successfully refer to good persons, any more than it was necessary that anybody knew what makes water 'water' to successfully refer to water before the advent of molecular theory". In Exemplarism, one is not required to associate any descriptive meaning with the term 'good person'—with users of a given language group being able to successfully refer to good persons even in situations where members of this group associate the wrong descriptions with the term 'good person' (Zagzebski 2013a).

Moreover, as in the case of natural kinds, one can successfully refer to good persons so long as they, or certain other individuals in the community, can pick out exemplars—this can be seen to be already present within our moral practice through an investigation of personal experience and narratives (Zagzebski 2016). Hence, important moral concepts such as a virtue, right and wrong acts, and good states of affairs can be defined with reference to, and after an investigation of, these exemplary people who are certain individuals that are admirable and worth emulating (Zagzebski 2017). More fully, for Exemplarism, one is required to focus on the *most admirable people*, who could be fictional persons, non-fictional persons who are living or dead, or persons who are a mix of both. Exemplars are thus those individuals that are most admirable—where one identifies admirable persons by the emotion of admiration, which is subject, as Zagzebski (2010, pp. 51–52) writes, "to

education through the example of the emotional reactions of other persons". Exemplarism is thus compatible with the view that one's identification of a set of exemplars is revisable as more knowledge of them becomes available (or one becomes aware of further information concerning them)—which could lead to one losing one's admiration for them. Hence, in a similar manner to that in which an individual can be mistaken that a certain body of water is really water (i.e., H₂O)—one can also be mistaken that a certain person who is paradigmatically good is really good (i.e., most admirable). However, in Zagzebski's (2017) thought, it is unlikely that one would be mistaken in the identification of most exemplars—in a similar manner to how one cannot be mistaken that most of what they take to be water is really water—as there is a specific referential connection between good persons and the individuals that are identified as good—namely, good persons are persons like *that*. Nevertheless, at least at the initial stage, one is not required to admire the set of exemplars in *every respect*. Rather, these exemplars are conceived of as being the standard for one's moral theorising—in that they systematically link together all of one's moral concepts. More specifically, Zagzebski (2017, p. 21) sees that one can proceed to systematically define a series of moral concepts by reference to a given set of exemplary persons, each of which can be stated more precisely as follows:

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| (10) (Moral Concepts) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) A <i>virtue</i> is a trait we admire in an exemplar. It is what makes that person admirable in a certain respect. (ii) A <i>good motive</i> is a motive of an exemplar. It is a motive of a person like that. (iii) A <i>good end</i> is a state of affairs at which exemplars aim. It is a state of affairs at which persons like that aim. (iv) A <i>virtuous act</i> is an admirable act, an act we admire in a person like that. (v) An <i>admirable life</i> is a life lived by an exemplar, a person like that. (vi) A desirable life (a life of well-being) is a life desired by an exemplar. The components of a good life are good for a human person. (vii) A <i>right act</i> for a person A in some set of circumstances C is what the admirable person would take to be most favored by the balance of reasons for persons like A in C. (viii) A <i>duty</i> in some set of circumstances C is an act an admirable person demands from both herself and others. She would feel guilty if she did not do it, and she would blame others if they did not do it. |
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These specific definitions are not intended to give the content of the series of moral concepts that play an important role in our moral practice—nor are they intended to reveal the deep nature of these moral concepts—as they do not tell us *what* virtue, right act, or a good life *are*; rather, they simply provide one with directions for finding out (Zagzebski 2017). That is, as Zagzebski (2010, p. 55) notes, in each case noted above, “the concept to be defined (virtue, good state of affairs, right act, and so on) is defined via indexical reference to a paradigmatically good person”. Therefore, a virtue is a trait we admire in that person and in persons like *that*. A good end is a state of affairs at which persons like *that* aim. A good life is a life desired by persons like *that*. A right act is an act a person like *that* would take to be favoured by the balance of reasons. In addition, a duty is what persons like *that* would demand of themselves and others (Zagzebski 2017, p. 22). In short, one can thus say that exemplars play a fundamental role in ‘grounding morality’.

Exemplars, as admirable persons, show us *what* morality is. However, they also make us *want* to be moral, and they show us how to do it (Zagzebski 2017). How the latter task is achieved is through individuals seeking to *emulate* exemplars. That is, the primary elements of virtue—which is that of a virtuous behaviour disposition and a virtuous motive disposition—can be acquired through emulation. Emulation, at a general level,

according to Zagzebski 2017, p. 131), “is a form of imitation in which the emulated person is perceived as a model in some respect—a model of cooking, dancing, playing basketball, doing philosophy”. Admiration provides the reason for why an individual would want to be like the person that they emulate—namely, because they see the person they emulate *as good*. In addition, the process in which admiration leads to the emulation of an admired person, in Zagzebski’s (2017) thought,²⁷ is through that of *wishfully picturing themselves in the image of the admired person*. That is, as Zagzebski (2017, p. 136) notes, “One imagines oneself as a generous (honest, kind) person, and then goes about enacting this self-image”. Emulation is linked directly to admiration, because wishfully picturing oneself in the image of an ideal *is* that of admiring them. Imagining oneself with a motivating feeling is not the same as one actually having that feeling, yet the process of imagination is very close to that of possession, and so an imagined feeling can indeed cause actual feeling, especially in cases when the individual wants to become the person that has that feeling (Zagzebski 2017). Moreover, as Zagzebski (2017, p. 138) writes, the “moral learner does the virtuous act from a virtuous motive because the learner is emulating someone who does that act from that motive. With practice, the agent becomes disposed to doing acts of that kind from motives of that kind”. In addition, therefore, through an individual projecting themselves onto the image that one then enacts, they are able to gradually *become the person that they want to be*. Hence, one acquires the necessary virtues to be an exemplar by playing a role that becomes part of them—such that, as Zagzebski (2017, p. 137) writes, “wanting to be like an exemplar, when conjoined with imagining that I am like that exemplar, can make me like that exemplar”. However, given this fact, it is quite clear that one cannot imagine oneself as a certain kind of person, unless one knows *what it is* that they are imagining. That is, one must be able to *grasp* what that person is like, yet one cannot grasp this by superficial observation or observing overt behaviour—instead, one must do this in another way, specifically through that of *mind reading* (Zagzebski 2017). One model for how one can accomplish this end, in Zagzebski’s (2017, p. 137) thought, is that of ‘simulation theory’. In its general iteration, as noted by Zagzebski (2017),²⁸ an individual called a ‘mentalist’ simulates another person’s mind by creating pretend states that correspond to those of the target, which then are input into the relevant cognitive mechanism to generate a new output—such as that of a decision. This same sort of process is undertaken during the process of *prospection*: the process in which an individual is simulating their future self. Within this process, there needs to be a certain degree of similarity between the exemplar and the individual, if the simulation is to be accurate (Zagzebski 2017). For example, as Zagzebski (2017, p. 137) notes, “we could not simulate the exemplar’s feeling of compassion and the way that compassion motivates acts unless we had a suitably similar system of emotion dispositions and mental structure linking emotions of the relevant kind with acts of the relevant kind”. Hence, in the process of emulation, one would not be able to see an exemplar to be the ideal self without there being some form of a *basic similarity* in the psychic structure of the individual and the exemplar. That is, if the exemplar had a radically different psychic structure would be unrecognisable and thus inimitable. Thus, there must be a certain level of similarity between exemplars and moral learners.

Importantly, however, though all moral concepts are grounded on exemplars, this does not mean that the theory posited by Exemplarism is entirely subjectivist. Rather, there is a type of modest moral realism that is *grounded in the real, natural world—that is, it is anchored in objective reality*. Hence, as Zagzebski (2017, p. 226) writes, “what we mean by “good person” or “virtue” or “right act” does not change, even if the persons we call “good,” the traits we call “virtues,” and the acts we call “right” undergo a gradual change. There is nonetheless *something there* that we are talking about all along when we undertake theoretical moral discourse, or more frequently, tell stories”. The ‘something’ that is there, according to Exemplarism, is that of certain *necessary truths* concerning morality. More specifically, that is, morality is objectively grounded on the fact of there being *necessary a posteriori moral truth*. That is in the process of discovery via reflection, one identifies the psychological structure of a bearer of admirability through observation of a purported

admirable person *and* subjection of a range of their actions and features to the test of reflective admiration (Zagzebski 2017). This ultimately then allows one to explain *how* they, in fact, discover the necessity of certain moral traits of a good person. In addition, *if* this is true, then it is a *necessary* truth as it expresses the fact of what is necessary for being admirable—which is thus a truth that is discovered by the identification of what one admires on reflection. Hence, in all, the appearance of subjectivity that is to be had by Exemplarism is thus tied to the a posteriori nature of the process of discovery that is centred on the particularised test of reflective admiration that can be performed by a given individual; nevertheless, this theory is indeed objectively grounded on the necessity of the moral truths that are expressed by the life of a good (admirable) person (Zagzebski 2017). In addition, we can take these moral truths that are expressed to be that of the basic goods that were previously detailed—that is, the basic goods provide the necessary foundation for Exemplarism, which thus provides us with a link between the two ethical frameworks. Thus, even though, in the contemporary ethics literature, the ethical theories of natural law and Exemplarism have not been brought together, there is nevertheless nothing inherently problematic in doing this, with natural law stating the basic human goods—which are thus the necessary moral truths that provide the moral foundation—and Exemplarism detailing how the other moral concepts that are expressions of this can be understood with direct reference to exemplars—which provides the a posteriori epistemic process of discovering these necessary truths.²⁹

In summary, the moral foundation of reality is grounded upon a theoretical foundation and experience that is trusted—namely, the experience of reflective admiration, which is shaped by narratives that are part of a common tradition and enables one to identify exemplars of goodness. Exemplarism thus affirms the importance of exemplars in grounding the various central facets of morality—where an exemplar is to be taken to be a person who is paradigmatically good—that is, they are most admirable. One identifies the admirable through the emotion of (reflective) admiration, which is focused on the admiration of acquired and deep traits of character or virtues possessed by an admirable person. A person who is admirable thus provides a basis for moral judgements and certain imitable behaviours—that is, they are imitable in respect to their admirable trait, where the admiration of this individual and trait leads to an imaginative ideal of oneself, which then, in turn, produces emulation of the exemplar's motives and actions—which, in all, enables the individual to play an important role in grounding morality in our world. Now that we have detailed the nature of the ethical theory of Exemplarism, it is important to now see how, in assuming that this theory also holds true in the world, God would seek to fulfil his creative aim (of humans creatively flourishing, to the maximum level, as exemplars of morality) by sending a divine prophet.

3.2. Fulfilment of Creative Aim: Exemplarism and a Divine Prophet

In the previous phase of our constructive task, we saw that God, as the perfectly good creator and sustainer of all things, would seek to help the humans that he had created to live flourishing lives by providing revelatory information concerning the nature of the basic goods—with this information also providing them with further motivation to participate fully in them. For this information to be correctly interpreted and promulgated across cultures and generations, God would also need to send an accompanying prophet that would communicate this revelation to others. In doing this, God would thus achieve his personal aim—that of humans personally flourishing, to the maximum level, by fully participating in the basic goods. Now, according to God's creative aim, God desires for humans to fully participate in his creative activity in the world. More specifically, as the creation of conscious entities is plausibly a good thing, God would inevitably seek to undertake a creative activity that brings about conscious entities such as human persons.³⁰ In creating humans, God would seek to further manifest his goodness by enabling these humans to not only personally flourish by participating in the basic goods, but he would seek to further their flourishing in a different way—namely, 'creatively', through their

participation in his creative action. This participation will take the form of them having the ability to bring about other created entities directly—through reproduction—and indirectly—by aiding others to reproduce (e.g., through breeding animals). Humans thus participate in God’s creative activity by their being one of the means that God uses to bring about other created entities in his world—let’s term this creative action ‘creating a world’. However, it is plausibly the case that God would seek to go beyond this in enabling humans to participate in his creative activity in a unique way—namely, that of helping God to manifest (or diffuse) his goodness through each human being given the opportunity and responsibility of being the means that God uses to further goodness and morality in the world—let’s term this creative action ‘creating a good world’. Hence, the two creative actions that humans are able to participate in: God’s action of creating the world—by bringing about the existence of other entities—and creating a good world—by enabling these entities to spread goodness in the world—seem to each be a unique best action (i.e., the sensible, appropriate, reasonable/rational action), which would thus be a product of his nature that stems from him necessarily, yet wilfully, spreading his goodness in his creative act. Focusing our attention now on human participation in the creation of a good world, for this to occur, it would require the creation and/or promulgation of some system of morality. One way in which God could do this would be by him including a total moral law/code within the propositional revelation that is to be provided by the prophet that he sent—with him instructing the prophet to communicate the requirement for every person to follow it. We can illustrate this type of world through Figure 5. (where the ‘stick figurine’ represents a human individual, ‘G’ stands for goodness (i.e., the concepts of morality), and the ‘arrows’ represent the direction in which morality (i.e., goodness) is grounded):

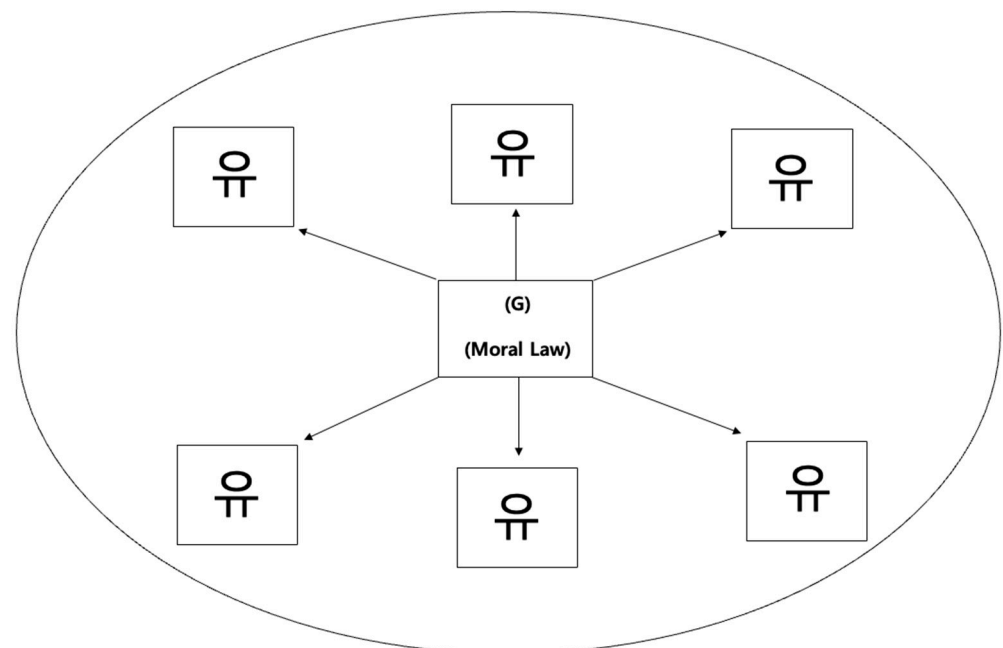


Figure 5. System of morality in a good world (i).

In creating this type of world—as is emphasised in the illustration by the direction in which morality is grounded (namely, from the (prophet communicated) moral law to the human individuals, and not vice versa)—God would forgo the good of giving humans much *responsibility* for how the moral foundation of his creation should be. That is, a world in which morality was grounded in an overriding moral code—rather than human exemplars of goodness—would be one in which humans have only very limited responsibility for our moral development and do not play a creative role in making the world into a ‘good world’—for example, a world in which there are many admirable persons who, through the imitability of the admirable, further the good that is present in the world by living

virtuous lives. A God who gave agents only such limited responsibilities for the type of world we were to live in would not have given much, as God would not only have reserved for himself the all-important action of causing the world to exist but also the all-important choice of the kind of world it was to be—while, as Swinburne (1997, p. 99) has stated in a similar context, simply leaving humans with “the minor choice of filling in the details”. That is, if great limits were set for the role that humans play in grounding moral concepts, our acquisition of moral knowledge, and our overall moral development—which would be so if God were to provide a total moral law/code—then God, as Swinburne (2010, p. 93) further writes, “would be unable to give humans much real responsibility; he would be able to allow them only to play a toy game”. However, if God were to create a world in such a way that all of morality is rooted in exemplars of morality—and thus all humans are given the opportunity to freely acquire the traits (grounded in the deep psychological structure) that enable an individual to be an admirable person—then humans would have been given a share in God’s creation—a share in the ability to further the good by living admirable lives that—through one directly referring to them—can be emulated by others. We can now illustrate *this* type of world through Figure 6. (where, again, the ‘stick figurine’ represents a human individual (who is now an exemplar of goodness), ‘G’ stands for goodness (i.e., the concepts of morality), and the ‘arrows’ represent the direction in which morality (i.e., goodness) is grounded):

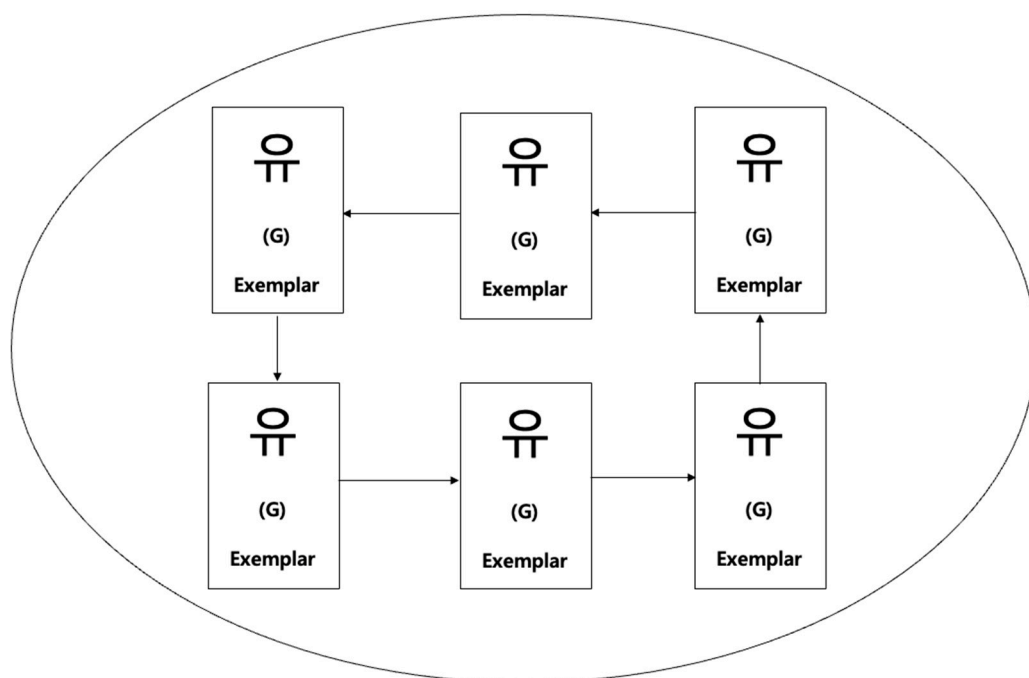


Figure 6. System of morality in a good world (ii).

The lives of exemplary people—as is emphasised in this illustration by the direction in which morality is grounded (namely, from one human individual (who fulfils the role of an exemplar) to another human individual (who emulates them))—would thus fulfil the role of grounding morality in our world. In this world, direct reference would be made to exemplars of goodness, with the central concepts of our moral practice being defined by this reference, and thus this world would be able to be made into a ‘good world’ by each and every human individual playing a part in living an admirable life, which would motivate others (who admire them) to emulate their lives, and thus, because of this, they themselves would also become admirable—which would ultimately manifest the good in the world. Hence, a good God, like a good father, will delegate this type of responsibility (Swinburne 2004). In addition, we therefore have reason to believe that God would utilise

an ‘Exemplarist methodology’ when it comes to grounding morality, rather than grounding it solely (or at all) in a total moral law/code.³¹

That there should be such a world is a good thing. In addition, the bringing about of this type of world appears, as noted previously, to be a unique best action (i.e., the sensible, appropriate, reasonable/rational action). Yet, this type of world, where all moral concepts are defined by reference to exemplars—and thus humans playing the pivotal role of grounding morality in the world—is indeed *risky*, as humans might come to have an incorrect grasp of morality by latching onto (and defining terms by reference to) sets of individuals whose admirability, at a specific time, survives the conscientious reflection of a certain culture and generation—and thus are classed as exemplars that ground morality at that time. However, over an extended period of time, and within different cultures and generations, these sets of exemplars might be held to be deplorable and thus, the definition of the moral concepts that were made in reference to them, and the moral truths derived from this, are then understood to, in fact, be erroneous. Moreover, even if the risk of this occurring is low, there is also the issue to be faced of there being many *different kinds* of exemplars that are recognised by different individuals and communities, and thus there can be moral disagreement among these exemplars and communities. One would thus not know what the correct position is concerning disputed moral issues (such as whether war, abortion and euthanasia are always wrong or sometimes permissible), given the positions held by these different kinds of exemplars. We can thus illustrate the position that has been reached here through Figure 7, where the creative flourishing of humans is to be achieved by their participating in God’s creative activity (where, again, ‘proneness’ stands for ‘proneness to wrongdoing’):

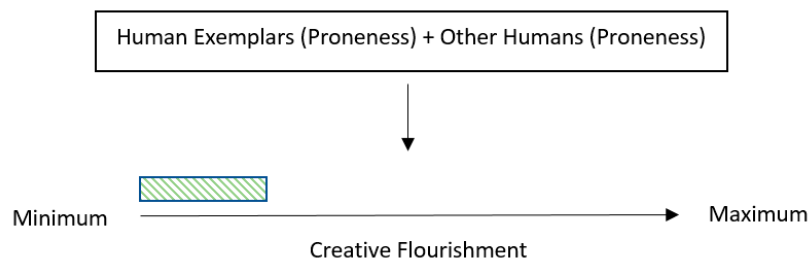


Figure 7. Creative flourishing (i).

Humans can participate in God’s creative activity by spreading goodness and grounding morality within the world as exemplars; however, the level of flourishing that is to be had by humans is indeed very minimal, given the two issues just noted. In addition, therefore, God, as a perfectly good being, would seek, through performing a unique best action, to help humans to maximise their creative flourishing by warding off these issues. The manner in which this can be achieved is by first taking God *himself* to be the *metaphysical ground and standard of morality* and, most importantly, *the supreme exemplar*. That is, due to God being omniscient, he would know all moral truths, and due to his being perfectly free, he would only do good. Hence, God is by nature supremely good, the source of all goodness in the world and thus the object of the highest admiration (Zagzebski n.d.). Hence, as Zagzebski (n.d., p. 1) writes, God is “a meta-exemplar, whose nature is the ultimate standard for moral exemplars in every culture”. God, as the supreme exemplar, thus allows there to be a cross-cultural and generational ‘standard’ for individuals to test the appropriateness of their admiration in particular cases and the correctness of the moral judgments made by a given culture’s exemplars—and thus, on this basis, one can understand whether a certain set of exemplars, and their judgements concerning the disputed moral issues, are indeed correct. All exemplars are thus connected to each other by their likeness to the divine exemplar and the standard of morality that is grounded by him. God thus, in a certain sense, provides the ground and standard for other human exemplars, such that their own goodness and virtuous actions consist in their resemblance to God—where,

without God, there would be no means for one to ‘anchor’ other human exemplars. One thus has a means of dealing with the above two issues; however, the solution provided here faces its own issue. This issue is that of the dissimilarity between humans and God being such that it is not possible for humans to emulate him and thus acquire his virtues and acts. That is, as noted previously, one emulates an exemplar by imagining, or simulating, themselves as that individual, yet it is only possible to do this if there is a basic similarity in the psychic structure of the individual and the exemplar. However, as there is a vast ontological distinction to be drawn between God and all other humans, one can clearly take it to be the case that there is indeed a lack of the necessary similarity here. Hence, as it stands, God cannot play a role in grounding morality within the world by being a supreme exemplar that provides an imitable standard for other exemplars and individuals. Therefore, the question now to be faced is: how could this issue be solved? The only solution available is that of either God himself or another ‘divine’ person that is in a ‘close’ relationship with God (and thus can fulfil the same role as him as a supreme exemplar), assuming a psychic structure that is similar to other human individuals. Either of these two options is sufficient to achieve the stated goal, and thus, in proceeding forward with the second option, we can understand that what is needed for a solution to the present issue is that of a divine person *becoming human*. More specifically, as the divine nature is so far above human nature, the only way in which human persons can emulate God is by emulating a person, as Zagzebski (2004, p. 233) notes, that “combines the divine nature with human nature”. In other words, as God is ontologically different from humans, but is required to serve as the supreme exemplar for humans, there must therefore be a historical human exemplar that stands in a special relation to God *as a human and divine person*. That is, one needs, as Zagzebski (2022, p. 179) writes, “both a human exemplar to whom we can refer in moral discourse and a divine metaphysical ground for value. The theory needs a God-man to serve both roles”. Hence, it is only by a divine person becoming a human and living an exemplary life, that God can show other individuals how to emulate him in an accessible and human way. Importantly, however, for one to not presuppose the *Christian* understanding of the nature of divinity in this a priori analysis—which would be that of the prophet being of the *same* exact nature as God (i.e., *homoousios*)—we can take the notion of ‘divine’ to refer to an entity that *perfectly emulates* God, where the term ‘perfectly emulate’ in this specific context could be understood ‘ontologically’—by him having the same nature as God—or, ‘epistemically’—by his beliefs being fully orientated on God—or, ‘morally’—by his actions always being in line with God’s will. The prophet could thus be divine by being a perfect emulation of God in one, or all of the three ways just stated (i.e., ontologically, epistemically and morally). In proceeding forward, however, we will assume that the prophet sent by God is an ontological, epistemic and morally perfect emulation of him.³²

It is thus plausible that God would act in this way—namely, by sending a divine prophet into the world—and there is a further reason that seems to support this, as well: in God allowing humans to play a part in making the world into a good world, God is seeking for all humans to *freely* choose to become admirable (given that admirability, in the context of Exemplarism, can only be had for *acquired* traits).³³ Hence, in this type of world, as noted previously, God has given humans libertarian freedom with the ability for self-determination, which thus results in there being an additional risk that these individuals might exercise their freedom in a manner that leads to them and others becoming deplorable. This risk is surely a reality given the need for humans to have an inclination (i.e., desire) to perform the bad if they are to make a free moral choice (and thus, in this context, freely becoming admirable). Hence, there is a requirement that the condition of humans be such that they have inherited a proneness to wrongdoing, which, as noted previously, consists of bad desires, weakness of will and false moral beliefs. This inheritance, as also noted previously, is partly biological, as it stems from our genes, inherited from our ancestors, which cause an individual’s strong desires to seek food, sleep, shelter, sex, etc., beyond what is permissible or rightfully theirs. In addition, it is partly social—in that parents and

individuals in positions of authority in society can influence others to behave badly. Hence, this proneness to wrongdoing will play an important role in influencing humans to seek their immediate well-being at the expense of others, and thus this can potentially lead to them performing actions that are deplorable and promote an incorrect moral system. Now, this condition of a proneness to wrongdoing, which is a result of God endowing humans with freedom—with the goal of them exercising their freedom to become admirable—is a condition that affects *all* humans. Hence, if a *mere* human were to be tasked with the role of being the cross-cultural and generational supreme exemplar and metaphysical ground of morality, then one could be placed in a situation of scepticism concerning the correctness of the definition of the moral concepts that are made in light of that individual, and the veracity of any moral teaching derived from them. More specifically, in being genetically human, this individual would inherit the (potentially) bad desires and weakness of will that stem from our ancestors, and in being part of human society, this individual would plausibly inherit the (potentially) false moral beliefs that have been taught by the society that he is part of. Hence, because of this, the free moral actions that are performed by this individual *might* be morally wrong, and the moral beliefs held and taught by that individual *might* be false—and other individuals,³⁴ at the specific time in question, would not have the ability to decipher whether or not these actions and beliefs are, in fact, morally wrong, given that this specific human person is understood to be the supreme exemplar that has all virtues, motives, ends, acts and aims being defined in reference to *them*—and thus is the standard by which we assess the veracity of our moral concepts. Hence, given the human condition, it seems to be the case that, in addition to the need to provide a standard of morality and supreme exemplar that can fulfil the role of being the ground of morality in the world, God would also seek to ward off any form of scepticism concerning the veracity of the system of morality that is established by his prophet. Thus, the way in which this can be accomplished would be, again, by this prophet being human *and* divine, as, on the basis of the divinity of this prophet, one can understand that he *could not* inherit the proneness to wrongdoing that inflicts all other human persons. The reason that this is so is due to the fact that, as this prophet is divine, he would, first, not inherit the proneness to wrongdoing given to humans by society—namely, false moral beliefs—as he would be omniscient and thus would know the truth value of all moral propositions and would have *no* false moral beliefs. Thus, even if the society that he is placed within is furthering an erroneous moral system, he would not believe the teaching of this system. Hence, his moral beliefs would be true, and thus one can have certainty that the teaching that comes from him is also true. Second, he would also not inherit the proneness to wrongdoing passed to humans genetically from our ancestors—namely, bad desires and weakness of will (in the sense of a desire to do wrong and the will to perform wrong actions)—as it is plausibly wrong for an individual to put themselves in a position where they are liable to perform a wrong action—such as that of internationally allowing oneself to forget their duties, take drugs that would lead to the individual being tempted to do wrong, or driving a car after consuming alcohol, and thus the individual putting them in a position where they are likely to harm someone else (Swinburne 2008). Hence, as God, and any other divine person that shares his nature, is perfectly good—and thus cannot perform any wrong action—he would not put himself in a position where he could have chosen to do wrong. Thus, in the prophet being divine, he (and God) would not place himself in a situation where he could have performed any wrong action and open himself up to the possibility of doing objective or subjective wrong, and thus he would, as Swinburne (2008, p. 45) notes, “have ensured that in his human actions he had access to such true moral beliefs as would allow him to be aware of his duties, and he must have ensured that he would never be subject to too strong a desire to do any action which was wrong”. A divine prophet would thus not have false moral beliefs, inherit desires that could influence him to do wrong and the weakness of will that would lead to him succumbing to this.³⁵ One could thus have epistemic certainty that the moral actions that are performed by the prophet are not, in fact, wrong and thus, admiration that is elicited by the prophet (who fulfils the role of

being the supreme exemplar, the cross-cultural and generational standard and ground of morality) is safeguarded from error—in virtue of him having a divine nature—and thus any wide-scale scepticism concerning his fulfilment of this role can be warded off. The sending of a divine person to fulfil this role as a human being is thus clearly a unique best action (i.e., the sensible, appropriate, reasonable/rational action).³⁶ Hence, God, as the perfectly good creator and sustainer of all things, would thus inevitably send a divine prophet into the world to serve as the supreme exemplar, the ground of morality and the standard by which the admirability of others can be measured—in short, this action would thus be an act of essence. Thus, given all of this, one can now understand that the central moral concepts that are to be defined in terms of exemplars are, therefore, now to be understood *in light of God*. However, as the requirement for God to be made accessible to us in order for others to be able to emulate him, these concepts are made richer and more concrete when understood with reference to *the prophet*—who is now taken to be *a divine person who has a human nature*. Hence, we can thus systematically define the moral concepts in reference to the prophet as follows:

(11) (Moral Concepts*)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) A <i>virtue</i> is a trait we admire in the prophet. It is what makes the prophet admirable in a certain respect. (ii) A <i>good motive</i> is a motive of the prophet. It is a motive of an entity like that. (iii) A <i>good end</i> is a state of affairs at which the prophet aims. It is a state of affairs at which an entity like that aims. (iv) A <i>virtuous act</i> is an admirable act, an act we admire in a prophet like that. (v) An <i>admirable life</i> is a life lived by the prophet, an entity like that. (vi) A desirable life (a life of well-being) is a life desired by the prophet. The components of a good life are good for a human person. (vii) A <i>right act</i> for a person A in some set of circumstances C is what the prophet would take to be most favoured by the balance of reasons for persons like A in C. (viii) A duty in some set of circumstances C is an act the prophet demands from both themselves (i.e., the prophet) and others. He would feel guilty if he did not do it, and he would blame others if they did not do it.
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All moral concepts (e.g., virtue, good motives, virtuous acts, right acts, etc.) are defined via indexical reference to the prophet. Therefore, a virtue is a trait we admire in that prophet and in persons like *that*. That is, a good end is a state of affairs at which *that* prophet would aim. A good life is a life desired by a prophet like *that*. A right act is an act a prophet like *that* would take to be favoured by the balance of reasons. In addition, a duty is what a prophet like *that* would demand of themselves and others. The ultimate ground of morality for all virtues, motives, ends, acts, and aims is that of the virtues, motives, ends, acts, and aims expressed within the life of the divine person in his incarnate state as a human prophet. In other words, God, through the divine person that shares his nature, fulfils the role of grounding morality and, in this divine person’s incarnate state as a human prophet, he provides a means for others to be able to emulate him (and God), and thus themselves become exemplars. The incarnation of a divine person as a human prophet thus allows God’s creative aim to be fully realised by this individual living *the admirable life* that can then be the ground of morality, and the standard for moral assessment and emulation by others in different cultures and generations. We can thus illustrate the position that has now been reached here through Figure 8., where the creative flourishing of humans is to be now increased (i.e., potentially maximised) by the sending of the prophet:

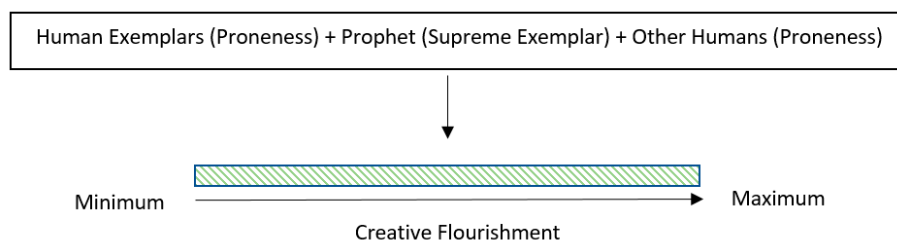


Figure 8. Creative flourishing (ii).

God sending a *divine* prophet is thus the necessary means for others to be able to creatively flourish in their participation in God’s creative activity of making the world into a good world. This action of God sending a divine prophet into the world—as with the action of him sending this prophet with the task of communicating his propositional revelation—is thus an inevitable action stemming from his perfect goodness, that will thus be performed by God as an act of essence. In summary, in order for humans to creatively flourish they need to take part in spreading goodness around the world, and thus make God’s world into a good world. However, due to the human condition, humans cannot do this. Thus, there is a requirement for God to send a divine prophet that can function as the ground of morality within the world.³⁷

Now that the requirement for God to send a divine prophet in order to fulfil his creative aim has been detailed, it is important to turn our attention to the last phase of our constructive task, which focuses on God’s fulfilment of his relational aim and the need for a certain type of *action* to be performed by the prophet—namely, an act of atonement—in order for this aim to be fully realised.

4. Relational Flourishment: The Atonement of the Prophet

The third phase of our constructive task focuses on the aim of *Relational Flourishment*—which we can term God’s ‘relational aim’, in order to emphasise the fact that this aim is for the relational flourishing of human beings. This aim, once further precisified, will be shown to require God to provide a divine prophet that provides a *means of atonement* in order for this relational aim to be fulfilled. The specific precisification of this relational aim can now be re-stated within the present context as follows:

(12) (Relational Aim)	God aims for humans to flourish relationally, to the maximum level, by participating in an agápēic relationship with him.
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For God’s relational aim, God desires for humans to flourish relationally by being in an everlasting relationship with him that is grounded on a multi-formed and unitive *agápē*. However, as before, given the human condition, the realisation of this aim requires that God send a prophet that will live an atoning life (i.e., he would provide a means of atonement through his life). As in the previous two phases of our analysis, this aim can be precisified at a philosophical level in several ways through different theories of love; however, it will be helpful to further detail the central elements of this aim by utilising a theory of love centred on the notion of ‘*agápē*’,³⁸ which will provide a theoretical basis for further understanding why God would be required to send—not only a divine prophet that is tasked with communicating his propositional revelation—but one that also provides a means for atonement.

4.1. The Nature of Love: Multi-Formed Agápē

According to Alexander Pruss (2008, 2013), the notion of *agápē* is at the heart of a loving (‘agápēic’) relationship between two individuals: the lover and the beloved. Given the importance of this notion within this context, we can understand its nature more precisely as follows:

(13) (Agápē)	(i) <i>Determination</i> : A determination of the will of an individual in favour of the beloved.
	(ii) <i>Forms</i> : A multi-formed concept with three interrelated aspects: appreciation, benevolence and union.

In understanding (10) more precisely, the various forms of love—filial, romantic or fraternal love, etc.—are all forms of *agápē*. That is, in Pruss' (2013) thought, *agápē* is not a distinct type of love alongside the other forms of love; rather, it simply *is* love, a multi-formed love. Hence, *agápē* is best conceived of as a multi-formed love that is a determination of the will of an individual in favour of the beloved. *Agápē* is thus a concept that is connected to action—it guarantees right action—and thus, individuals are responsible for love, rather than being passive receivers of it (Pruss 2013). To fulfil this responsibility, one must love by willing the good for the beloved—for their sake, rather than one's own—but one must also appreciate the beloved and seek union with them. There are, thus, at least three aspects of all forms of *agápē*: *appreciation*, *benevolence (willing the good for the beloved)* and *striving for union*. These three aspects of *agápē* are interconnected as follows: a true appreciation of the beloved would result in a recognition that it is right to bestow goods on them through acts of will (Pruss 2013). Moreover, appreciation of the beloved would lead to one seeking union with them in such a way that the beloved's good becomes that of the lover's good as well (Pruss 2013). By willing the good for the beloved for their sake, one would appreciate them as an individual who it is appropriate to bestow goods upon, and one would also be united with the beloved in will, given that the beloved would also will the good for themselves. Additionally, by one aiming for an intimate form of union, where one would treat the good and bad experiences that befall the beloved as befalling themselves, it would thus be natural that the lover would appreciate the beloved as one who is worthwhile of experiencing the good, resulting in one naturally willing the good for the beloved (Pruss 2013). These three aspects of *agápē* provide a basis for there to be a selfless and generative love between the lover and the beloved.³⁹ Moreover, all the various forms of *agápē*—all the various types of *agápē*ic relationships—will include these three aspects within them, yet they will be manifested in different ways. That is, each form of love—self, romantic, filial, and fraternal love, etc.—will exhibit, in distinct ways, an appreciation of the beloved, the willing of their good and a striving for some form of union with them. Precisely, the differentiation between the forms of *agápē* will be distinguishable by the *type of union* that one is impelled to enter into: *formal union* and/or *real union*—with the type of union that is appropriate between the lover and the beloved depending, in part, on the characteristics of the individuals (Pruss 2013). We can thus illustrate the central aspects of the notion of *agápē* through Figure 9., where these aspects being taken as essential components of this specific conception of love.⁴⁰

Focusing now on the unitive aspects of *agápē*,⁴¹ the formal union between a lover and their beloved is a *union of mind and will*. This union of mind and will consists of a mutual 'indwelling' of the lover and beloved—even in the cases of unreciprocated love. In this mutual indwelling, the lover has the beloved 'living within their mind' and strives to understand the nature and goals of the beloved from their perspective—understanding the beloved from the inside—which leads to a willing of the other's particular good and the performance of actions for the sake of the lover *as if the beloved were the lover themselves* (Pruss 2013). In a certain way, love is *ek-static*,⁴² in the sense that through their union, the lover comes to live outside of themselves and in the lover. Hence, in a loving relationship, the lover dwells in the beloved intellectually and in will, and, in turn, the beloved dwells in the lover intellectually and in will as well (Pruss 2013). There is thus a formal union that can be increased as one gains a better knowledge of the beloved, enabling the lover to understand what is good and bad for this particular beloved and understand them better from their own point of view. Moreover, one's will is united with the beloved by willing the good for them, and thus this formal union is derivable from the appreciative and benevolent aspects of love and is therefore always present in every case of love. Formal union is present simply

in virtue of one loving another, and thus can exist without reciprocation, as Pruss (2013, p. 32) writes, “formal union is already achieved at any time love is there . . . formal union can exist without any reciprocation”. However, the love that is present in a relationship nevertheless impels one toward *real* union. Real union is thus the *external* expression of the formal union between the lover and the beloved. That is, real union is the way that the lover and the beloved, who are each united in mind and will, are together in a particular manner that is determined by the nature of the form of love that is present (Pruss 2013). Real union is the reciprocation of love that achieves an additional union between the lover and their beloved through a *shared activity*. *Agápē* thus makes an individual seek real union with another, with the specific form of real union that is sought being the primary distinguishing factor between the different forms of *agápē*. For example, filial love might require physical touch—such as hugging a child—while the friendly love between two colleagues might not call for this expression of their union, with an intellectual conversation perhaps being more appropriate to this type of relationship (Pruss 2008).

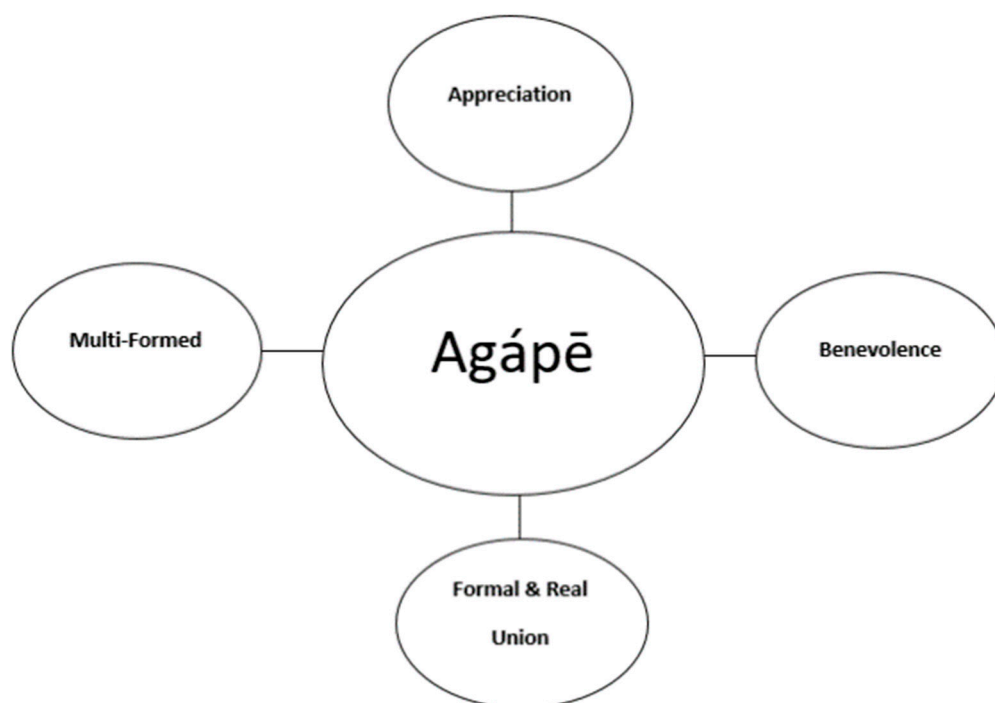


Figure 9. Nature of *Agápē*.

The love between people must thus take on a form that is *appropriate* to the lover, the beloved and their relationship, with some type of real union being paradigmatic of the form of love between them. Love, construed as *agápē*, must thus be *dynamic* and *responsive* to the reality of the beloved, with the achievement of a real union between the lover and their beloved being the central goal that has an external expression—a ‘consummation’ of the form of love that is present. Paradigmatically, the consummation of a real union would thus be a *shared activity* that expresses the *distinctiveness* of the type of relationship that is present and enables the love to be *fulfilled* with respect to the particular form that it takes. The unitive aspect of love is thus fulfilled by this consummation, which includes—in all forms of love—a psychological union, and for a specific form of love—romantic love—a physical union as well. In summary, a relationship of love centres around the expression of *agápē* between the lover and the beloved. *Agápē* is a multi-formed love that is a determination of the lovers will in favour of the beloved and is expressed through their appreciation of the beloved, willing the good for them, being formally united with them and seeking real union with them. Now that we have detailed the nature of the notion of love under study, *agápē*, it is important now to see how, in assuming the cogency of the conceptualisation

of this notion of love, God would seek to fulfil his relational aim (of humans relational flourishing, to a maximum level, through being in a loving *agápēic* with him) by sending a divine prophet to provide a means of atonement.

4.2. Fulfilment of Relational Aim: *Agápē* and Human Flourishment

In the previous two phases of our constructive task, we saw that God,⁴³ as the perfectly good creator and sustainer of all things, would seek to help all of the humans that he had created to live personally flourishing lives, to the maximum level, by providing revelatory information concerning the basic goods, and seeking to provide them with the opportunity to participate in God's creative activity of making the world a good world by living exemplary lives. The sending of a prophet is needed for God to provide an authoritative mechanism that can help to correctly interpret, translate and guard his propositional revelation across cultures and generations—thus allowing God to fulfil his personal aim. Moreover, the divinity of this prophet is needed in order for God to provide a supreme exemplar that can ground morality and provide a standard that can enable other individuals to become exemplars—ultimately allowing God to fulfil his creative aim. For God's relational aim—namely, that of humans being in an everlasting *agápēic* relationship with him, one can take it to be the case that the *intrinsic upper limit* on human flourishing is to be in a loving relationship with God (Stump 2017). That is, participation in the basic goods, and in God's creative activity, are ways in which humans can flourish; yet, a given human's permanent relationship with God in this life, and ultimately in Heaven, is, at a general level, the best thing for human beings. In contrast, the worst thing for human beings is the permanent absence of that relationship with God and others. In addition, in addition to its permanence, the best thing for humans comes in degrees. That is, based on the fact that it is possible for one to have a greater degree of a loving relationship with another person, it is possible for one to have a greater degree of a loving relationship in union with God as well—which, as Eleonore Stump (2012, p. 404) notes, is based on “the willingness and the capacity to receive God's love even on the part of those human beings who are in union with God”. Hence, the most excellent state for humans is the degreed state of being in an everlasting relationship with God that is not had equally by individuals who are in that state. In addition, as humans possess libertarian free will, it is possible for a human being to choose to be in a loving relationship with God—and thus, this choice is the necessary and sufficient condition (in combination with that of participating in the basic goods) for one going to Heaven and warding of Hell. Now, God, as a perfectly good being, would inevitably seek—in addition to human personal and creative flourishing—human relational flourishing, which provides the best and worst thing for humans. It is thus a unique best action for God to enter into a relationship of love (i.e., *agápē*) with all humans—in short, this action is thus an act of essence. In this *agápēic* relationship, God would thus have his will determined in favour of each and every individual by appreciating them, willing the good for them and striving for union with them.

Focusing now on the unitive aspect of *agápēic* love, in showing *agápēic* love towards other individuals, God would thus strive for formal union and real union with each one. The formal union between God and others would be a union of mind and will that consists in a mutual indwelling of God and each individual—such that God, through his ‘omnisubjectivity’ (i.e., his ability to have a complete cognitive grasp of all conscious entities from their first-person perspective),⁴⁴ having the mind of all of his creation within his mind and, through his omniscience (i.e., his ability to the know of the truth value of all propositions),⁴⁵ he understands the nature and the goals of each of them from their perspective. The love between God and creation is *ek-static* in that through his union with each created individual, these individuals come to live outside of themselves in God—these individuals dwell intellectually and in will in God—with this formal union with each of these individuals—from God's side—being of the deepest quality as God understands what is good and bad for each particular individual, understands them fully from their own point of view and always wills the good for them. There is thus a formal union between

God and all other created individuals simply in virtue of him loving them. However, given the human condition, this exists without reciprocation based on the fact, as noted before, of humans inheriting (genetically and socially) a proneness to wrongdoing, which consists of bad desires, weakness of will and false moral beliefs. This proneness to wrongdoing plausibly causes there to be a lack of harmony between a human's mind and will and God's. There is thus, in fact, no *mutual* indwelling between God and humans, but rather, there is a distance between them based on the fact that each person has a certain self-centred mind, and seeks to perform self-centred actions that are contrary to the will of a perfectly good God. The source of the distance between God and a human person is thus to be located in their proneness to wrongdoing, influencing them to not think the thoughts of God (i.e., have his mind (his beliefs and desires)) and will what God wills. Hence, as the formal union between God and humans is not reciprocated, there cannot be a real union between them. However, as an *agápēic* relationship strives not only for formal union but real union—that is, it 'impels' one to seek it—God cannot be in an *agápēic* relationship with humans (or be in one of any worth) if this formal union is not reciprocated—and thus, he cannot achieve his relational aim and provide humans with primary means of their flourishing. We can thus illustrate this point here through Figure 10, where the relational flourishing of humans is to be had by them being in an everlasting relationship with God (with 'proneness' standing for 'proneness to wrongdoing'):

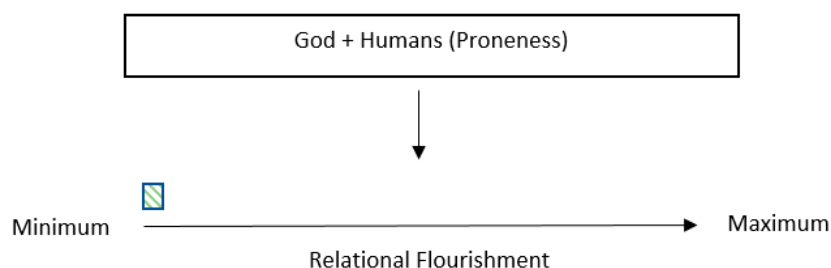


Figure 10. Relational flourishing (i).

Humans can relationally flourish through their participation in a mutual appreciation, benevolence and (formal and real) union between them and God; however, the level of flourishing that is to be attained by humans, given their condition, is indeed at a minimal level, and thus God, as a perfectly good being, would seek, by performing a unique best action, to help humans to maximise their relational flourishing by finding a solution to the problem that plagues them. In finding the needed solution to this problem—which we can term an 'atonement' (i.e., at-one-ment: the uniting of two divided entities). In the act of the atonement, God provides a means of dealing with the proneness to wrongdoing that plagues all of the human race, through the perfect life that the prophet lived, the death that the prophet endured, and the resurrection that the prophet experienced. The atonement thus has three aspects: the life, death and resurrection of the prophet. It will be helpful to now break these down in more detail.⁴⁶

The first aspect of the atoning action of the prophet is that of him living a perfect human life—a life which showed other individuals how they should live and one which could be offered by other humans as 'reparation' for wrongdoing. The perfect life lived by the prophet, as noted previously, was one in which, as an exemplar of goodness, he performed no bad actions, many good actions, and always performed the best or equal best action/kind of action, when there was one. A perfect life would thus include performing the good (best or equal best action/kind of action) of helping others improve the human condition, which has been plagued by disease, death and sin (Swinburne 2003). Hence, in living a perfect life, the prophet would seek to directly improve the human condition through his teaching—namely, by teaching moral truths that can correct the false moral beliefs promulgated. That is, as noted by Swinburne (2003, p. 57), he could teach other humans "how we are to worship and otherwise interact with God; and teaching about

the afterlife, that there is Heaven for the good and (if that is how it is) the possibility of Hell for the bad . . . teaching (e.g., about Heaven) whose truth we could not discover for ourselves". Additionally, he would also seek to better the human condition beyond the capacity of ordinary humans by, for example, healing psychological and physical illnesses and dealing with some of the other evils of society. In addition, as Swinburne (2003, p. 56) further notes, the performance of some miracles with "many non-miraculous healings would be the best combination". As noted previously, as a divine person, the prophet could not have been prone to wrongdoing, but only have a proneness to not performing any supererogatory actions or the best action (or equal best action), and thus he would indeed face certain temptations not to as well. Hence, the prophet could have been subject to temptation not to live such a perfect life in this specific sense. In addition, in living a perfect life, the prophet overcame this temptation when ordinary humans often yield to it. In overcoming these temptations, and thus living a life of perfection, it is not necessary that this life end in a *death by execution* (Swinburne 2003). Yet, in many societies, this might, in fact, happen, as it is a frequent response to those who perform the supererogatory action of protesting strongly against injustice, and promoting a correct moral system—in a society that promotes an incorrect one—that they are often executed for doing this. Hence, the prophet, in living a perfect life, as a reparational sacrifice,⁴⁷ and for the purpose of exemplifying and showing how one should respond to the worst that life throws at one, it is plausible that he would decide to live his life in a society where his life would end in death by execution (Swinburne 2003). That is, in the prophet performing the action of becoming incarnate, living a perfect life that could function as a reparational sacrifice for the sins of humanity, and showing others how to live in a society (like many other human societies) that rejects a life orientated towards the good, it is indeed plausible that the prophet's life will end in a death by execution. This thus leads us to the second aspect of the atoning action of the prophet.

The second aspect of the atoning action of the prophet is that of his death providing a means for all of the bondage to wrongdoing that has been inflicted upon humans to be dealt with. More precisely, all humans are taken here to be 'present' with the prophet during his death—with this death being the means used by God to overcome the problem that sin has caused for each and every human being. At a general level, and in following (Stump 2018), we can take it to be the case that an individual can be present, firstly, at a *place*, through occupying a certain region of space, secondly, at a *time*, through existing at a certain moment of time, and, thirdly, *personally present*, through having a psychological connection with another individual (Stump 2018). For the third type of presence: personal presence—which is a presence *with* or *to* another individual—one can begin to understand the nature of this presence better through the notion of 'mind reading'. Mind reading, as noted by Stump (2018, p. 131), is where "one human person can be present with another in a way more powerful than mere presence at a place or in a time". In contemporary neuropsychology, mind reading is the process in which an individual has within themselves something of the mind of the other individual—where the mind of an individual is the combination of the attitudes, perspectives, commitments and beliefs, etc., of that individual—in short, their 'intentional states' (Stump 2018). In mind reading, an individual would thus have intuitive and direct access to the mind of another person—that is, direct and intuitive access to the intentional states in the mind of another person. An individual can thus be taken to be present with another individual, as Stump (2013, p. 41) notes, "In the intermingling of minds made possible by the mirror neuron system, one person is present to another in virtue of being in the other, in a way that the neurobiology of the brain makes possible". More precisely, contemporary neurobiologists conceive of this knowledge of persons as being supported by a neurologically distinct system termed the 'mirror neuron system' (Stump 2013). Hence, in mind reading, as further noted by Stump (2012, p. 8), "mirror neurons fire both when a person does a particular kind of action and also when he sees someone else performing such an action. The kind of knowledge given by the mirror neuron system is not a kind of *knowledge that*. Rather it is a matter of knowing from one's

own internal state what someone else is doing and feeling". An individual thus knows a person, and that person is present within the mind of that individual, by them having a 'copy' or 'simulacrum' of the mental states of that individual that is provided to them by their mirror neuron system (Stump 2018). Thus, the prophet, in having a human nature, will have the ability, like other humans, to mind read other individuals. Yet, due to the prophet also having a divine nature, he will have access to divine power, and so can have the ability to mind read other human beings in a way that mere humans cannot do so (Stump 2018). Moreover, as a divine person would be eternal (i.e., existing without beginning or end) and omnipresent (i.e., being causally active at, and cognizant of, every point of space), and thus would be present at every time and space, the prophet can use his human mind, and the power that is available from his possession of a divine nature to mind read, at once, the *entire mind of every human beings that exist at every time and space* (Stump 2018). That is, the power of the divine person in the prophet, as noted by Stump (2018, p. 164, square parentheses added), "can give the human mind of [the prophet] the power of having within himself, in a mind-reading way, the minds of all human persons at one and the same time". In addition, the event in which this takes place is his death by execution on the cross. On the cross, the prophet is willing to open himself up simultaneously to every human mind. In addition, thus, when he does so, as Stump (2013, p. 45) further writes, "then at that time all the mental states of all human beings will flood his mind, through the extended powers provided by his divine nature". Hence, at this time, the mind of the prophet is opened to the mind of all human beings—including times before his birth and after his physical death. In addition, by the mind of the prophet being connected to the minds of every other human being, the prophet would have in his mind a copy or simulacrum of each of the mental states of every individual, such that each and every individual is present within the mind of the prophet in the event of his death (Stump 2018). This would thus result in two things occurring that are central to our theory: first, in this act, the prophet fulfils his pre-temporal 'rejection' by becoming the 'Rejected One',⁴⁸ through bearing all the sins and inherent evil of humanity. That is, on the cross, the prophet's mind is connected with the minds of every human being—where at one and the same time, the prophet mind reads the mental states, as noted by Stump (2012, p. 14, parentheses added), that is "found in all the terribly evil human acts human beings have ever committed. Every vile, shocking, disgusting revolutive evil psychic state accompanying all human evil will also be at once in the psyche [mind] of the prophet, only off-line". The prophet is thus able to possess in his mind a copy or simulacrum of all the 'stains' of all the sinful and evil actions that have ever been thought of, performed (or will ever be performed)—without, however, him having performed any evil acts of his own. Thus, by performing this mind reading action, the prophet takes on all of the sins (and evil) of the world and thus becomes the Rejected One, who stands in the place of all other humans.

The second thing that this mind reading act would result in is that all human beings would be *present with* the prophet in his death, through the minds of all humans being present within the mind of the prophet at this time. In addition, therefore, as all of the minds that indwell within the mind of the prophet (while he is on the cross) are present with him during this event, they are then put to 'spiritual' death (in the spiritual dimension) through the 'physical' death of the prophet (in the physical dimension).⁴⁹ In other words, all humans participate in the death of the prophet by virtue of being personally present with him. Thus, in participating in the death of the prophet, all humans are freed from their bondage to sin, as the death of their minds in the prophet puts an end to the proneness to sin and the spiritual darkness of their minds—which are both states that are dependent on the functioning of the human mind. Hence, as all of the minds of each and every human spiritually die at the moment that the mind of the prophet physically dies, there is an end that has now been given to the production of sin in the life of every human—as, in short, each of these humans has now died through participating (via personal presence) in the death of the prophet. Thus, by the prophet experiencing death, we are now presented with a means of breaking the bondage to sin that has plagued all humans—which is provided

by the prophet taking on all the sins of the world (and thus became the Rejected One), and by that of the minds of all humans experiencing death—and thus the proneness to sin and spiritual bondage that is tied to these minds ceasing to exist as well. Yet, the death of the prophet is not the end, given that he is resurrected from the dead by God (as affirmed by the Christian tradition), which thus provides grounds for the third, and final, aspect of the atoning action of the prophet.

The third aspect of the atoning action of the prophet is that of his resurrection providing a means for all humans to be provided with a renewed mind and will. The ‘mind’ of an individual, as noted previously, is the combination of the intentional states of that individual. Whereas the ‘first-order’ will of an individual is a will, in this specific context, that is directed towards the good (or the bad). Based on their genetic inheritance, humans lack a mind and first-order will for the good, and, given their social environment (and the influences of their genes), they cannot bring themselves to acquire it. More precisely, humans cannot reciprocate a formal union with God because they have a mind and will that are at odds with his. However, humans cannot obtain this mind and will by themselves. Hence, this mind and will must come from God. Yet, as God is a perfect being, he has a mind and will that is *wholly* different from humans—that is, his attitudes, perspectives, commitments, beliefs and will are completely different from that of humans. God’s mind is such that it is not something that fits with the ‘life-situation’ of humans—who each have their mind in a manner that is tied, given the human condition, to their vulnerabilities, sufferings, inherent limitations, urges and dependence on the physical, and, ultimately, the reality of death. Hence, humans cannot directly adopt or ‘share’ God’s mind, as noted by Collins (2011, p. 2), it “would be too alien from ours for this sharing to occur. This is analogous to the fact that a tree branch cannot be grafted into a horse, only another tree; the horse is too alien for it”. God must thus use another means to provide the required mind and will. Now, by all human beings indwelling within the mind of the prophet—by them being personally present with his mind reading activity—all humans have been put to death in the death of the prophet. That is, as noted previously, the minds of all humans have participated in the death of the prophet and thus cease to exist ‘spiritually’ at the time that the prophet’s mind ceases to exist ‘physically’. However, as the prophet is the means by which God uses to communicate his will (through revelation and his exemplary acts), and, most importantly, the only human that presently stands in an agápēic relation with God—as in being divine he is (plausibly) in an everlasting agápēic relationship with God. Hence, God would seek to bring him back to life so as to enable others to stand in an agápēic relationship with God as well *through* him. The resurrection of the prophet thus provides the grounds for all humans to enter into an agápēic relationship with God—and thus receive the goods made available to them by standing in a (saving) relation to the prophet. Hence, they now have the opportunity to receive a renewed mind and will by being brought back to life *with* the prophet in his resurrection. Through this event taking place, all humans are thus able to adopt the mind and will that was created during the life of the prophet. More specifically, during the period of his incarnation, the prophet entered as *deeply* as possible into the human life situation of suffering, limitations, dependence, vulnerability, and death—and in this situation, he responded to these issues with love, faith and hope. Thus, by the prophet performing this action of identification, a *fully human and divine mind and will* were created in the prophet—with this mind *not* being prone to wrongdoing. In other words, by living a certain type of life, the prophet created a *new mind and will* that was wholeheartedly conformed around the good—his intentional states and will were all directed towards the good—and thus, each derivatively elect individual is provided with the opportunity to replace their previously possessed ‘tainted’ mind and will by ‘partaking’ (adopting or sharing) in his. Yet, this mind and will cannot be imposed upon an individual by God, if their libertarian freedom and ‘personhood’ is to be maintained. Thus, an individual must *freely* partake of it by forming a ‘second-order’ will for a mind and will that is directed towards the good, which can only be achieved once an individual ceases resisting God. Once an individual has ceased resisting God’s love, God then can

provide them with ‘operative grace’ that is required for them to come to possess the needed second-order will for a mind and will orientated towards the good. That is, God can infuse this operative grace into a person’s will without violating it, and thus, through this infusion of grace, an individual comes to have a will of faith—where they are now focused on seeking God’s goodness and repudiating their own evil. In this condition, an individual has *justification*—which centres on the formation of this second-order desire, as Stump (2018, p. 204) notes, “the will of faith is therefore the global second-order will to have, through God’s help, a will that wills the good, universally understood. The formation of this will of faith in a person is his justification”. Justification is thus the first step towards achieving moral and spiritual regeneration leading to a reciprocated formal union between God and humans, a real union which is completed by the integration between the first- and second-order desires, and the adoption of the mind of the prophet in a particular individual.

This particular integration and adoption occurs through the process of *sanctification* that is initiated when an individual comes to faith (and thus is justified) by receiving God’s operative grace, and thus now receives God’s ‘spirit’.⁵⁰ God’s spirit now comes to indwell in the person and brings with it the mind of the prophet that was formed during his life and which an individual can now directly participate in.⁵¹ The indwelling of God’s spirit thus enables an individual to be directly attentive to the mind of the prophet and his character. However, by God’s spirit coming to indwell within an individual and infusing the mind (i.e., subjectivity) of the prophet into the individual, this does not remove the old dispositions that the individual acquired through their performance of morally bad or wrong actions. However, as Stump (2018, p. 343) writes, it does “introduce virtues over them, and it counteracts the old morally wrong dispositions”. Thus, at this stage, the individual is not *wholly integrated* around the good, as they can still act on some first-order desires that are contrary to the good as they see it. However, the individual is now in an intimate relationship with God, and thus together, they can cooperate to make progress in the integration of the individual. More precisely, there is now a reciprocated formal union between God and humans where, in an ‘ek-static’ manner, each human lives outside themselves and in God, and now—once the process of sanctification has been initiated—God lives outside of himself and in a particular individual (through his spirit). Hence, all humans live in God intellectually and in will and, in turn, through his spirit and the mind of the prophet (who shares the same nature as God) being imparted into them, God now dwells in a particular justified human intellectually and in will. This all establishes the ground for a real union between God and humans, as a real union is an external expression of (the now established) reciprocated formal union between God and creation—in the way that God and a human individual, who are each united in mind and will, are now together in a particular manner through the *shared activity of sanctification*. That is, the integration of the first and second-order will, and the adoption of the mind of the prophet, during the process of sanctification—the work of which is called God’s ‘cooperative grace’—is a *shared activity* between God and that human, such that, as long as the individual continues to cooperate with God in allowing his grace (through the work of his spirit) to establish a wholehearted desire for the good (i.e., a first and second-order desire for the good)—and does not decide to return to their original resistance to God’s love and the grace that he has infused within them—then the process that has been initiated will continue to work within them to strengthen the individual in willing the good, ultimately resulting in an individual’s complete integration around the good and real union with God (Stump 2018). Hence, an individual’s surrender to God’s love, in response to the suffering of the prophet, is the central act that is met immediately by the indwelling of God’s spirit—with all of the subjective states of the prophet—which, over time, will ultimately culminate in a complete (i.e., formal and real) union with God. This all allows God and each individual human, who is justified (and is currently undergoing (or has completed) the process of sanctification) as being in an agápēic relationship, that is, a relationship of love where each of the *relata*: God and the human individual, have their will determined in favour of one another, which is

expressed by their appreciation for one another, their willing the good for each other, and the formal and real union with one another. God’s relational aim is thus able to be fulfilled by the work of the prophet, as it is, first, the mind of him, created during his life, that is appropriated by humans in order to allow them to have the ‘mind of God’.

The life, death and resurrection of the prophet is thus instrumental in enabling an individual to be led into real union with God as, through the death of the prophet, humans are able to participate in this death and thus cease to possess their ‘darkened’ minds and wills. In addition, now, through the resurrection of the prophet, humans can now also participate in his life by the mind and will of the prophet now replacing the individual’s own mind and will in a manner that the intentional states of the prophet are, as noted by Collins (2000, p. 139), “creatively individualized and integrated into our own”. In addition, as the new mind and will created in the prophet during his life is radically at odds with the original minds and wills of other humans who have inherited an inclination to wrongdoing, it undercuts it by now providing them with intentional states that are inclined towards the good. Therefore, by the prophet performing the action of resurrecting from the dead, we now have the final element needed for humans to reciprocate their formal union with God—namely, that of a renewed mind and will now being made available for all humans. Thus, through the prophet’s life, death and resurrection humans have been provided with the means to enter into an everlasting agápēic relationship with God. Yet, it is again important to note that by employing these means, humans are able to enter into this relationship, in an *indirect manner*, through the prophet. That is, humans *cannot* directly remove their proneness to wrongdoing, and thus enter into this relationship with God, but they can remove it, *indirectly*, through the death and resurrection of the prophet removing their tainted mind and will and—via the infusion of God’s spirit—providing them with a mind and will that is in conformity with God’s—namely, the prophet’s. In other words, the prophet is the sole human that can, and does, stand in an everlasting agápēic relationship with God. However, through the actions performed by the prophet, humans are now able to indirectly partake of this agápēic relationship with God, in the prophet, by the appropriation of the means of atonement that was provided by him. We can thus illustrate the position that has now been reached here through Figure 11., where the relational flourishing of humans is to be now increased (i.e., potentially maximised) by the sending of a divine and atoning prophet.

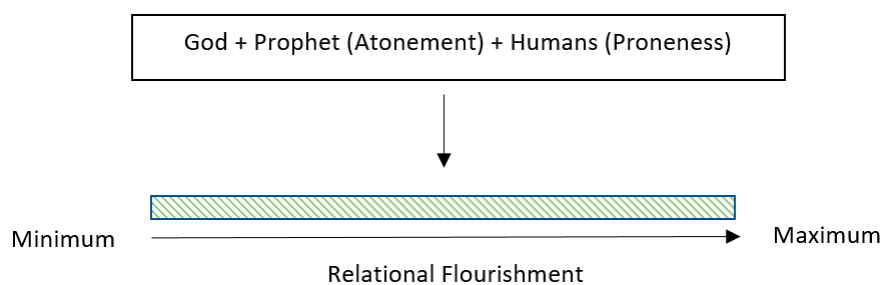


Figure 11. Relational flourishing (ii).

By God inevitably sending the prophet to the world in order to fulfil an *atoning* role, his relational aim of enabling humans to participate in an agápēic relationship with him can be fully realised. In other words, it is thus, again, clearly, a unique best action for God to send a divine prophet into the world to not only communicate his propositional revelation, but provide a means of atonement for all humans—in short, as with the other action, this specific action performed by God is one that can be classed as an act of essence. In summary, in order for humans to relationally flourish, they need to stand in an agápēic relationship with God. However, due to the human condition, humans cannot do this. Thus, there is a requirement for God to send a divine and atoning prophet that can provide the means of atonement for humans to be able to enter into this everlasting relationship with God.

Taking all of these things into account, one thus has good a priori reasons in support of the Christian Position and the extension expressed in (2) that God would send a divine and atoning prophet, due to the fact that the sending of a prophet by this action allows God to fulfil his flourishing aims: his personal, creative and relational aims. First, God's personal aim is able to be fulfilled by the prophet's communication of God's revelation, enabling them to fully participate in the basic goods. Second, God's creative aim is able to be fulfilled by the prophet providing the grounds for morality and the standard by which others can understand how to become an exemplar. Third, God's relational aim is able to be fulfilled by the prophet (i.e., his mind and will) providing the means for the union that is required for humans to be in an everlasting relationship of love with God. God's action of sending a divine and atoning prophet, as taught by Christianity, is thus the means by which God's aim for goodness and maximal flourishing can be truly realised in our world.

5. Conclusions

In conclusion, the central focus of this article was to provide an informal, a priori argument—termed the Flourishment Argument—in support of the veracity of the Christian conception of the Abrahamic religion (i.e., the Christian Position), which centres on God's action of sending a divine and atoning prophet into the world. These reasons were formulated in light of two ethical theories: natural law and Exemplarism, and the notion of *agápē*. Within the framework established by these philosophical theories and notions, it was shown that the action of God sending a divine and atoning prophet provides the necessary means for God to fulfil his aim for humans to maximally flourish in three ways: personally, creatively, and relationally. It was shown in this article that, first, in order for God to fulfil his personal aim, it was required that he send a prophet (with a propositional revelation). Second, for him to fulfil his creative aim, it was required that this prophet be divine. In addition, third, for God to fulfil his relational aim, it was required that this prophet live an 'atoning' life. Hence, given the possibility of fulfilling these aims, it is necessarily the case that God, as a perfectly good being, would want humans to flourish in these ways and thus would inevitably (as an act of essence) send a divine and atoning prophet—as taught by Christianity—into the world to help this goal to be fully realised. The Christian Position (i.e., the Christian conception of the central tenets of the Abrahamic religion) is thus defensible on independent, a priori grounds.

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Notes

- ¹ The other prominent Abrahamic religions are the Bahá'í Faith, Druze, Samaritanism and Rastafarianism. Despite these religions being included within the umbrella of Abrahamic religions, these religions will not be focused on in this article.
- ² Though some Jews, and all Christians, would affirm the fact of the message of these prophets being for individuals of all nations.
- ³ I take the word 'God' here and throughout this article to refer to the one divine person: 'the Father', who is conceived of as the sole fundamental divine person. The usage of the term in this way, however, does not negate the possibility of there being other divine persons as well—such as that of the 'Son' (Christ). Nevertheless, the argument of this article, though not dependent upon any account of the doctrine of the Trinity, is best formulated within a Monarchical Trinitarian framework. For an explication of this view, see (Sijuwade 2021a).
- ⁴ These would be passages such as Romans 1:4 and 10:9.
- ⁵ As can be seen clearly in Islamic teaching in *Surah An-Nisa* 157.
- ⁶ Swinburne's argument is focused on the 'incarnation of God', rather than the 'sending of a divine prophet'. However, the difference between the position defended by his argument and that of this article is purely semantic. Nonetheless, the latter phrasing is to be preferred due to its helpfulness in emphasising the importance of the notion and role of a prophet in the

Abrahamic religious framework—where, within the Christian framework, this notion being of such great importance that even Christ refers to himself in through this language in Mark 6:4.

7 One could ask the question of how something like the incarnation could be an act of essence—which would require the incarnation to be a necessary act that has always been the case—given the fact that the Son does not everlastingly assume a human nature but instead does so at a certain point in time (such as 4BCE)? Well, one can deal with this issue by assuming the classical conception of God’s relationship to time—that of divine timelessness, which allows one to affirm the fact of the Son having always been ‘incarnate’—as there is no temporal sequence in the life of a timeless being (i.e., all events that occur within its life are simultaneous); yet, the effects, or the completion, of these actions can still be present, and extended through time. A way to better understand this point has been put forward by Brian Leftow (2002, p. 297), where he utilises the notion of timelessness and ‘scattered temporal locations’, which helps to further clarify this point and deserves to be quoted in full:

Some events have scattered temporal locations. When did Booth kill Lincoln? Booth shot Lincoln at t_1 . Lincoln died at t_2 . Surely Booth’s shooting Lincoln is part of his killing Lincoln. The killing was completed at t_2 , when Lincoln died. But it does not seem right to say that Booth was gradually killing Lincoln the whole time Lincoln lay dying: the killing was not a continuous event stretching from the shooting to t_2 . Rather, it was a ‘scattered’ event, consisting of the shooting and Lincoln’s finally becoming dead. The incarnation, I submit, is another event with a scattered location. It consists of God’s taking on flesh and the flesh’s being taken on. God performs the action of taking on Christ’s flesh timelessly, as Booth shot Lincoln at t_1 . The flesh God takes on comes to be in 4 BC, at which point the flesh is taken on, and the event of taking on flesh is complete—as Lincoln’s dying at a later time makes Booth’s action complete. Booth did not have to be there for his killing to become complete. He could well have been killed himself before it was. Nor then need Booth have changed intrinsically for the event he put in motion to become complete. So too, then, the completion of the event of becoming incarnate need involve no intrinsic change in God. The incarnation, I submit, is not complete until 4 BC, but its completion involves changes only in temporal things, not in God.

Thus, in assuming this specific approach one can see how the incarnation could indeed be taken to be an act of essence. Thus, in taking this all into account, one can indeed affirm the reality of the incarnation (and atonement)—and the overall action of God sending a divine and atoning prophet into the world, as will be detailed below—as being a ‘timeless’ act of essence, even though the completion of these actions will take place over an extended period of time.

8 More on the nature of omnisubjectivity below.

9 These ‘strands’ (and aspects of his concept of divine revelation) will be utilised in various areas of the argument that is to be formulated in this article.

10 That is, the Flourishment Argument that will be formulated and presented throughout the rest of this article in an informal, rather than formal manner.

11 Specifically, God is an omnipotence-trope. For an explanation of this, see (Sijuwade 2021b).

12 Where, at a general level, to ‘flourish’ is to ‘develop successfully’, ‘to the fullest’ or to ‘thrive’.

13 This is not to say that there are not any altruistic desires; however, these types of desires operate alongside the selfish desires and are often weak.

14 Yet, as Swinburne (1989, p. 114) notes, the fact of moral belief is good as it ‘simply serves as the trigger which turns desires of certain sorts into a proneness to wrongdoing’.

15 It is important to note that there are indeed criticisms that can be (and have been) raised against each of the philosophical positions utilised in developing the Flourishment Argument—namely, that of Swinburne’s conception of free will (and the human condition), Finnis’ natural law, Zagzebski’s Exemplarism and Pruss’ conception of *agápē* (i.e., love). However, given that it will take us too far afield in detailing these criticisms, showing how one can deal with them, and how the aforementioned philosophers have also sought to do so, we can thus, again, assume a conditional position in this article of: *if* the conception of the human condition assumed here, the ethical theories of natural law and Exemplarism, and the notion *agápē* are cogent, then there is a successful argument in support of the Christian Position. Though it is important to note, as will be further detailed below, that the argument itself is not wholly wedded to these theories and notions and thus can indeed be re-cast within a different framework if one has issues with these them, and does not want to assume the conditional position put forward here.

16 Thus, even though the argument of this section will be detailed within the framework of natural law—due to its rigour and philosophical clarity—the central thesis of it—namely, that God will want humans to personally flourish by participating in basic goods—is not wholly tied to this theory and hence can be further developed within another ethical framework. Thus, if one takes issue with the theory of natural law, the argument of this section can still stand and be re-stated within another philosophical context. Furthermore, it is important to understand that even though the term ‘natural law’ theory is usually associated with that of ‘classical natural law’ theory, found in the work of St. Thomas Aquinas. The specific version of the natural law theory that is under focus here is that of what has been termed the ‘new natural law’ theory. However, for ease of writing, I will continue to simply refer to it as the natural law theory.

17 Which thus includes answers that do not necessarily involve a deity.

18 This is not to say that other lists cannot be produced and the nature of these goods be further precisified, as Finnis (2011) himself more recently added the notion of marriage to the basic good of life.

19 These requirements are taken here to be basic and self-evident in the same way that the basic goods are.
20 With an intimate relationship with God being the needed sufficient condition that will be detailed below.
21 This, however, does not mean that this information has to be stated in the more philosophically precise way that Finnis did; thus, one should expect a statement concerning the goods and requirements of practical reason to be stated in the language, and conceptual structure, of the society that the revelation was provided within. More on the nature of a ‘culture-dependent’ revelation below.
22 And are in a relationship with God—this, however, is entailed by one fully participating in the basic good of religion.
23 For example, by one knowing that God is necessarily related to other ontologically equal divine persons, rather than him being an ontologically unique, solitary being, one would know that it is permissible to offer up worship to God through one of those divine persons.
24 The latter statement is found in (Swinburne 2016, p. 130).
25 Thus, again, even though the argument of this section will be detailed within the framework of Exemplarism—due to its rigour and philosophical clarity—the central thesis of it—namely, that God will want humans to participate in his creative activity of grounding morality and spreading goodness through living moral lives—is not wholly tied to this theory and hence can be further developed within another ethical framework. Thus, if one takes issue with the theory of Exemplarism, the argument of this section can still stand and be re-stated within another philosophical context.
26 Furthermore, according to Zagzebski (2017, p. 11), we can succeed in referring to water even if we associate the wrong descriptions with ‘water’, as what makes water ‘water’ is that it is H₂O. However, the meaning of ‘water’ cannot be ‘H₂O’ since people did not even have the concept of H₂O, much less use it in explaining the meaning of “water”, until recent centuries.
27 Zagzebski finds the following model of emulation in the work of David Velleman (2007).
28 Zagzebski sources the general iteration of the simulation model from the work of Alvin Goldman (2008) and others.
29 Further detailing the relationship between these two theories will be the focus of future work. However, if one has issues in affirming both of these theories, then one can privilege that of Exemplarism, over the theory of natural law, as the holding of this theory (which requires sending a prophet as a supreme exemplar) will thus also entail the fact of God sending a prophet (i.e., an authoritative representative), though this prophet might not be tasked with the role of communicating a propositional revelation. Moreover, for a further explanation of the a posteriori necessity of morality within an Exemplarist framework, see (Zagzebski 2017).
30 Among the myriad other entities that God would see that is good to create as well.
31 I say ‘solely’ here to keep open the possibility of God providing a ‘partial’ moral code (e.g., the 10 Commandments) in addition to moral exemplars.
32 With a reminder that one does not have to make this assumption for the argument to hold. Moreover, I will regularly refer to the ontological perfect emulation of the prophet with God as that of him sharing his nature.
33 As well as those that are acquired in the face of difficulty, for this, see (Zagzebski 2017, pp. 30–40).
34 The modal term ‘might’ is emphasised here to highlight the fact that the possibility of this occurring is all that is needed for scepticism to rear its head, rather than that of it actually being the case that this occurs for this to happen.
35 Even though the prophet would not be able to perform a wrong action, his psychological state might be as such as to lead him to feel as though he could. In addition, though he would not have any proneness to wrongdoing, he indeed would be able to have a proneness to not perform any supererogatory actions or the best action (or equal best action), and thus would indeed face certain temptations not to as well (Swinburne 2008).
36 One could ask the question of whether the prophet argued for in the previous section has to be the same person as the divine person who is sent to fulfil the role of being a supreme exemplar? Yes, it is highly plausible that if God will inevitably send a prophet to accompany his propositional revelation and exercise an authoritative role in doing this, it is plausible that this specific individual would also be given the task of fulfilling the role of being the supreme exemplar that is the ground of morality, and provides the standard that enables other individuals to themselves to become exemplary. This is so because if God were to send the prophet to exercise an authoritative role over the communities formed by the propositional revelation that he has communicated, and the divine person sent by God were also to function as a supreme exemplar over all existing communities—and thus have a level of authority in them—then there could be a clash of authorities. Hence, it is plausibly the case that the prophet inevitably sent by God to communicate God’s propositional revelation is *identical* to the divine person inevitably sent by God to provide the standard of morality.
37 Though there has been a use of the notion of exemplarism here, this is not to be confused with the notion of exemplarism that is utilised by theologians to form the ‘Moral Exemplar Theory of Atonement’. As the notion of atonement that will be utilised in the next section does not rely on the prophet’s atoning act simply being that of him being a moral exemplar; rather, as will be shown, the atonement is taken to have an ontological effect. Nevertheless, for a helpful detailing of the Exemplar Theory of Atonement, see (Quinn 1993).
38 Thus, again, even though the argument of this section will be detailed within an *agápēic* framework—due to its clarity and theological plausibility—the central thesis of it—namely, that God will want humans to be in an everlasting relationship of

love with him—is not wholly tied to this framework and hence can be further developed within another theoretical framework. Thus, if one takes issue with the concept of *agapē*, the argument of this section can still stand and be re-stated within another philosophical context.

39 Despite love being such as to include a determination of the will that involves appreciation, goodwill and union, it is important to note that love is not experienced *as* these features, but is a single thing (Pruss 2013, p. 24).

40 Therefore, if one of these aspects is missing in a relationship, then it is not an agápēic (love) relationship.

41 The first two aspects of love will not vary drastically between the different forms of love—one can appreciate the same good of an individual in a romantic, filial and fraternal context, and the very same goods can also be willed within these contexts as well.

42 More on this notion below.

43 In this section, I will be interchanging between the term ‘*agapē*’ and ‘love’ throughout without any change in meaning.

44 For a further detailing of the nature of omniscience, see (Zagzebski 2013b).

45 For a further detailing of the nature of omniscience, see (Swinburne 2016).

46 The following is a brief explication of elements of the Agápēic Theory of Atonement that features in (Sijuwade). At a general level, the Atonement is the authoritative and definitive teaching of Christianity, and thus, on this basis, some positions concerning the nature and work of Christ (i.e., the prophet) that deny the veracity of this teaching—that is, that deny the fact *that* Christ’s life, death and resurrection saves humans from sin and reconciles them to God—are to be ruled out as ‘unorthodox’. Yet, as there is no authoritative and definitive stance on *how* to best interpret this teaching, it is possible for there to be a number of different interpretations that can each be classed as ‘orthodox’ interpretations of the doctrine. More specifically, in the field of contemporary ‘analytic theology’, certain individuals have sought to propose particular ‘theories’ of the Atonement that provide an explanation of *how* Christ’s life, death and resurrection saves humans from sin and reconciles them to God. These have ranged from Anselmian approaches, as expressed by Swinburne (1994), through Eastern Orthodox approaches, as expressed by Robin Collins (2011), to Thomistic approaches, as expressed by Eleonore Stump (2018). At a specific level, the Agápēic Theory of Atonement draws from these three types of approaches and seeks to show how Christ’s life, death and resurrection saves humans from sin and reconciles them to God, within a specific theoretical framework that takes God to have the desire for humans to flourish to the maximum level by partaking in an everlasting relationship of love (*agápē*) with him. Yet, given the ‘human condition’, all humans face a problem that stops them from entering this relationship with God. Hence, the atoning work of Christ provides the necessary means for dealing with this problem and enabling all humans to enter into an ‘agápēic relationship’ with God, and thus truly flourish to the maximum level.

47 More on this in the next section.

48 This assumes the ‘Barthian’ idea that the prophet (‘the Son’) was pre-temporally elected by God to fulfill his role—and thus is the ‘Elected One’ and was thus also deemed pre-temporally the ‘Rejected One’ in anticipation of the sins that he would take on during his death.

49 The distinction between dimensions was introduced in earlier sections of this article. I leave the metaphysics of this ‘spiritual’ death open.

50 Stump (2018) refers to this as the ‘Holy Spirit’; however, to ward off the requirement to establish the veracity of the doctrine of the Trinity and to promote some of neutrality between the ARs, I will refer to this entity as ‘God’s spirit’, without any assumption that this is a personal entity. Moreover, even though words such as ‘justification’ and ‘sanctification’ have been used here, these terms are not necessarily to be interpreted in a Christian manner—and thus I use the terms, again, in a theologically neutral manner.

51 Though terms like ‘grace’, ‘justification’ and ‘sanctification’ have been used here this does not mean, however, that one should interpret them in a Christian manner, given the a priori nature of the argument that has been proposed in this article.

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