

THE PROBLEM OF EVIL AND PROVIDENCE IN THE BOOK OF JOB: AQUINAS'S CRITICAL INTERPRETATION OF MAIMONIDES.

OUTLINE

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1.0 STATUS QUAESTIONIS:

Introduction

A philosophico-religious discussion must entail a comparative inquiry among major religious traditions—Jewish, Christian and Muslim. Our choice of Moses Maimonides and Thomas Aquinas is based on the fact that their philosophical convictions are a cross-pollination of ideas coming from the three major religious traditions—Jewish, Christian and Islamic traditions. The major areas of discussion in this research where the ideas of our authors engage each other include the character of language and religious discourse about God with a special emphasis on the nature of divine attributes; the centrality of matter and the concomitant effects of matter as the cause of evil; the inner compatibility of human freedom with divine providence in a created order. It is evident that the introduction of Aristotle's logic¹ in the theology of the 12th century revolutionized the way human language speaks about God both in the East and the West. Both Maimonides and Aquinas believe that we cannot actually grasp the quidditative knowledge of God and that no names or attributes can signify the actual essence of God. While Maimonides is very sympathetic to the Eastern Neo-Platonist tradition (Plotinus, Pseudo-Dionysius among others) affirming the *via negativa* as the only way of making sense of man's discourse about God, Aquinas while not rejecting the *via negativa*, reasons on the contrary that human language can make meaningful positive statements about God such that to say that "God is good," means that "God is substantially good." In his *Commentary* on the famous question 13 of the *Summa Theologiae*, Brian J. Shanley observes that, 'at the heart of Aquinas's treatise on God is a bridge-constructing act between two opposing poles of thought: respecting the transcendent otherness of God by denying that human language can know and name the divine essence; and giving meaning to the positive and affirmative claims about God in the scripture, tradition and worship.'² The task is clear: reconciling the negative approach to God in the Greek Eastern tradition and the positive approach to God in the Latin Western tradition. And Aquinas's key to this important task of reconciliation is interpreting in his own way, the threefold path to God—

¹ Some parts of Aristotle's logic (*Peri Hermenias*, *Categories*) have been well known from the 1st cycle of the Middle Ages, but others (*Prior and Posterior Analytics*) were rediscovered during the 12th and the 13th centuries, shaping the medieval conception of science with a lot of consequences on the medieval conception of theology.

² Aquinas, *The Treatise on the Divine Nature: Summa Theologiae 1, 1-13*, translated with commentary by Brian J. Shanley, (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2006) p 324.

causality, negation and eminence—first articulated by Pseudo-Dionysius.³ This threefold path is Aquinas's way of interpreting Maimonides. The weakness in the latter's teaching is according to Aquinas, the lack of vision that prevented access to the eminent divine attribute on the basis of which the affirmative and the negative attributes find their logical meaning. It is in this interpretation of the threefold path to God that the agreement and disagreement between Maimonides and Aquinas come to the fore. Maimonides's '*sola negativa*' renders human language meaningless but Aquinas's surgical introduction of the other two ways—*causalitatis* and *eminentiae*, without rejecting the *via negativa*, reestablishes the positive value of the human language and assures the solidity of the Christian metaphysics and faith. This difference in language would immediately be seen in our authors' discussion of divine providence.

A deep perusal of Aquinas's works would reveal his consistent interest in the contributions of Maimonides to the philosophical questions of his 13th century environment. The huge array of quotations from the *Dux Neutorum*, and the mentioning of 'Rabbi Moyses' by name in the works of Aquinas, witness to this interest and to the great influence that Maimonides exercised on the Christian scholastics of his time.⁴ As a result, any comparative study involving the two authors, demand a certain *mise au point*.⁵ Their common biblical and Aristotelian heritage would always be an important factor in the understanding of their views. This common heritage may sometimes be the explanation for certain similarities in their philosophical and theological conclusions. In some cases where an original interpretation is found in Maimonides and the same interpretation is found in Aquinas, the correct tendency would be to ask if Aquinas has not borrowed the same from Maimonides without acknowledging it or if he has not allowed Maimonides's thought to influence him. But where they work on the same texts and move from

³ It does seem that 'eminence' is not one distinct way of Dionysius's *viae*. He may have actually given two major ways: the way of denial and transcendence, and the way of causality. However, Albert the Great, even before Aquinas, already talked about the three ways: the way of negation, the way of eminence and the way of causality. "Modi ergo tres, quos ponit, sunt isti: quia ex creaturis in deum ascendimus *in ablatione omnium*, idest omnia negando ab ipso, *et in excessu*, idest ea quae sunt in creaturis, excedenter ponendo in ipso, *et in omnium causa*, idest ponendo eum causam omnium quae sunt in creaturis, ut si inveniam sapientiam in creaturis, dicam, quod deus non est talis sapientia, sed est causa huius sapientiae et est eminenter habens sapientiam." Cf Alberti Magni, *Super Dionysium De Divinis Nominibus*, ch.7, n° 28, p 358, *Opera Omnia XXXVII*, (Monasteri Westfalorum in Aedibus Aschendorff, 1972).

⁴ It was Etienne Gilson who acknowledging the influence of Maimonides, states that 'his influence on the Christian thought of the middle ages has been considerable.' Cf Etienne Gilson, *History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages*, (London: Sheed and Ward, 1955), p 231.

⁵ Isaïe Leibowitz had already noted the same points of view in his preface to Avital Wohlman's work: *Thomas d'Aquin et Maïmonide: un dialogue exemplaire*, (Paris: Les Editions du Cerf, 1988), p 11. We try to develop some of the points he hinted in his write-up.

the same hypothesis and however arrive at different conclusions, what do we give as the explanation for the divergent views? It would not be improper to appeal to their different religious convictions pushing their rational thoughts in different directions. Earlier scholars, as we shall discover, tend to have developed a two-way search in Maimonides-Aquinas relation. How Maimonides influenced Aquinas and how the latter adapted or modified the teachings of the former, tend to be at the center of this two-way search. We intend this research work to achieve a double objective: firstly a comparative analysis of the works of the authors off each other's shoulders; this will involve an extensive analysis of even those topics that have not been explicitly mentioned by Aquinas; and secondly an interpretative analysis whereby we use Thomas Aquinas to read Moses Maimonides. By this we mean, showing how Aquinas arrives at the development of new doctrinal positions by making use of almost the same philosophical tools as Maimonides and in some cases, expanding the thought process of Maimonides to yield a result quite different from that of Maimonides. It is this latter objective that would, more than the religious conviction, explain their divergent interpretations of the same text. This is possible because of the enormous philosophical and theological influence Maimonides had on Thomas Aquinas. Because this influence is not seen in all the topics of our discussion, we shall endeavor to present their ideas separately and suggest what Aquinas's interpretation of such would look like were he to have commented on it.

The Determining Factors/ *Instrumentum Laboris*:

Zevi Diesendruck has correctly identified *three factors of thought* which both Maimonides and Aquinas used as a basis and point of departure for their philosophical thoughts.⁶ On the side of Maimonides, there was present (i) traditional Judaism dealing with moral conduct and God of morality; (ii) the Aristotelian philosophy concerned with the Prime Mover and First Cause of all things; the whole tradition of Arabic interpreters of Aristotle that produced thinkers in the mould of al-Farabi, Avicenna, Avempace, Averroes though it is questionable whether the latter did actually influence Maimonides, and (iii) the Islamic Kalam which essentially "sought to vindicate and fortify the theological ideas, primarily the idea of God, by entirely destroying the

⁶ Diesendruck, Zevi, "Maimonides and Thomas Aquinas," in Jacob I. Dienstag, ed., *Studies in Maimonides and St. Thomas Aquinas*, (KTAV Publishing House, Inc., 1975) pp 184-191.

idea of nature and of a world with immanent laws and processes.”⁷ The little omission in Diesendruck’s enumeration is the importance of Greek commentators like Alexander of Aphrodisias and Themistius. Even Maimonides, in the letter written to Samuel Ibn Tibbon—the official translator of the *Guide* into Hebrew—recognizes the difficulty of understanding Aristotle without the works of those commentators.⁸ These are the factors that actually influenced and shaped Maimonides’s philosophy as will be made clear in our discussion.

As for Thomas Aquinas, his Christian philosophical-theological tradition very much contributed to shaping his thoughts. It is through this tradition that the streams of Platonism entered within the system of Aquinas, a system that would later be purged of Platonism. The most important factor that Aquinas shared together with Maimonides is the Aristotelian philosophy and the whole tradition of Arabic peripatetic philosophers and commentators of Aristotle. The Greek commentators of Aristotle like, Theophrastus, Alexander of Aphrodisias, and Themistius, all belong to this line of philosophical tradition that much influenced Aquinas. They helped shape Aquinas’s philosophical and theological thoughts in such important areas as the theory of divine attributes, creation, providence and mostly the theory of *beatitudo perfecta in patria*. The third factor which came from the second is what is called Latin Averroism.⁹ It was from Averroes that this movement—championing an extreme interpretation of the teaching of Averroes—came to see the light of day. It is well known that Aquinas carried out a long battle with this school.¹⁰ In a

⁷ Ibid. p 187.

⁸ Pines, Shlomo, « Translator’s Introduction » in *The Guide of the Perplexed*, vol.1, translated with an Introduction and Notes by Shlomo Pines, (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1963) p lix: “The works of Aristotle are the roots and foundations of all works on the sciences. But they cannot be understood except with the help of commentaries, those of Alexander of Aphrodisias, those of Themistius, and those of Averroes.”

⁹ Cf Alain de Libera, *La Philosophie Médiévale*, (Paris : Presses Universitaires de France, 1993) pp 383-386. Another worthy observation is that of Fernand Van Steenberghen. He summarises the debate as follows : « Bref, l’averroïsme latin dont Renan a établi l’existence au XIIIe siècle se réduit à la doctrine de l’unique intellect possible, professée par quelques maîtres parisiens dans la seconde moitié du siècle, et à un état d’esprit rationaliste peut-être d’Averroes. » Cf Fernand Van Steenberghen, *La Philosophie au XIIIe Siècle*, (Louvain : Publications Universitaires de Louvain, 1966) p 368.

¹⁰ Our research will reveal that Thomas Aquinas constantly attacks what he perceives as erroneous reasonings coming from Averroes and his interpreters. These are scattered throughout Aquinas’s earlier and mature works but especially—the *Summa Contra Gentiles* dorénavant known as SCG (our English translations are taken from SCG, translated by Anton C. Pegis et al, Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press edition, 1975) and the *Summa Theologiae* shortened as ST. (Translations are from *The Summa Theologiae of Saint Thomas Aquinas*, Latin-English edition, (5 vols.), translated by the Fathers of the English Dominican Province, (Scotts Valley, California: NovAntiqua, 2008-2011). It is known that Aquinas consecrated a major work in response to Averroes: *De Unitate Intellectus Contra Averroistas*. The nature of Aquinas’s attack on Averroes centers principally sur la noétique d’Averroès. Cf Alain de Libera, *La Philosophie Médiévale*, (Paris : PUF, 1993) p 411.

very short description of what this battle was all about, Alain de Libera notes that the year 1270 knew much crisis of political, institutional and intellectual dimensions. Why this agitation?

Thomas lui-même nous répond: une erreur a envahi l'université parisienne — il faut la réfuter. Son auteur? Averroès. Ses partisans? Des chrétiens latins qui font profession d'ignorer leur christianisme et de mépriser leur latinité. En un mot: des *averroïstes*. Quelle erreur? L' "unité de l'intellect" et l'affirmation, fascinante mais paradoxale, que l' « homme ne pense pas. » D'un mot : le *monopsychisme*. Deux mots que l'histoire a imposés : Thomas lance le premier ; Leibniz forgera l'autre.¹¹

It is a combination of these factors that would provide our *instrumentum laboris* by the help of which we shall try to elucidate the teachings of Maimonides on our topic of choice and Aquinas's interpretation of them. We note some disagreement as to the authenticity and the reliability of the Latin translation of the *Guide*—*Dux Neutrorum*—which Aquinas used. In its original Arabic form, the work is called *Dalālat al-hāirin*.¹² According to Diesendruck:

It is regrettable that Thomas, as well as the rest of the Western scholastics, had to use a translation which could not possibly be exact. The book was originally written in Arabic and was translated twice into Hebrew; the Latin is only a translation from the poorer Hebrew translation, which neglected many cardinal points of the original.¹³

The observation of Diesendruck is not an isolated observation. Jacob Dienstag corroborates the observation and underlines that the Latin text used by Aquinas was made from a poor Hebrew translation of the Arabic original.¹⁴ It is not very clear whether this particular Latin edition is still

¹¹ Libera, Alain de, « Introduction » dans *Thomas d'Aquin : Contre Averroès*, traduction d'Alain de Libera, (Paris : Flammarion, 1994) pp 9-10. For a complete exposition of this controversy, read from pp 9-73. Fernand Van Steenberghen agrees as to the major meaning of the term "*averroïsta*." He defines it as follows : «le term *averroïsta* désigne, au XIIIe siècle, un partisan du monopsychisme hérétique et que rien ne nous autorise à élargir, sans preuve, la signification de ce vocable. » Cf Fernand Van Steenberghen, *La Philosophie au XIIIe Siècle*, p 369.

¹² *Dalālat al-hāirin; Le Guide des égarés* : traité de théologie et de philosophie/Par Moïse Ben Maimon ; publ. pour la première fois dans l'orig. Arabe et accompagné d'une trad. Française et de notes critiques littéraires et explicatives par S. Munk, (Osnabrück : Zeller, 1964).

¹³ Diesendruck, Zevi, "Maimonides and Thomas Aquinas," in *Studies in Maimonides and St. Thomas Aquinas*, p 188.

¹⁴ Dienstag, Jacob I., "St. Thomas Aquinas in Maimonidean Scholarship," in *Studies in Maimonides and St. Thomas Aquinas*, p 194: "His *Guide to the Perplexed*, which was originally written in Arabic, was early translated into Hebrew by Samuel Ibn Tibbon under the title *Moreh Nebukhim*, and retranslated somewhat later by Judah Al-Harizi. It was from this Al-Harizi translation that the first Latin translation was made by an anonymous author, during the first half of the thirteenth century under the title *Dux Neutrorum*."

in circulation. However, we have in our possession a 1520 Latin edition of the *Guide*.¹⁵ According to the authority of A. Dondaine, it is actually this later edition that Thomas Aquinas knew and read.¹⁶ Contrary to the opinion above, P. Synave acknowledges the existence of the 1520 edition but seriously doubts that it was the edition known and used by Aquinas.¹⁷ The lack of perfect matchup in their sentences seems to favour Synave's argument. Because of the difficulty in knowing exactly the truth of the matter, and getting in possession of perhaps, any other Latin edition in existence, we shall base all our consultations on the 1520 Latin edition of the *Guide*. We shall minimize the difficulty surrounding the exactitude of this translated Latin text by corroborating our study with the direct-first hand-better translations from the original Arabic, existing in English and French.¹⁸ Our preference will be for the English translation because of the added advantage of two introductory essays by Leo Strauss and the translator himself-Shlomo Pines. We shall also make use of the French translation-*Le Guide des Egarés* by Salomon Munk, where the need arises. Our consultation of the 1520 edition of the Latin text-*Dux seu director dubitantium aut perplexorum* better known as *Dux Neutrorum*-will be very exhaustive as we shall treat it as our major text since it is presumably from that text that Aquinas took his knowledge and appreciation of Maimonides. The only problem is that there may not be hundred percent correspondences with the English edition which we have chosen as corroborating text in order to shore up the deficiencies in the Latin edition. It will be fair to say that the editions would provide us with the accurate thoughts of Maimonides.

¹⁵ It is the translation made from the Hebrew by Augustinus Justinianus in 1520 and published under the title: *Dux seu director dubitantium aut perplexorum in tres libros divisus et summa accurate reverendi patris Augustini Justiniani ordinis praedicatorii nebiensium episcopi recognitus* (Herdr.: Parisiis, 1520).

¹⁶ Dondaine, A., "Problèmes d'Histoire Littéraire," in *Expositio Super Job ad Litteram*, volume 26, léonine édition, (1965) p 27, fn 1 : « Nous citons Maïmonide d'après la version latine médiévale connue de saint Thomas et publiée à la renaissance par A. Justinianus, Rabi Mossei Aegyptii Dux seu Director dubitantium aut perplexorum..., Parisiis 1520. »

¹⁷ Synave, P, "La Révélation des Vérités Divines Naturelles d'après saint Thomas d'Aquin, » in *Studies in Maimonides and Saint Thomas Aquinas*, p 302, fn. 2 : « Nous ne possédons pas la traduction latine du *Guide des indécis* entreprise au début du XIIIe siècle et utilisée par S. Thomas d'Aquin. La Bibliothèque...a la bonne fortune de posséder un exemplaire de la traduction latine qui fut faite sur l'hébreu par Agostino Giustiniani en 1520 et publiée sous le titre suivant : Rabi Mossei Aegyptii, Dux seu Director dubitantium aut perplexorum, in treis (sic) Libros divisus...Parisiis MDXX. »

¹⁸ Maimonides, Moses, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, translated with an introduction and notes by Shlomo Pines, Volumes I and II, (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1963); *Le Guide des Egarés, suivi du Traité des Huit Chapitres*, traduit par Salomon Munk, (Largesse: Verdier, 1989) All our citations in English are to be taken from this edition unless where stated.

Problem of Esotericism and Interpretation

The difficulty in reading Maimonides follows from the fact that he presents himself as a many-dimensional author.¹⁹ He makes it clear in his *Dux Neutrorum*, that the book contains many layers of meaning—*modum apertum et modum occultum*—external and internal—addressed to different groups of people in the society with the goal of not revealing the “secrets and the mystery of the Torah” to those unprepared for their reception. To conceal these “secrets,” among which are the subjects of creation, God’s governance of the world and His providence, divine attributes and God’s knowledge, Maimonides says that he deliberately presents his work in a disjointed fashion, dropping occasional flashes of truth and immediately contradicting them by opposing arguments. He further describes seven sorts of contradictions to be found in any book and insists that two of such—the fifth and the seventh—are employed in the composition of the *Guide* to conceal truths that would perplex the philosophically untrained and could even lead to controversy. The fifth cause is pedagogic where the teacher tries by indirect means to let the student arrive at the correct answer, and the seventh cause is destined at protecting “a secret” from being discovered by the uninitiated while at the same time providing “flash points” that would lead the initiated to its discovery.²⁰ With particular reference to the “Account of the Beginning” (*maaseh bereshith*) identified with natural science and the “Account of the Chariot” (*maaseh merkabah*) identified with divine science, Maimonides says that their exposition will be taught in “*initia rationum*—chapter headings” and “*sunt dispersa, et immutata modis aliis*—scattered and entangled with other subjects” so that their truths may be “glimpsed and then again concealed, so as not to oppose that divine purpose which one cannot possibly oppose and which has concealed from the vulgar among the people those truths especially requisite to his apprehension.”²¹ By concealing these truths, the vulgar, that is, the philosophically untrained

¹⁹ To come to terms with the difficulty one experiences in reading the *Guide*, Marvin Fox discusses what he calls «The Many-Sided Maimonides» in his recent work: *Interpreting Maimonides: Studies in Methodology, Metaphysics, and Moral Philosophy*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), pp 3-25.

²⁰ *Dux Neutrorum*, lib.I, Prooemium Authoris, fol.4: “Causa quinta est, necessitas addiscendi cuius expositio est cum fuerit profunda ratio ad intelligendum difficilis discipulis...Causa septima est cum necesse est sapienti loqui in rationibus nimis profundis: quarum partem conveniens est occultare et partem explicare.” Cf *Guide*, “Introduction to the First Part,” pp 17-18.

²¹ Ibid: fol.2: “Et exposuimus quod dixerunt, quod non debent instruere in Mercana nec unum solum nisi sit sapiens, et intelligens ex sensu suo. Et tunc dabit ei initia rationum : et ideo non quaerat a me nisi initia rationum : et tamen illa initia non sunt ordinata in libro isto, nec unum post aliud : sed sunt dispersa, et immutata modis aliis ab eo quod est nostrae voluntatis exponere. Quoniam intentio mea est, ut veritates quae ibi sunt aliquando manifestentur : et aliquando occultentur, ut non remaneat aliquid quod stet contra rationem specialem, quia nihil potest esse quod

reader will only understand the text at its surface level. Maimonides compares the internal, esoteric meaning to “apples of gold in settings of silver.”²²

It is this explicit mention of “secrets” in the *Dux Neutorum* that has given rise to a plethora of interpretations, some mutually exclusive of each other, but all of which seem to find solid support in the texts of Maimonides. There is also a long standing controversy as to how much importance is to be attached to Maimonides’s use of esotericism and whether there are actually esoteric teachings in the *Dux Neutorum*. The positions scholars have taken in this whole debate are determined by the meaning they attach to contradictions and the level of validity they accord to the presence or not of esotericism in the *Dux Neutorum*. Would Maimonides’s explicit warning of the presence of contradictions and hidden truths, make any meaning to his interpreters? How do we classify the various strands of interpretation? This is not a very easy task because it would require taking into consideration, the scholarly works done on Maimonides from the thirteenth century to the present.

As a guideline, we have the profound historical work done by Aviezer Ravitzky,²³ one of the eminent scholars on Maimonides. From the 13th to the 20th centuries, he distinguishes four different strands of interpretation. The first is the radical esotericist interpretation which is distinguished by three major characteristics—doctrines, method and esoteric tradition. This is the major strand in the Middle Ages and it attributes radical esoteric views to Maimonides on issues such as creation, divine will, miracles, divine providence, prophecy and human perfection. Its methodology pays attention to the chapter headings, the words, the literary devices of concealment and allusion as Maimonides says in his texts. It is the conviction of this strand that their interpretation follows the “arcane Jewish philosophical tradition which had its roots in the Bible itself.”²⁴ The major proponent of this interpretation is Samuel Ibn Tibbon, the official translator of the *Guide* into Hebrew.

constet contra ipsam. Et ideo fuerunt veritates quae sunt separatae in compraeensione creatoris, occultae communitati gentium.” Cf *Guide*, “Introduction to the First Part,” pp 6-7.

²²Ibid: fol.3: “Mala aurea cum sculpturis vel picturis argenteum verbum prolatum in ratione sua.” Cf *Guide*, “Introduction to the First Part,” p 11.

²³ Ravitzky, Aviezer, “The Secrets of the Guide to the Perplexed: Between the Thirteenth and Twentieth Centuries,” in Isadore Twersky, ed., *Studies in Maimonides*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), pp159-207.

²⁴ *Ibid*. p 162.

The second strand is the moderate-harmonistic interpretation. This strand considers the principal goal of the *Guide* to be one of synthesizing the truths of philosophy with the Jewish religion. According to Ravitzky, the goal is “one of harmonization between philosophical truths and traditional religious beliefs.”²⁵ It takes its methodology to be that of reconciling the internal contradictions that may be discerned in the *Guide*.

The third strand is the anti-Maimonidean interpretation. This is the interpretation coming from the religious opponents of Maimonides. They would criticize and reject the *Guide* because of the presence of esoteric doctrines profoundly different from the popular traditional beliefs. This group would call the *Guide*’s claim to an arcane Jewish tradition, an aberration and an attempt at undermining their respectable tradition.²⁶

The fourth and final strand is the interpretation of the mysteries by way of the holy names. From Ravitzky, we learn that it emerges from the writings of Abraham Abulafia, the “prophetic kabbalist.” Even though it emphasizes an esoteric dimension to the *Guide*, it concentrates “on combination of letters, on numerology, on holy names—which are conceived both as magic powers and as scientific formulations of the laws of nature.”²⁷ In all, this last group is considered a fake imitation of the esoteric interpreters. Although this classification is very broad, we do not think that it does take care of all the divergent interpretations of the *Guide*. Credit must be given to Ravitzky for providing us a model and criteria for further classifications.

Today in the 21st century Maimonidean studies, progress has again been made in that some of the strands that Ravitzky mentioned—anti Maimonidean and interpretation of the mysteries by knowledge of the holy names—seem to have been overtaken. The emphasis now is on the presence or not of esoteric doctrine in the *Guide of the perplexed* and on what actually is Maimonides’s message in the *Guide*. In her most recent book, T. M. Rudavsky touches on three different classifications of interpretations of Maimonides’s thought and these classifications are determined by various attitudes toward the inherent contradictions in the *Guide*. According to Rudavsky:

²⁵ *Ibid.* p 168.

²⁶ *Ibid.* p 169.

²⁷ *Ibid.* p 173.

One's attitude toward contradictions will determine to a large extent whether to see in Maimonides' words an esoteric subtext that conflicts with Jewish belief, an esoteric subtext that can ultimately be harmonized with belief, or simply a straightforward literal meaning that eschews esotericism altogether.²⁸

We recover the radical esoteric interpretation, the harmonist and the literal interpretations. The radical esotericism of the modern day or what Arthur Hyman prefers to call the naturalistic interpretation²⁹ is championed by Leo Strauss, Shlomo Pines and Lawrence Barman. Apart from the affinity to esotericism which they share with the medieval esotericists, these modern esotericists identify a political dimension as very central to the thoughts of Maimonides. They generally hold that the truth of the *Guide* is rooted in Aristotelian philosophy and this often conflicts with Jewish belief.

The harmonistic interpretation of today is championed by scholars like Julius Guttman, Harry A Wolfson, Arthur Hyman, Isadore Twersky to mention but a few. They do not deny the presence of esoteric subtext in the *Guide* but insist that such is geared towards a synthesis with the exoteric message. In a very clear and unambiguous language, Twersky notes that the goal of Maimonides in all his writings was to demonstrate the "inseparability and complementarity of the two apparently discordant but intrinsically harmonious disciplines" of Torah and philosophy.³⁰ In other words, Judaism is not averse to a rational conception.

The third class of interpretation identified by Rudavsky is the straightforward literal interpretation. Though Rudavsky neither explained this class of interpretation nor identified the scholars in this group, we wish to fill in the vacuum. That it is called 'literal' interpretation does not in any way suggest a light reading of the Maimonidean texts. On the contrary, it is a solid and substantial reading of Maimonides that lays emphasis on the philosophical meaning of the texts rather than their supposed hidden, figurative messages. This interpretation thinks that Maimonides is so clear and decisive in his arguments and analysis that the purported presence of

²⁸ Rudavsky, T.M., *Maimonides*, (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell Publishing, 2010), p 23.

²⁹ Hyman, A., "Interpreting Maimonides," in Joseph A. Buijs, ed., *Maimonides: A Collection of Critical Essays*, (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), p 24.

³⁰ Twersky, Isadore, *Introduction to the Code of Maimonides* [Mishneh Torah], (New Heaven, CT: Yale University Press, 1980), pp 356-70 especially p 359.

contradictions and repetitions is nonexistent. In recent Maimonidean scholarship, the major proponent of this interpretation is Oliver Leaman. Writing about Maimonides, Leaman says:

He uses arguments and explains texts in his analysis; he does not proceed by assembling contradictions and repetitions which mislead the naïve reader and instruct the more intelligent concerning his real purpose ... The suggestion that there is a hidden doctrine is entirely discounted ... if the book succeeds it will show that we must address ourselves fully to Maimonides' arguments and not to any putative hidden doctrines which owe far more to the imagination of most of his commentators than to anything we can find in the text.³¹

For this style of interpretation, the *Guide* should be read as it presents itself, that is as a philosophical work in its content and form. According to Leaman, the interest in esotericism places much emphasis on the style of the writing at the expense of the stuff of the philosophical arguments. Another class of interpretation that has been along for a while but has not actually been taken seriously is what we shall call the skeptic/agnostic interpretation. This interpretation is based on Maimonides's working principle that judgment should be suspended in matters that can neither be demonstrated logically nor argued philosophically. It is a principle that applies to anyone in search of knowledge. As stated by Maimonides himself:

When points appearing as dubious occur to him or the thing he seeks does not seem to him to be demonstrated, he should not deny and reject it, hastening to pronounce it false, but rather should persevere and thereby *have regard for the honor of his Creator*. He should refrain and hold back.³² (He, in this citation, refers to anyone in search of knowledge).

The known proponent of this type of interpretation is Sara Klein-Braslavy. In her reading of the creation story as interpreted by Maimonides, she followed the way of biblical exegesis and came to the conclusion that Maimonides should be read "as a skeptic who maintained *epochē*."³³ We

³¹ Leaman, Oliver, *Moses Maimonides*, (Surrey: Curzon Press, 1990), p 17.

³² *Dux Neutrorum*, lib.I, cap.XXXI, fol.12: "Et cum inciderint ei dubitationes, et non inuenerit probationem eius quod quaerit, non obhorreat illud nec proiciat post tergum, et non festinet contradicere : sed consideret et propitius sit super gloria creatoris : et stet. » Cf *Guide* I, 32, p 70.

³³ Klein-Braslavy, Sara, "The Creation of the World and Maimonides' Interpretation of Gen. I-V," in Shlomo Pines and Yirmiyahu Yovel, eds., *Maimonides and Philosophy*, (Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1986), p 65.

cannot claim to have represented all the range of interpretations that there are in Maimonidean scholarship. But at least, our classification would serve as an identification model that would help us determine where our opinion falls into. These classifications do not exclude the possibility that there could be a *mélange* of opinions or different strands where a totally esoteric outlook accommodates an harmonistic interpretation. In other words, these classifications are not exclusive.

As we noted above, all the strands of interpretation find solid support in the texts of Maimonides. A major explanation for this is found in the fact that Maimonides interprets biblical parables, the major passages of his philosophical exegesis, as being in harmony with the truths of Aristotelian philosophy. This he does with the aim of maintaining the faith of the ordinary Jew in the Torah and at the same time leading the more astute reader, to the deeper philosophical meanings of the parables dressed in religious garb. That is a perfect manner of “speaking in double language.”³⁴ But the question remains as to what degree Maimonides accepts the philosophical implications of his interpretations as some are contradictory to his Jewish faith. Under the heavy influence of Arabic Peripateticians, Maimonides conceives God as the Necessary Cause of a world without beginning, a world that emanates eternally in a hierarchical order and is governed through the eternal laws of nature with the radical implication that God’s direct knowledge and involvement in providential care of the world is at best, mostly indirect. These ideas are significantly opposed to the Jewish religious tradition of a miracle-working Creator-God who knows all individuals, acts directly in history, and personally rewards and punishes those who obey the divine law, dominant traditional Jewish ideas that Maimonides finds a way of upholding and apparently defending. How do we interpret this double tendency in Maimonides? Is he playing a game of hide and seek? Do we understand Maimonides’s approach as simply esoteric since he would run the risk of being unorthodox were he to publicly endorse these philosophical truths?³⁵ Would Maimonides prefer fidelity to law above fidelity to scientific truth? Did Aquinas in his interpretations, consider the problem of esotericism in Maimonides?

³⁴ Halbertal, Moshe, “Double Language and Divided Public in Guide of the Perplexed,” in his book *Concealment and Revelation* translated by Jackie Feldman, (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2007) pp 49-59 especially p 53.

³⁵ An author that is opposed to any esoteric reading of the Guide is Herbert A. Davidson. For a reading of his arguments, consult his--*Moses Maimonides: The Man and His Works* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005) pp 387-402.

We shall attempt to answer the last question by considering briefly why Maimonides had to conceal the truth of his writings. One of the major reasons had to do with the precarious nature of being Jewish and philosopher in a Muslim country. What is interesting however is that, Greek philosophy in the Islamic world, knew much controversy and persecution because of the presence of unorthodox principles tending to contravene the traditional Islamic sciences of law, theology and literature.³⁶ Thus in order to avoid much conflict and present themselves as “perfectly ordinary believers with orthodox views,” the philosophers adopted a system of *taqiya*, “of dissimulation of one’s real view under a veil of orthodoxy to prevent the authorities from persecuting one’s genuine heterodox opinions...and it gave rise to a well-developed tradition of esoteric (*bātin*) as opposed to exoteric (*zāhir*) writing.”³⁷ Maimonides learnt his philosophy in the Islamic world and adopted the system of doing philosophy under the precarious circumstances of the time. Cordova the birthplace of Maimonides (ca 1135 and 1138) was under Muslim control and rulership.³⁸ In Fez, where Maimonides passed some part of his adolescent life, it is very much recorded that the Jewish community especially under the Almohad rulership, knew major persecutions.³⁹ However it was at Fustat in Egypt that Maimonides lived most of his adult life, and at that time, he was acting in a “leading communal capacity”⁴⁰ and working as a physician in the royal court. Scholars speculated that Maimonides could have worked as the “official leader of the entire Egyptian Jewish community.”⁴¹ Occupying such a position calls for caution in many ways than one. Maimonides’s radical opinion could not only set him outside of his own community, “but the political conditions in which much of Jewry existed, made dissimulation and conversion vital if existence was to be preserved.”⁴² These are some of the circumstances that make us to think that Maimonides did actually adopt a different system of writing where he combines his unorthodox philosophical opinions with the generally accepted religious beliefs of the Jewish people.⁴³ That is why he specifically exhorted that we sort out in

³⁶ Leaman, Oliver, *Moses Maimonides*, p 1.

³⁷ Ibid. p 3.

³⁸ Davidson, Herbert A., *Moses Maimonides: The Man and His Works*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005) p 5.

³⁹ Ibid. p 21.

⁴⁰ Ibid. P 28.

⁴¹ Ibid. p 54.

⁴² Leaman, Oliver, *Moses Maimonides*, p 4.

⁴³ Cf Strauss, Leo, *Persecution and the Art of Writing*, (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, Inc., 1973), p 25: “Persecution, then, gives rise to a peculiar technique of writing, and therewith to a particular type of literature, in which the truth about all crucial things is presented exclusively between the lines...It has all the advantages of public communication without having its greatest disadvantage—capital punishment for the author.”

his works, “the chapter headings” that will lead to the major “apples of gold in settings of silver.” Finally as pertinently observed by Kraemer:

The *Guide* is a polyvalent text in which contradictory discourses, allusive digressions, equivocal terms continually intersect to thwart a univocal conclusion of meaning. In his life, Maimonides had to don a mask and play the game of *taqiyya*, or prudent dissimulation, feigning Islam on the outside and being a Jew within. As a courtier in Egypt, he had to use deception to survive and remain in favor. In sum, he was used to duplicity, to living a double life for the sake of survival and for serving noble causes. His was a life of ambivalence, concealment, and inscrutable mystery.⁴⁴

Compare this cultural background of Maimonides to the monastic environment of Aquinas (1225) who, after his primary education at the Benedictine monastery of Mount Cassino, was by the age of 14 (ca 1239-1243), already frequenting the faculty of arts of the University of Naples.⁴⁵ A scholastic scientific system of education and writing was already opened up to him that he would not have any need to resort to esotericism. Even in his interpretation of Maimonides, there seems not to be much evidence to suggest that Aquinas considers the presence of esotericism in Maimonides or that he did consider esotericism as a hindrance towards understanding Maimonides.

Our Field of Study

Our field of study is centered on evil and providence in the biblical *Book of Job* and there are not too many philosophical or theological works that could have drawn more intellectual interest from Maimonides and Aquinas than this *Book of Job*. Being part of the Western intellectual heritage, the *Book of Job* has been either a major myth or literary achievement, of the Western civilization.⁴⁶ Both of our authors differ on the nature of the book: either a myth for Maimonides or a historical work for Thomas Aquinas. This book, depending on how you understand it, could

⁴⁴ Kraemer, Joel L., *Maimonides. The Life and World of One of Civilization's Greatest Minds*, (New York: Doubleday, 2008) p 10.

⁴⁵ Steenberghen, Fernand Van, *La Philosophie au XIIIe Siècle*, (Louvain : Publications Universitaires, 1966) p 307.

⁴⁶ Schreiner, Susan E, *Where Shall Wisdom be Found? Calvin's Exegesis of Job from Medieval and Modern Perspectives*, (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1994) p 1.

be argued to be the *locus classicus* of the problem of evil in a world that is said to be under the providence of a divine Creator. Apart from having the same biblical heritage, Maimonides and Aquinas draw from the same Aristotelian source since they are the immediate inheritors of a rich Arabic philosophical tradition, the major commentators of Aristotle. That tradition will have much to say in this intellectual encounter between different faith traditions—Jewish, Christian and Islamic—all having a special admiration for the legend of Job. This admiration is hinged on the character of a certain man—Job—whose image “has challenged every attempt to understand suffering and to justify God’s actions.”⁴⁷ Because of this perennial quest, the *Book of Job* has attained, in the language of David Tracy, the status of a “religious classic.” According to Tracy, every classic bears two distinguishing characteristics: permanence and the excess of meaning.⁴⁸ The former is attested to by the innumerable texts that have emerged through the centuries and continue to emerge on the legend of Job; and the latter by the many fundamental dimensions of the human life and its relation to God, which the study of the *Book of Job* has revealed. It is the latter objective more so than the former, that is our major interest, as it is where Maimonides and Aquinas dialogue with each other. This interpretation would involve in the language of Tracy, “the back-and-forth movement of disclosure and concealment of a truth about life itself,”⁴⁹ a character very much evident in Maimonides.

Aquinas is a product of the 13th century biblical tradition that has taken the Scripture to be composed of two major senses: a literal (historical) and a spiritual sense. The latter sense is further subdivided into three senses: the allegorical, the moral or tropological, and the anagogical senses.⁵⁰ At the period, according to Smalley, the exact sorting out of the senses was a serious cause for concern as it led to two major problems.⁵¹ In the first place, there was confusion over what belonged to which sense. How do we classify the so many metaphors and the parables in the Bible? Do we classify them under the literal sense or under the spiritual sense? In the second place, it was not very clear the relationship between the two senses. As the spiritual sense was

⁴⁷ Ibid. p 1.

⁴⁸ Tracy, David, *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism*, (New York: Crossroad, 1981) p 154.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Smalley, Beryl, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages*, (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame, 1964), 3rd edition, p 28. For a proper study of the four senses of the Scripture, we recommend the magisterial work done by Henri de Lubac, *Exégèse Médiévale: Les Quatre Sens de l'Ecriture*, première partie, Tome II (Aubier: Editions Montaigne, 1959).

⁵¹ Smalley, Beryl, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages*, p 41, 295f.

seemingly taken to be the most important sense, how do we control the plethora of interpretations making claim to the spiritual sense of the Scripture? Gregory the Great's *Moralia in Job* puts much importance on the spiritual sense and subsequently dictated the tone of biblical interpretations till the 13th century and beyond.⁵² This is where the importance of Aquinas becomes evident⁵³ as it is generally believed that his clear definitions of the two senses, and his shift of emphasis on the literal interpretation of the Scripture, helped change the tide. In the Sacred Scripture, Aquinas notes that:

The first signification whereby words signify things belongs to the first sense, the historical or literal. That signification whereby things signified by words have themselves also a signification is called the spiritual sense, which is based on the literal, and presupposes it.⁵⁴

By so doing, he does not reject other senses of the Scripture, but hold the literal sense as the most important on which is based all the other senses.⁵⁵ It is only from the literal sense that arguments can be drawn. This is the conviction that Aquinas takes into his study and interpretation of the *Book of Job*. But why is the literal sense very important for Aquinas? We could say that it is because Aquinas wishes to construct a theological system that has a scientific character, in the sense that it is based on the system of syllogisms where possible. Aquinas was a product of the University and followed a scholastic system where reason and the use of dialectics are the tools permitting the proper elucidation of truth and faith. He did not consider the problem of esotericism in Maimonides. On the contrary, Maimonides's cultural background imposed upon him, an unorthodox system of communicating his thoughts. Thus whereas Aquinas's reading of the *Book of Job* is literal, and more scientific, Maimonides's method seems to be allegoric and esoteric. Maimonides believes that the real meaning of the *Book of Job* lies beneath its literal surface, and that the true esoteric significance of the biblical text, teaches the truth of Aristotelian physics and metaphysics. These divergences in approach would lead sometimes to divergent

⁵² Wasselynck, H, "L'influence de l'exégèse de saint Grégoire le Grand sur les commentaires bibliques médiévaux," *Recherches de théologie ancienne et médiévale* 32, (1965), pp 157-205.

⁵³ Smalley, Beryl, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages*, p 300.

⁵⁴ ST 1a, q.1, a.10: "Illa ergo prima significatio, qua voces significant res, pertinet ad primum sensum, qui est sensus historicus vel litteralis. Illa vero significatio qua res significatae per voces, iterum res alias significant, dicitur sensus spiritualis ; qui super litteralem fundatur, et eum supponit. »

⁵⁵ Cf P. Synave, "La doctrine de saint Thomas d'Aquin sur le sens littéral des écritures, » *Revue Biblique* 35, (1926) pp 40-65.

interpretations and at other times to the same result. Our actual study of the *Book of Job* would bring to light what we mean.

Lawrence Basserman is an author who has identified three traditions in the history of the Job legend: the biblical, the apocryphal, and the ecclesiastical traditions of the study of the *Book of Job*.⁵⁶ By the “biblical tradition,” Basserman means “the Hebrew and Greek versions of the Book of Job and explicit allusions to Job in Ezekiel, the Book of Tobias, and the Epistle of James.”⁵⁷ The apocryphal tradition includes the various versions of the Job legend, sometimes pseudo-epigraphal writings, that appear in Jewish, Muslim, and medieval vernacular literature. Here, Job is portrayed as always pious and patient.⁵⁸ The “ecclesiastical tradition” means for Basserman, “exegetical or liturgical uses of Job.”⁵⁹ In this research, we shall try to examine some medieval authors of the exegetic tradition, who confronted the *Book of Job* in its entirety, but particularly “had to do justice to those portions of the Book in which Job appears to be challenging God’s justice, to regard Him as hostile to man, and as unwilling to give answer to man’s insistent queries.”⁶⁰ Being exegetical in import, their interpretations are sometimes transformative in that they go beyond the surface level of the text, to unravel, with the help of their cultural, rational and religious belief, the hidden messages of the text. Apart from Gregory the Great’s *Moralia in Job*, some chapters of Maimonides’s *Dux Neutrorum*, and Thomas Aquinas’s *Expositio super Job ad litteram*, there are many other authors belonging to this exegetical tradition whose works contribute in no less measure to the rich vein of the tradition. They do not form the major object of our study, but they nevertheless contribute to a better understanding of the subject of our study.

Saadya ben Joseph, generally called Saadia Gaon, (882-942) comes up as one of the earliest systematic medieval philosophers and interpreters, belonging to this exegetic tradition. Issuing forth from a time when Jewish culture was being opened up to the influence of Greek and Islamic philosophy, Saadya “wanted to show that the sort of things which the Bible asserts do not go against valid philosophical argument, that a rational explanation can be provided for even

⁵⁶ Basserman, Lawrence, *The Legend of Job in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1979) p 3.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ Glatzer, Nahum, “The Book of Job and Its Interpreters,” in Alexander, Altman, ed., *Biblical Motifs: Origins and Transformations* (Cambridge (Mass.): Harvard University, 1966) p 201.

the most difficult passages in the Bible.”⁶¹ By the rules of rational thinking, the anthropomorphic language of the Bible must be rejected even though it helps people to their various beliefs. Saadya takes this rational approach to his interpretation of the story of Job. He is credited with two important books where the normal questions of his day: God, His relation to the world; prophecy, providence and the issue of evil, are all discussed.⁶² In his ‘Book of Justice,’ where he discusses Job, his emphasis “is firmly on justice and how to reconcile the notion of divine justice with the course of events with which we are familiar in the text.”⁶³ His Job does not doubt the providence and the justice of God but only wanted an explanation for his suffering. It is a case of human knowledge trying to understand the workings of divine justice. Saadya interprets suffering as being part of the divine plan working for the ultimate benefit of the just whom He educates, punishes and tests.

The third case is that of trial and testing. An upright servant, whose Lord knows that he will bear sufferings loosed upon him and hold steadfast in his uprightness, is subjected to certain sufferings, so that when he steadfastly bears them, his Lord may reward him and bless him. This too is a kind of bounty and beneficence, for it brings the servant to everlasting blessedness.⁶⁴

Does an eternal reward one does not know how or what it looks like, justify the infliction of unjust suffering on an innocent man? Saadya does actually think that it does since what we call justice does not measure to the unfathomable riches of divine justice. This theme of beneficial suffering would make its appearance in latter interpreters. As a justification of God’s unfathomable wisdom and power, Saadya thinks that God, in His speech, illustrated that quality by the image of the Leviathan. By talking about such great monsters like Leviathan, Hippopotamus, etc., God wishes to reinforce the loftiness of His power, the grandeur of His creation, and the foolishness of asking Him to answer word for word to man’s request. God is the Final Cause of creation and has assigned man a little part in the order of creation. He uses the images of such monsters to remind man of the unfathomable difference between him (man) and

⁶¹ Leaman, Oliver, *Evil and Suffering in Jewish Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p 49.

⁶² Saadya, Gaon, *The Book of Beliefs and Opinions*, translated by S. Rosenblatt, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1951); *The Book of Theodicy: Translation and Commentary on the Book of Job*, translated by L. Goodman, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988).

⁶³ Cf. Leaman, Oliver, *Evil and Suffering in Jewish Philosophy*, p 50.

⁶⁴ Saadya, Gaon, *The Book of Theodicy*, pp. 125-6 cited in Leaman, Oliver, *Evil and Suffering in Jewish Philosophy*, p 53.

his Creator; apart from assuring God's transcendence, such image of animal creatures serve as exegetical devices by which Saadya "kept his good, just, and gracious God far removed from unseemly contact with the human world."⁶⁵ The interpretations of Saadya would slightly appear in Maimonides's religious language of equivocality to differentiate our understanding and our language from those of the divine. God's ways are far beyond our comprehension. Finally, the *Book of Job* according to Saadya, has two distinct purposes: a theological one in upholding the principle of justice; and an ethical purpose in that the figure of Job is a "model for patience in the face of suffering."⁶⁶

Shortly after Maimonides, philosophy flourished in Jewish communities in the Provence and the Languedoc. Apart from Samuel Ibn Tibbon (c.1160-c.1232) who several decades earlier had been known not only as the official translator of the *Guide* from its Arabic original into Hebrew, but also an original thinker who contributed in the areas of philosophy and exegesis,⁶⁷ there arose a philosopher-exegete of immense worth, Rabi Levi ben Gershom (1288-1344), simply known in the Latin tradition as Gersonides. Although he wrote two major works,⁶⁸ he couldn't let go of the influence of Maimonides. Even the style of his writing—where he explains certain particular terms—parallels that of Maimonides's *Dux Neutrorum*. However, unlike Maimonides, he is a more straight-forward thinker that doesn't have recourse to esoteric systems. Like the others before him, Gersonides treats the philosophical issues of his time; but the ones that would occupy us more are his interpretations of providence and evil and the book of Job. Gersonides accepts as a given that general providence, which derives from the celestial bodies and through the Active Intellect, is given to every specie including humans, in the sublunar realm. Nadler notes that "it is this identification of the general providence with an astral determinism—what Touati calls *la providence astrale*—that is the distinctive feature of Gersonides' theory."⁶⁹ Where he also structurally differs from Maimonides, is on the issue of personal providence. Adopting the Avicennian conception of God according to which, He has limited knowledge of

⁶⁵ Glatzer, Nahum, "The Book of Job and Its Interpreters," p 210.

⁶⁶ Eisen, Robert, *The Book of Job in Medieval Jewish Philosophy*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004) p 22.

⁶⁷ Ibid. p 79.

⁶⁸ Gersonides, *The Wars of the Lord*, translated by Seymour Feldman, 3 vols. (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication society of America, 1984-99); *The Commentary of Levi ben Gershom (Gersonides) on the Book of Job*, translated and introduced by Abraham Lassen (New York: Bloch Press, 1946).

⁶⁹ Nadler, Steven, "Gersonides on Providence: A Jewish Chapter in the History of the General Will," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, vol.62, 1, (2001), pp 47-48. Cf Menachem Kellner, "Gersonides, Providence, and the Rabbinic Tradition," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 42 (1974), pp 673-685.

particulars in the world, complicates matters for Gersonides.⁷⁰ He holds to three positions on this issue of personal providence: the first is the Aristotelian position according to which there is no individual providence. It is the position held by Job in his suffering.⁷¹ The second is the position of the followers of the Torah, according to which every individual human being is under the protection of the divine providence and that God rewards and punishes according to one's righteousness or wickedness.⁷² The third position is that of the "outstanding scholars of the Torah such as Maimonides" according to whom individual providence is limited only to those who have achieved some level of intellectual perfection.⁷³ Gersonides identifies this as the position of Elihu.

Individual providence, according to Gersonides, manifests in two ways: prophecy and providential suffering. As in Maimonides, prophecy is reached only by people with high intellectual ability. Prophecy confers on such people, the power to predict the future and warn against imminent danger.⁷⁴ Providential suffering likened to the Talmudic "sufferings of love," is experienced by those who have achieved a lesser intellectual perfection.⁷⁵ This takes one of two forms: in the first type, a greater physical harm is prevented by a present suffering. For example, a broken leg prevents one from travelling on a ship that would later sink into the ocean. The suffering here has prevented the man from a much greater harm. In the second form of providential suffering, an individual is saved from spiritual injury, when neglecting his intellectual habit, he engages in material and mundane things. As a result of this negligence, he endures providential suffering which awakens him to the needs of his intellect.⁷⁶ To solve the complication that his Avicennian idea of God brings upon his theory, Gersonides adopts the Maimonidean idea of emanation also given by Avicenna. The prophet taps into the emanations

⁷⁰ For a study of God's knowledge of particulars in Gersonides, confer Norbert Samuelson, "Gersonides Account of God's Knowledge of Particulars," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 10, (1972) pp 399-441.

⁷¹ Gersonides, *The Wars of the Lord*, vol. 2, pp 155-158.

⁷² Ibid. p 155.

⁷³ Ibid. p 150, 206-209. Cf Robert Eisen, *Gersonides on Providence, Covenant, and the Chosen People*, (Albany : State University of New York Press, 1995) p16.

⁷⁴ Gersonides, *The Wars of the Lord*, vol. 2, pp 174-75, 178. For Gersonides's detailed view on prophecy, consult: Charles Touati, *La pensée philosophique et théologique de Gersonides*, (Paris : Editions de Minuit, 1973), pp 367-75, 451-68; "Le problème de l'inspiration prophétique dans la théologie juive du Moyen Age," *Revue de l'histoire des religions* 174, (1968), pp 169-187 ; Tamar Rudavsky, « Divine Omniscience, Contingency, and Prophecy in Gersonides, » in Tamar Rudavsky, ed., *Divine Omniscience and Omnipotence in Medieval Philosophy : Islamic, Jewish and Christian Perspectives*, (Dordrecht : Reidel, 1985) pp 161-181.

⁷⁵ Eisen, Robert, *The Book of Job in Medieval Jewish Philosophy*, p 146.

⁷⁶ Gersonides, *The Wars of the Lord*, vol. 2, pp 178, 188 Cf Robert Eisen, *Gersonides on Providence, Covenant and the Chosen People*, p 16.

coming from the Active Intellect and acquires information about the future. The individual, by the help of his perfected intellect, also profits from this overflowing emanations and acquires personal providence.⁷⁷ Thus, God's involvement is never direct because He has a limited knowledge of individuals.

Existing Literature in Maimonides/Aquinas Comparative Scholarship

Our work is not done in isolation. In spite of the shortage of literature in comparative scholarship involving Maimonides and Aquinas on the question of evil and providence, there are some significant texts that could not have been neglected. We intend to examine some of them and show their shortcomings in comparison to our own text. One of the earliest comparative works on Maimonides and Aquinas is that by Martin D. Yaffe.⁷⁸ He rightly cites the Aristotelian and biblical heritage shared by both Maimonides and Aquinas, but his interpretation of their various readings of the book of Job, leaves much to desire. Any scholar acquainted with Maimonides's *Guide of the Perplexed* would agree that he gave a specific interpretation of providence quite different from the Jewish belief. But this is never mentioned anywhere in the eighteen pages of Yaffe's essay and neither did he do so in his reading of Aquinas's *Expositio super Job ad litteram*. However, he sets about pursuing certain objectives: 'identifying the addressee for whom their respective comments are intended; the figure of Job himself; the role of the three friends whom Job confronts in dialogue about his suffering; the role of Elihu and the speech of God that resolves Job's drama.'⁷⁹ A deeper study is needed to show how Job profits from divine providence even in the midst of his sufferings.

David Burrell is another who has done a comparative analysis of Maimonides, Aquinas and Gersonides on the subject of providence and evil.⁸⁰ Basing his study on the *Book of Job* because each of the authors "specifically comments on the book of Job,"⁸¹ Burrell looks at their methods

⁷⁷ Gersonides, *The Wars of the Lord*, vol. 2, pp 180-183.

⁷⁸ Yaffe, Martin D, « Providence in Medieval Aristotelianism: Moses Maimonides and Thomas Aquinas on the Book of Job, » in Leo G. Perdue and W. Clark Gilpin, eds., *The Voice from the Whirlwind* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992) pp 111-128.

⁷⁹ Ibid. p 112.

⁸⁰ Burrell, David, « Maimonides, Aquinas and Gersonides on Providence and Evil, » in *Religious Studies*, vol 20, 3, (1984) pp 335-351.

⁸¹ Ibid. p 336.

of interpretation, their attitude toward Job, and their reading of the text. Good as the work may be, the mode of God's knowledge seems to be the thrust of the enquiry at the expense of the 'what and how' of divine providence. The question of evil seems to be totally ignored even though it is a part of the said objective as shown by the title of the work.

Idit Dobbs-Weinstein's is a very interesting book that has studied our area of research.⁸² Unlike the other authors examined above, Dobbs-Weinstein shows a lot of willingness in analyzing exegetically, the various allegorical figures and texts of the *Guide*. But instead of going to the logical conclusion of her interpretation, she backs out and contents only with repeating the words of Maimonides without indicating the meaning of the allegorical figures or statements. On the figure of Satan in the book of Job, for example, she says that Maimonides "does not consider it necessary to interpret the mystery since he has addressed the subject of angels twice and at some length ... Consequently, the reader is expected to interpret the mysteries of Job in the light of these discussions."⁸³ Maimonides expects us to do the interpretation and not to repeat what he has already said. Like the rest of the authors, Dobbs-Weinstein totally ignores Maimonides's personal opinion on providence under the weak pretext that "Maimonides' interpretation of Job does not constitute a full explanation of providence."⁸⁴ But as we shall show, Maimonides in his exegesis of the *Book of Job* provides his fullest teaching on providence. Only scholars who are ready to bring together the "chapter headings," and to go beneath the silver linings, would arrive at the apples of gold.

Her interpretations of Aquinas's *Commentary on Job* capture the most important points on providence and evil. The evident influence of Maimonides on the commentary of Aquinas is very much brought to light on the section dealing with Elihu's speech and God's teaching. The big omission we shall address is the reasons behind Aquinas's opposition to Maimonides's doctrine on providence and the new interpretation that Aquinas draws from this contact.

From the French tradition where a comparative study of Maimonides and Aquinas is far and few apart, we have Avital Wohlman, a Jew from Israel, who arguably, is the most eloquent voice

⁸² Dobbs-Weinstein, Idit, *Maimonides and St. Thomas on the Limits of Reason*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995).

⁸³ Ibid. p 49. The same applies to the type of providence represented by Elihu. Dobbs-Weinstein maintains that "Elihu's enigmatic parable, which describes the intercession of an angel on behalf of a sick man, so that he "is saved and restored to the best of states," receives no clarification." p 51.

⁸⁴ Ibid. p 52.

from this tradition that has pursued this area of research.⁸⁵ Her's is an original and pioneering work given that there are not too many of her kind in the French philosophical tradition. Rather than a critical evaluation of Maimonides and Aquinas, the work appears more to be a comparative analysis of the two philosophical and faith giants aimed at forging a solid base of *dialogue exemplaire* between Judaism and Christianity.⁸⁶ The basis of this claim is the particular interest paid by Aquinas to the great work of Maimonides—*Dux Neutorum*—either as a major authority or a major reference in scholastic reflections.⁸⁷ The highlights of this faith encounter between them is found in their reflections on God: the problem of creation—here, our author examines properly the similarities between Maimonides and Aquinas, or better still, the dependence of Aquinas on the philosophical principles and structures established by Maimonides on the question of creation. She also highlights Aquinas's replication of the same methods and arguments of Maimonides in refuting the said eternity of the world as seemingly established by Aristotle. Our approach will be different in that we shall try to see if, behind Maimonides's theory of providence as consequent upon the divine overflow, there is a solid metaphysical foundation supporting it. We shall try to show that Maimonides's "secret" admission of the Aristotelian eternity of the world supports his theory of providence. We shall also show that Aquinas's metaphysics of creation based on the notion of *esse* rejects both providence as overflow, and the world as eternal. Another most important point of encounter between Maimonides and Aquinas is on the question of divine attributes. Our author correctly describes this issue as "*le lieu le plus célèbre de la rencontre entre Maïmonide et Thomas d'Aquin.*"⁸⁸ She also remarks that this encounter between the two is not simply animated by a simple literary or historical interest, but by the same "*certitudes fondamentales concernant l'être de Dieu et de la créature.*"⁸⁹ Another positive that stands out in the work of Wohlman, is the place she accords to analogy in the work of Aquinas and the role this analogy plays in opening up and justifying man's language about God, what Maimonides totally denies. Her influence will be very much

⁸⁵ Wohlman, Avital, *Thomas d'Aquin et Maïmonide : un dialogue exemplaire*, (Paris : Les Editions du Cerf, 1988) ; *Maïmonide et Thomas d'Aquin : un dialogue impossible*, (Fribourg : Editions Universitaires, 1995). This latter work highlights the impossibility of reconciling Moses Maimonides and Thomas Aquinas.

⁸⁶ Wohlman, Avital, *Thomas d'Aquin et Maïmonide*, p 21. Later Wohlman defines the point of this dialogue: "Il s'agit, pour l'un et pour l'autre, de rendre compte de la transcendance de Dieu et du rapport entre la créature et le créateur, à l'aide des ressources de la raison. C'est sur cette certitude fondamentale qu'ils se rencontrent, et c'est là que s'établit ce que nous avons appelé leur dialogue. » p 325.

⁸⁷ Ibid. p 17.

⁸⁸ Ibid. p 105.

⁸⁹ Ibid. p 132.

felt in our treatment of this topic. The area of God's knowledge especially of particulars is another point of exchange between Maimonides and Aquinas, which our author discusses. She highlights their common usage of the image of the artisan to explain God's knowledge of singulars, and correctly distinguishes Aquinas's position from Maimonides on two specific points: equivocity (which contrary to Maimonides, Aquinas rejects) and the causal nature of God's knowledge—special to Aquinas.⁹⁰ We would however have loved to see highlighted, the contradiction in the position of Maimonides for whom God knows all things and yet His providence does not extend to particulars of non intellectual nature. The treatment of evil and its influence on God's exercise of providence could have been given a more prominent place in the discussions animating the book. We shall make the *Book of Job* our case study in verifying the compatibility of evil in a world under the providence of God. Other topics that highlight the merit of Wohlman's book and strengthen the base of a dialogue between the two authors include the proof for the existence of God, problem of human liberty, happiness, retribution, and prophecy. Some of these discussions will be reflected one way or the other, in our text. But on a sad note, we do not have many French authors in this Maimonides-Aquinas scholarship. We do not actually know the reason. But we know that this study has flourished more in the English tradition perhaps, because this Maimonidean scholarship has largely been pursued and promoted by American Jews. But we do not deny the presence of French authors studying one or the other aspect of our authors in their capacity as individual writers. The many discussions in our research animated by French writers would bear witness to this. Before passing to another author however, we note that in a different work, Wohlman tries to highlight the radical difference, albeit the impossibility of reconciling the two authors: "acceptation de la Loi et des commandements, chez Maïmonide, ouverture à la grace rédemptrice, chez Thomas d'Aquin."⁹¹ The dialogue which seems an achievable objective within a specifically philosophical discussion now turns impossible once the reflection on the world and on man engages an attitude of faith.⁹² Our own reflection will be to examine how Aquinas succeeds in interpreting Maimonides regardless of their faith differences.

⁹⁰ Ibid. p 222.

⁹¹ Wohlman, Avital, *Maïmonide et Thomas d'Aquin : un dialogue impossible*, (Fribourg : Editions Universitaires, 1995) p 1.

⁹² Ibid. p 191.

Susan E. Schreiner has made some important contribution in our research.⁹³ In spite of its shortcomings, this book is a *vade-mecum* for all those who try to establish a necessary historical link with the 6th century Gregory the Great's *Moralia in Job*, and the later medieval interpreters like Maimonides and Thomas Aquinas. We are grateful to Schreiner for bringing to our notice, a whole range of bibliography that has widened and deepened our understanding of Gregory the Great's *Moralia*. But because the major interest of this book is neither Maimonides nor Thomas Aquinas, she does not deliver a profound interpretation of their texts and thoughts. She rather uses them as a stepping-stone toward the examination of Calvin's exegesis of Job. In her own words, "this study focuses on Calvin's *Sermons sur le livre de Job*. These sermons are analyzed against the background of the two trajectories that most influenced the Latin medieval tradition of Joban commentary: the allegorical interpretation of Gregory the Great and the more "literal" exegesis influenced by Maimonides and formulated by Thomas Aquinas."⁹⁴ It is left to be seen whether Maimonides's interpretation is correctly termed "literal." One of the major positives among others, in this book, is the clean distinction between Gregory and Maimonides's attitude to suffering. While the former sees it as God's chosen way of leading man to the possession of eternal reality, the latter diminishes the importance of suffering in the intellectual emancipation of Job, and even describes it as "an impediment rather than an avenue to wisdom."⁹⁵ She rightly notes the place of personal immortality in the Thomistic interpretation as a major factor distinguishing him from his earlier associates.

Regardless of the positive notes of the existing literature on our subject of study, there is none that did undertake an interpretation of one by the other and it is in this that our work will be different as it will bring to the fore, Aquinas's appreciation and interpretation of Maimonides's reading of evil and providence, with special reference to the *Book of Job*.

⁹³ Schreiner, Susan E, *Where Shall Wisdom be Found? Calvin's Exegesis of Job from Medieval and Modern Perspectives*, (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

⁹⁴ Ibid. p 2.

⁹⁵ Ibid. p 70.

The Contemporary Problem of Evil

Another dimension that could be read into the interpretation of the book of Job is what scholars today describe as “the problem of evil.” The contemporary discussion of the multidimensional problem of evil generally centers on the compatibility of the existence of God and the existence of evil. This problem generally takes two major forms: the theoretical and the existential forms.⁹⁶ Under the theoretical form of the problem are found logical and epistemic concerns involving God and evil. It questions how an all-powerful, all-knowing and perfectly-good God could allow the existence or the reality of evil. The argument goes that if God is all-powerful, then He should find a solution to evil that ravages His creation and creatures. Where He chooses not to eradicate evil, it could either be that He is not all-powerful as claimed, or He is not perfectly-good as He is presented. But if He is all that He is said to be, then, evil cannot exist. But the reality of evil, questions not only the existence of God, but creates a logical incompatibility between what we say that God is and the reality of evil. Two atheological scholars who are mostly credited as developing these bipod stands—God exists and evil exists—as a logical problem of evil are J.L. Mackie and H.J. McCloskey.⁹⁷ As succinctly stated by McCloskey:

Evil is a problem, for the theist, in that a contradiction is involved in the fact of evil on the one hand and belief in the omnipotence and omniscience of God on the other. God cannot be both all-powerful and perfectly good if evil is real.⁹⁸

In its very elaborate form, Mackie and McCloskey are claiming that because of the logical inconsistency inherent in such proposition that God created a world containing evil, the statement that God exists is not credible. Perhaps, this is what led Hans Küng to describe the problem of evil as “the rock of atheism.”⁹⁹ Aquinas also considered the existence of evil as contradicting the goodness of God, and thus denying the existence of God.¹⁰⁰ The *Book of Job* is

⁹⁶ Peterson, Michael L., “Introduction: The Problem of Evil,” in Michael L. Peterson, ed., *The Problem of Evil: Selected Readings*, (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992) p 3.

⁹⁷ Mackie, J. L., « Evil and Omnipotence, » in *Mind*, vol. LXIV, No. 254, (1955), pp 200-212; H.J. McCloskey, “God and Evil,” in *The Philosophical Quarterly*, vol. X, No. 39 (1960), pp 97-114.

⁹⁸ McCloskey, H. J., “God and Evil,” p 97.

⁹⁹ Küng, Hans, *On Being a Christian*, translated by Edward Quinn, (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1976), p 432. It is said that this phrase was not invented by Küng himself. Cf Gijsbert van den Brink, *Almighty God: A Study of the Doctrine of Divine Omnipotence*, (GA Kampen: Kok Pharos Publishing House, 1993), p 240, fn. 2.

¹⁰⁰ ST. 1a, q.2, a.3, obj.1: “Videtur quod Deus non sit. Quia si unum contrariorum fuerit infinitum, totaliter destruetur aliud. Sed hoc intelligitur in hoc nomine Deus, scilicet quod sit quoddam bonum infinitum. Si ergo Deus esset, nullum malum inveniretur. Invenitur autem malum in mundo. Ergo Deus non est. » In answer to this, Aquinas

a classical example of the contradictions noted by Mackie and McCloskey and their associates and they have really made a point. What we are not very sure of is that they really succeeded in showing that the copula—God exists and evil exists—are logically incompatible. It is not also very clear that the presence of evil in the world denies and nullifies the existence of an all-powerful, all-knowing and perfectly-good God. An original line of defense has been charted by Nelson Pike in what he calls a “morally sufficient reason.”¹⁰¹ He gives an example of a parent who forces a child to take a spoonful of bitter medicine (which brings instance of suffering), in the interest of the child’s health and happiness. He argues that the fact the parent knowingly caused this suffering to the child is not sufficient to remove the parent from the class of perfectly good beings. If the parent fails to fit into this class, it is not because he caused this instance of suffering.’ The fact that a good and knowing parent permitted this suffering of his son, has not contradicted his state as a good and knowing parent who has the power to prevent his son’s suffering.

To say that there is a morally sufficient reason for his action is simply to say that there is a circumstance or condition which, when known, renders *blame* (though of course not *responsibility*) for the action inappropriate. As a general statement, a being who permits (or brings about) an instance of suffering might be perfectly good providing only that there is a morally sufficient reason for his action. Thus, it does not follow from the claim that God is perfectly good that he would prevent suffering if he could.¹⁰²

A huge array of academic responses has since flooded the debate. And one man who has offered an advanced form of the “morally sufficient reason,” is Alvin Plantinga. Those interested in pursuing further this part of the defense can consult the references below.¹⁰³

Another dimension of the theoretical form of the problem of evil, that is consistent with the facts exposed in the *Book of Job*, is what has been called the “evidential”¹⁰⁴ or “empirical”¹⁰⁵ problem

following Augustine reasons “that it is part of the infinite goodness of God, that He should allow evil to exist, and out of it produce good.”

¹⁰¹ Pike, Nelson, «Hume on Evil, » in Nelson Pike, ed., *God and Evil: Readings on the Theological Problem of Evil*, (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1964) p 88.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Plantinga, Alvin, *The Nature of Necessity*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974); *God, Freedom, and Evil* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1975); J. L .Mackie, *The Miracle of Theism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982) Cf also James R. Beebe, “The Logical Problem of Evil,” in *The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <http://www.iep.utm.edu/e/evil-log.htm>.

of evil. It is a shift that probably resulted from the failure of the logical problem of evil, as shown above, to destroy theism. Rowe says that “the world contains evils that render the existence of the theistic God unlikely.”¹⁰⁶ The argument here is no longer the consistency problem, but that the sheer evidence of evil in the world, count heavily against the existence of a benevolent, all-powerful and all-knowing God. The “senseless” suffering of the innocent Job plays perfectly into the hands of this line of thought. The various ways of presenting this argument yields the various dimensions of the same evidential problem of evil.¹⁰⁷ It is the sheer amount of this evil, and the fact that so many of its victims are innocent, that count heavily as an evidence against theism.¹⁰⁸ Contrary to this, Richard Swinburne has argued that it is not impossible that evil serves some greater goods that constitute viable evidence for theism.

I accept that an omnipotent being can prevent any evil he chooses, but I deny that a perfectly good being will always try to do so. If a perfectly good being is to allow evil to occur, he must have the right to do so, and there must be some good which is brought about by allowing the evil to occur and could not be brought about by him in any better way, and so great that it is worth allowing the evil to occur.¹⁰⁹

Another related argument is that of Alston. He argues that the fact that we do not or cannot see any divine sufficient reason that we can envisage for permitting evil, does not in any way justify the conclusion that there is no sufficient reason that would justify such a permission. It is as if we extrapolate and determine the boundaries of a realm beyond our intellectual ability. “Surely an omniscient, omnipotent being is further removed from any of us in this respect than a brilliant physicist is from one innocent of physics, or a Mozart is from one innocent of music, or Karpov is from a neophyte (in chess). Surely the extent to which God can envisage reasons for permitting a given state of affairs exceeds our ability to do so by at least as much as Einstein’s

¹⁰⁴ Rowe, William L., “The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism,” in *American Philosophical Quarterly*, vol. 16, No.4, (1979) p 335, fn.1: “There remains, however, what we may call the *evidential* form—as opposed to the *logical* form—of the problem of evil: the view that the variety and profusion of evil in our world, although perhaps not logically inconsistent with the existence of the theistic God, provides, nevertheless, *rational support* for atheism.” (Emphasis by the author).

¹⁰⁵ Rowe, William L., “The Empirical Argument from Evil,” in Audi & Wainwright, eds., *Rationality, Religious Belief, & Moral Commitment*, (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1986), pp 227-247.

¹⁰⁶ Rowe, William L., “The Empirical Argument from Evil,” p 227.

¹⁰⁷ Peterson, Michael, *Evil and the Christian God*, (Grand Rapids, 1982), pp 66f distinguishes three of them.

¹⁰⁸ Van Den Brink, G, *Almighty God: A Study of the Doctrine of Divine Omnipotence*, p 247.

¹⁰⁹ Swinburne, Richard, « Some Major Strands of Theodicy, » in Daniel Howard-Snyder, ed., *The Evidential Argument from Evil*, (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1996) pp 30-31.

ability to discern reason for a physical theory exceeds the ability of one ignorant of physics.”¹¹⁰ Thus, in the book of Job, it could even be said that God has a morally sufficient reason for allowing evil to ravage the affairs of man. Such reasons could range from His desire to let man realize how limited man’s understanding is, and how unfathomable God’s ways are. But we could still argue that man does not need such quantity of evil to realize his limitedness and fragility. And neither does God need to justify His reasons for permitting such quantity of evil.

The existential form of the problem of evil, according to Peterson, “pertains not simply to the abstract analysis of propositions but to one’s subjective experience, including a total sense of life or conscious attitude toward God.”¹¹¹ This form of the problem of evil is not very popular among scholars but it has actually found scholarly backing in the writings of Hasker,¹¹² and Adams.¹¹³ The experience of Job again fits in to this form of the problem of evil when, in spite of his goodness and justice, he comes face to face with suffering that makes him morally upset and outraged to the point that he would demand explanation from his God. In a way, our present inquiry on evil and providence, could be said to generally fit in well to this form of the problem of evil since in the final analysis, it redresses Job’s understanding of God and His relationship to man and to the world. In his experience, Job never doubted the existence of God nor the fact that He is all-present, all-good, and all-powerful. What his experience did for him was to let him understand God’s way of being present in his life and how this presence directs his actions.

Our Medieval Inspired Treatment of the Problem of Evil

However, purely seen from the perspective of Maimonides, the modern treatment of the problem of evil does not fit into his scheme since his idea or “definition” of God is totally different from the working definition accepted by the moderns. The image of an all-powerful, all-knowing, and benevolent God is to say the least, anthropomorphic when the human signification and real

¹¹⁰ Alston, William P., « Some (Temporarily) Final Thoughts on Evidential Argument from Evil, » in Daniel Howard-Snyder, ed., *The Evidential Argument from Evil*, p 318.

¹¹¹ Peterson, Michael L., « Introduction: The Problem of Evil, » p 3.

¹¹² Hasker, William, « On Regretting the Evils of This World, » in Michael L. Peterson, ed., *The Problem of Evil*, pp 153-168.

¹¹³ Adams, Marilyn M., «Redemptive Suffering: A Christian Solution to the Problem of Evil, » in Michael L. Peterson, ed., *The Problem of Evil*, pp 169-187.

signification in God are taken to be univocal. It is on the basis of these human-inspired images that analytic philosophers have constructed the modern problem of evil.

The purely logical problem addressed by the analytic philosophers as a metaphysical puzzle is too narrowly gauged to be fully satisfying. Solutions that address only the logical problem simply do not begin to suggest an appropriate response to evil and suffering.¹¹⁴

This anthropomorphic way of describing God transfers upon Him our *modus loquendi* and our *modus intelligendi* with all the human categories and that is the problem with the modern discussion of the problem of evil. It is the problem of human language not finding the appropriate vocabulary to enter within the realms of the divine. More so is it the problem of man's finite intelligence grasping with the unknowable essence of God. Both Maimonides and Aquinas teach the transcendence of God and by implication, accept that God is "beyond the world and the language in which the problem of evil can be stated."¹¹⁵ Maimonides's and Aquinas's theory of negative attributes is a game changer in this whole discussion of evil and providence. Aquinas's theory of divine attributes insists that we must not only have a right conception of God but be able to express that conception in appropriate terms devoid of ambiguity. Both Maimonides's and Aquinas's approach to the *Book of Job* are quite different from a modern interest. They do not even recognize that the sufferings of Job and his innocence call into question the nature of God as Good, nor even His existence. And thus, they "do not think that there is a problem of evil to be discussed on the assumption that discussions of it might lead us to conclude that God certainly or probably does not exist."¹¹⁶ It is this that would explain the absence in both Maimonides and Aquinas, of any topic concentrated on treating what is called the problem of evil in the sense that we have all along taken it. Rather their major interest is simply to understand and explain the workings of divine providence in a way devoid of all contradictions.¹¹⁷ It would be seen that our medieval inspired treatment of evil and providence, would be quite different from what the moderns would expect, not only in structure, essence and

¹¹⁴ Baker, Lynne Rudder, "The Second-Person Account of the Problem of Evil," in Kevin Timpe, ed., *Metaphysics and God: Essays in Honor of Eleonore Stump* (New York & London: Routledge, 2009) p 157.

¹¹⁵ It is a statement by Terry Eagleton in a "Foreword" he wrote in Herbert McCabe, *God and Evil in the Theology of St. Thomas Aquinas*, edited and introduced by Brian Davies, (London: Continuum, 2010) p x.

¹¹⁶ Davies, Brian, *Thomas Aquinas on God and Evil*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011) p 17.

¹¹⁷ Stump, Eleonore, "Aquinas on the Sufferings of Job," in Daniel Howard-Snyder, ed. *The Evidential Argument from Evil*, (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1996) p 50.

style, but also in the result. Because God does not and cannot exist in a direct relation with the world, there is no reason questioning why He does not interfere in the natural events of the world and save us from evil. The reasoning leads to conclude that God is not a moral being that we would require to justify His decisions and actions. Even Job in the legendary story understood this very well. As stated by McCabe:

The problem of evil is stated by asking questions about God that can only intelligibly be asked about creatures. It derives its apparent force not from its intelligibility but from the exigencies of the imaginative picture that we inevitably have of God and the world.¹¹⁸

The approach we shall adopt in our examination of the *Book of Job* finds its interest and meaning within the context of faith and belief in the God who is the Creator. We have chosen the *Book of Job* because it presents to us a classical example of the “contradictions” we find in a world that is said to be under the care and providence of an omniscient God, and the reality of evil being suffered by His creature, albeit a just man named Job. Our second reason for choosing the *Book of Job* is because of the special interest it has in the thoughts and writings of both Moses Maimonides and Thomas Aquinas. They both share a common Aristotelian and biblical heritage, such that their philosophical and theological convictions are seen to draw from the same Aristotelian source. Our third reason for choosing the *Book of Job* is because it provides a fitting base to showcase the practical thrust of their philosophy as exposed in both *The Guide of the Perplexed*¹¹⁹ and the *Expositio super Job ad litteram*.¹²⁰ This practical thrust is particularly manifest in their discussion of the problem of divine providence and evil.

Our reading of Maimonides’s interpretation of the *Book of Job* will show that divine providence and perfect happiness are dependent upon the intellectual perfection of each individual human being and not on moral righteousness. As for Thomas Aquinas’s interpretation of Maimonides, the primacy and irreducibility of *esse* would be seen to be at the centre of his metaphysics of providence where creatures are ontologically and intimately dependent on God regardless of

¹¹⁸ McCabe, Herbert, *God and Evil in the Theology of St. Thomas Aquinas*, p 111.

¹¹⁹ Frank, D.H, “Reason in Action: The ‘Practicality’ of Maimonides’ Guide,” in *Commandment and Community: New Essays in Jewish Legal and Political Philosophy*, ed. D. H. Frank, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995) pp 69-84; J. Stern, “Maimonides’ Demonstrations: Principles and Practice,” *Medieval Philosophy and Theology* 10, 2001, pp 47-84.

¹²⁰ Aquinas, *Expositio Super Job ad Litteram* Cf *The Literary Exposition on Job: A Scriptural Commentary Concerning Providence*, translated by Anthony Damico, (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1989).

their intellectual perfection. Because for him providence is *ratio ordinis rerum in finem*, Aquinas would interpret human endeavors including suffering, as various means to acquiring man's final end which is union with God. Against Maimonides, he will argue that perfect happiness can be achieved by individual human beings whose *naturale desiderium* cannot be in vain; and that *perfecta beatitudo* is solely by the help of the *lumen gloriae* which elevates the created intellect beyond its natural capacity to the union of the beatific vision. Job does not need to be the most intelligent to be under providence. Aquinas will build his theory of the beatific vision on the solid foundations of his principle of participation and the Aristotelian principle of hylemorphism. Aquinas may have taken this pain to redress the growing impression in the Arabic circles that perfect happiness consists in the conjunction of man's intellect with the separated Active Intellect and through this to the knowledge of separate intellects.

Over and above historical sources and questions, this work also seeks whether there is a central theme around which the interpretations of Job revolve. Regardless of the diverse exegetical methods, philosophical and theological perspectives inherent in the various interpretations, we shall still argue that the central theme that goes through the length and breadth of the interpretations is the concern with human understanding.¹²¹ Why does Job suffer? What did Job's friends misunderstand? What did Job see or understand from the revelation that transformed him and changed his fortune? Is there a limit to what man can understand in his relation with God? For Maimonides, we shall see that Job's transformation is as a result of his new intellectual vision of the nature of the cosmos, a rational understanding of the reality of God, and a proper grasp of the real meaning and working of providence. Job's evil has been as a result of the privation of providence. As for Aquinas, the difference is in Job's understanding of the ultimate goal of life: the immortality of the soul and final resurrection where the sufferings of this life, pale into insignificance vis-à-vis the rewards of the beatific vision. Having said this, Aquinas's reading of Maimonides, would set out addressing the metaphysical foundations on which the whole edifice of providence and evil are constructed: the nature of God, the issue of creation, the soul and the place of the Active Intellect, and immortality. These are the major points that would shape our discussion. In the final analysis, it would be discovered that we have not tried to find a solution to the problem of evil but only an adequate response. An understanding of our manner

¹²¹ Cf Schreiner, Susan E, *Where Shall Wisdom be Found?* p 10.

of arguing will demand what Françoise Mies calls « un détour épistémologique, une réflexion sur le rapport entre la question et la réponse. »

Il est des réponses qui conviennent adéquatement aux questions posées et qui, une fois énoncées, éteignent la question. C'est le cas des questions mathématiques. « Combien font $2 + 2$? 4 ! ». C'est le cas des questions logiques. « Quel est le contraire de grand? Petit ». C'est encore le cas des questions factuelles. « A quelle heure part l'avion pour Tel Aviv? A 3 heures ». Ces réponses sont des solutions à des problèmes qui trouvent dans les solutions leur extinction. Mais les vraies questions sont plus exigeantes : elles attendent des réponses et des solutions. Ces questions sont existentielles ou métaphysiques. « M'aimes-tu? » « Pourquoi l'injuste prospère et le juste dépérit? ». Ces questions sont sans solution. Mais pas sans réponse. Entre question et réponse, il n'est pas d'adéquation totale : le questionneur doit accepter un déplacement, et c'est probablement ce déplacement que Job a été capable d'effectuer.¹²²

In a work as vast and as difficult as our own, care must be taken to state the subject of the thesis correctly. We are setting out to expose Aquinas's critical reading of Maimonides on the problem of evil and providence in the *Book of Job*. As complicated as this objective may be, we shall approach it with every care. In our methodology, we intend to present our own understanding of Maimonides's position of the problem. Then we look at Maimonides through the eyes of Aquinas. What this latter objective entails is that in the exposition of Aquinas on the given subject, emphasis must be placed on the areas of agreement and disagreement and the final interpretation Aquinas makes of what he has perhaps read of Maimonides. The exigency it puts on us, is to furnish textual evidence of our claims though there will never be any line to line, section to section, correspondence between the two authors.

Our work comprises of four sections. The first section will examine matter, privation and evil from a metaphysical point of view. The major interest here will be to examine the ontological

¹²² Mies, Françoise, *L'Espérance de Job*, (Leuven: University Press, 2006) pp 424-425. The distinctions made by Mies fall into what Gabriel Marcel have called the distinction between "problem" and "mystery." Whereas a problem is something I find before me, and can therefore solve, a mystery is something in which I am myself involved, where the distinction between what is in me and what is before me loses its meaning and validity. "Au lieu qu'un problème authentique est justiciable d'une certaine technique appropriée en fonction de laquelle il se définit, un mystère transcende par définition toute technique concevable. Sans doute est-il toujours possible...de dégrader un mystère pour en faire un problème. » Cf Gabriel Marcel, *Être et Avoir*, (Paris : Editions Montaigne, 1935) pp 169-170. He cites the problem of evil as an example of the degradation of a mystery into a problem.

status of matter and evil and how this status apportions blame to or exonerates God from responsibility for evil in the world. Because Plotinus's and Maimonides's cosmogony follow a hierarchical structure of emanation, they single out matter as the absolute evil and the cause of all evils. And because matter is the last in the hierarchy of intelligences, they both place the responsibility for evil on the doorsteps of God, the ultimate principle giving rise to matter. How does Aquinas confront the problem? In his interpretation, he metaphysically distinguishes between matter, privation and evil. While he accords matter an ontological status because the effect of a willing agent, he denies such status to evil which is only mere privation of a good that should exist in a given object. Aquinas locates the cause of evil in the defective will of a rational creature and thus exonerates God of the responsibility for evil. Thus to interpret Maimonides, Aquinas would actually say that God does not directly cause evil; He rather indirectly permits evil, since He puts in place, the possibility giving rise to destruction and the absence of good. God does not have it in His nature to create evil.

If a good God cannot be the cause of evil, He could at least intervene to save man from the effects of evil, less His attributes of goodness, knowledge, existence and power are empty words. Are those qualities technically called attributes really in God? If they are, do they tell us anything about the nature of God? What language could man employ in talking about this God and His relation to the world? Maimonides calls attributes mere accidents that cannot be added to the pure essence of God. To guard against introducing ontological multiplicity into the simple essence of God, Maimonides denies God of every attribute and reads whatever we call essential attributes as actions of God. By consequence, Maimonides adopts equivocal predication as the only valid predication between God and creatures and effectively closes all avenues that may lead to the knowledge of God. Aquinas's interpretative methodology is to expand the words of Maimonides such that out of the negative and positive ways (attributes of action) arise a third, the *via eminentiae* by which the *modus significandi* proper to man is negated, and the *res significata* is attributed in its preeminent state to God. Because these attributes are found in God, not as multiplicity but as simple in the essence of God, Aquinas holds that man can positively know God though imperfectly, and the bases of this knowledge permits an analogical relation existing between God and creatures as cause and its effect. These discussions bordering on semantics and logic of the nature and attributes of God constitute the object of our section two.

But the lack of order in the circumstances of human individuals throws up questions about God's knowledge and providence. Our section three will try to do justice to this question. God according to Maimonides is an intellect in *actu* in whom there is the numerical unity of *intellectus, intelligens et intellectum*. As such God supposedly knows everything by His essence. Regardless of this metaphysical truth, Maimonides follows Aristotle in denying that God's providence extends to the individuals of non intellectual species because providence according to him, is consequent upon the intellect. The basis of all this is the structure of emanation that denies God's direct causative knowledge of all realities. Aquinas's reading of Maimonides throws up some logical inconsistencies following this metaphysical truth. A thing cannot be a perfect intellect in *actu* and yet fails to know the individuals of non-intellectual species. This leads to two major errors: God is not omniscient and He is not provident of all His creation. Aquinas's objective then would be to show that knowledge is one with God's essence by which He causes and provides for everything in their individual natures.

Section four tries to examine the foundations on which Maimonides's theory of providence as consequent upon the intellect is built. Among other things, it will examine the practical application of this theory in the *Book of Job* where an innocent man suffers evil even though God is said to be provident. The implication of singling out intellectual perfection as the most important factor in providence is that it reduces less intellectual human beings to the level of beasts and excludes them from the overflow of providence. Evil happens to them because they are deprived of providence. Their happiness in terms of union with God is inconceivable. The new interpretation it leads to is that evil becomes then the absence or privation of providence. Job suffers evil because he lacks intellectual perfection. The acquisition of this perfection, establishes him under the permanent flow of providence—*largitatem splendoris spiritualis*. Knowing the implications of Maimonides's reading of Job, Aquinas starts his interpretation by establishing man as a dependent creature of God. To be a creature is to be in possession of *esse*—the ultimate effect of God. What Maimonides rejected as an accident becomes in the hand of Aquinas, a gift by God and a major ontological principle of every finite being; and the hub of his metaphysics of providence and creation. Thanks to *esse*, every finite being of intellectual and non intellectual species, enjoys the direct knowledge and providence of God. The intellect takes up a different position of making man a special creature of God, endowed with the responsibility of making choices and taking the consequences of his choices. Evil gets reinforced as absence of

good that should actually be in a subject, caused by the defective will of a choosing agent. Because providence is divine plan ordering things to their end, Aquinas interprets suffering as a tool by which God leads man to his final end. Though there is problem justifying the place of suffering, Aquinas turns attention to the good of beatific vision which renders all sufferings in this world insignificant. It is this hope of the resurrection that sustains and justifies Job's sufferings as God's manifestation of His divine providence.

The final part of this section examines other philosophical, psychological, religious *voire* theological interpretations of the *Book of Job*, and the place and importance of the sufferings of Job in the contemporary world. The highlights of this section will be among others, the interpretations of Paul Ricoeur, Carl Jung and Philippe Nemo. Françoise Mies's interpretation in the "*Le livre de Job: de l'excès du mal à l'altérité du mal?*", places much emphasis upon Job's personal relation with God as the key to understanding the *Book*. God is responsible for Job's suffering not as a causative agent of his suffering, but as the object of Job's love and attachment. In the "*Philosophie de la volonté II finitude et culpabilité*", Paul Ricoeur exposes the weak foundation on which the *Book of Job* is based: the conception of God's relation to the world as ethical with the consequence that man's actions in the world take a penal character. Such a vision fails to explain innocent suffering as in the case of Job who like his friends, are all guilty of this ethical vision of God and the world. The theophany eventually opens Job to a new vision where he learns to accept things as God-given.

The most radical interpretation comes from Carl G. Jung's "*Réponse à Job*." His contestation of the monotheistic God, his rejection of evil as *privatio boni*, his acceptance of contraries and a feminine nature in God makes his book a special and obligatory reading. For Jung, it is God's encounter with Job that necessitated God's transformation of Himself in the Incarnation in order to make repairs for the unjust sufferings inflicted upon Job and consequently upon humankind. God's answer to Job is at the point of Christ's crucifixion on the cross. From Philippe Nemo's interpretation of *Job et l'excès du mal*, we understand that the excess of evil which Job suffered and the excess of beatitude with which he was comforted are two abilities showing the transcendence of God over being and over the world. Against the atheists who hang on the existence of evil as proof for the nonexistence of God, Nemo replies that the presence of evil

proves the existence of God, since it opens up the possibility of encountering the Transcendent Being.

SECTION I: ON MATTER, PRIVATION AND EVIL: A METAPHYSICAL APPROACH

1.0 Plotinus's Theory of Matter and Evil

Plotinus devotes four major works of his enigmatic *Enneads* to the treatment of matter. In their standard chronological order by Porphyry, they include: (1) II, 4 – On Matter; (2) II, 5 – On what exists potentially and what exists actually; (3) III, 6 – On the Impassibility of things without body; and (4) I, 8 – On what are and whence come Evils.¹²³ In this treatment, we shall try to examine and put together where possible, a consistent theory of Plotinus on matter and evil. The long term plan is to see how Plotinus's exposition helps shape the discussion between Maimonides and Thomas Aquinas on the question of evil and providence. In other words, Plotinus here is serving as an introduction to both Maimonides and Thomas Aquinas whose treatment of evil cut across matter.

We said 'where possible' because of the intermittent problems prevalent with the study and interpretation of the *Enneads*. It is well known that Plotinus is a very difficult thinker to understand because of the "real or apparent contradictions" which "abound in the *Enneads*, and Plotinus's perspective can change entirely within a page or even a sentence."¹²⁴ His use of metaphors and the system of questioning add to the difficulty of assessing his real philosophical thought on the issue of matter. Instead of stating real philosophical arguments, he poses questions and uses metaphors, thus creating the atmosphere of doubt as to what is to be taken literally or not, and to what exactly he is thinking of. In this use of metaphors, Plotinus could be said to anticipate Maimonides. According to Dennis O'Brien whose interpretations of the *Enneads* would guide our own reading, "Plotinus' obscurities and difficulties are at least an intrinsic part of his attempt to think about and argue through a number of tricky philosophical questions, which in the third century, already had an intricate and tangled past."¹²⁵ His close affinity to Plato and Aristotle and the Peripatetics, makes it quite difficult to see "what is distinctive in Plotinus' theory, for the combination of positive and negative attributes of matter is

¹²³ Plotinus, *Enneads*, in seven volumes, with an English translation by A. H. Armstrong, (London: William Heinemann Ltd, 1966-1988). All citations and ordering come from this edition unless otherwise stated. The citation is as follows: the book (II), the chapter (4), the number (6), and the line.

¹²⁴ Corrigan, K, *Plotinus' Theory of Matter-Evil and the Question of Substance: Plato, Aristotle, and Alexander of Aphrodisias*, (Leuven: Peeters, 1996) p 9.

¹²⁵ O'Brien, Denis, *Plotinus on the Origin of Matter: An Exercise in the interpretation of the Enneads*, (Napoli: Bibliopolis, 1991) pp 87-88.

virtually a commonplace of earlier thinking.”¹²⁶ That does not however, deny the fact that he made an original contribution in the treatment of matter and evil as we shall show in the following pages.

The ambiguities and difficulties inherent in the texts of Plotinus become foremost evident in his explanation of the origin of material things. In one of such texts which suggest the influence of *Gnosticism* on Plotinus, he seems to present matter in two different lights: either as a distinct principle that is opposed to the One or as a last term in the procession of the One.¹²⁷ There seems to be an inherent ontological dualism present in the thought of Plotinus. Some interpreters would go as far as branding Plotinus’s thought system dualistic while others would disagree.¹²⁸ In the body of this work, we shall try to expose the difficulties involved in the interpretation of the texts of Plotinus. The major argument, which however would come up against such suggestion of inherent ontological dualism in Plotinus, is the consistent thread of emanation that permeates the Plotinian world view.

Plotinus teaches that everything that exists, owes its existence to the First Principle or the One.¹²⁹ It is the common source of all things because everything is derived from it and nothing can exist without it.

The One is all things and not a single one of them: it is the principle of all things, not all things, but all things have that other kind of transcendent existence; for in a way they do occur in the One.¹³⁰

It is this First Principle or the One that explains both the existence of form and that of matter, since all reality proceeds from it. This idea of the One played a great part in the development of monotheism by the three monotheistic religions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. In the context of our philosophical inquiry, it greatly influenced the thought process of Moses Maimonides and Thomas Aquinas both of whom we shall encounter later on. In his treatment of the procession (*proodos*) of all things from the One, Plotinus raises the question that has shaped

¹²⁶ Corrigan, K, *Plotinus’ Theory of Matter-Evil and the Question of Substance*, p 9.

¹²⁷ *Enneads* IV.8(6).6.16-23.

¹²⁸ Cf Corrigan, K, *Plotinus’ Theory of Matter-Evil and the Question of Substance*, pp 251-54.

¹²⁹ For a fuller discussion of Plotinus’s ‘monism,’ cf B.A.G. Fuller, *The Problem of Evil in Plotinus*, (Cambridge: University Press, 1912) p 66ff; John Rist, “Plotinus and Christian Philosophy,” in Lloyd P. Gerson, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Plotinus*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) pp 386-413.

¹³⁰ *Enneads*, V.2.1.1-5.

medieval philosophy and remains relevant even in our day. That question occupies the thoughts both of Maimonides and Aquinas. How does what is multiple come from what is One and Simple? According to Plotinus:

How then do all things come from the One, which is simple and has in it no diverse variety, or any sort of doubleness? It is because there is nothing in it that all things come from it: in order that being may exist, the One is not being, but the generator of being.¹³¹

Whether this actually answers the question of how the multiple come from the One is left to be seen. In the course of this study, we shall see the ambivalent description of matter by Plotinus and how that ambivalence makes its mark on the teaching of Maimonides. That ambivalence is a natural mark of Plotinus's inclination toward Plato and Aristotle. This will be very much on the surface as he examines the origin of matter. We shall be faithful to the chronological order of the *Enneads* as that order helps us note the evolution of Plotinus's thought on the unavoidable problem of matter and the problem of evil. We shall not go into a detailed discussion of the whole of the *Enneads* since Plotinus serves only as an introduction to the issue at stake. However, a good exposition of the issues involved will help us to a better grasp of the problem and how our subsequent thinkers grappled with it.

1.1 The Origin of Matter:

The question of the origin of matter, both corporeal and intelligible, has generated a lot of controversy among interpreters of Plotinus. This is partly due to the obscurity of the passage in the *Enneads* and the not-so-clear-teaching of Plotinus himself on this question. On a number of occasions, he makes reference to this question and each time fails to leave a sure teaching of what it is that he holds to be true. For example, in the *Enneads* V, Plotinus writes that after the generation of the soul by the intellect, the soul itself generates what "must necessarily be worse than soul; about these we must speak later."¹³² In some of such passages as we shall see, the ambiguity of ontological dualism tends to come to the fore and Plotinus faces the potential threat of either abandoning his 'monism' where matter comes as the end product of the procession

¹³¹ *Enneads*, V.2.1.5-10 "This we may say is the first act of generation: the One, perfect because it seeks nothing, has nothing, and needs nothing, overflows, as it were, and its superabundance makes something other than itself."

¹³² *Enneads* V.1(10).7.45-48.

which began from the One, or proving beyond doubt that matter-evil is not an independent principle opposed to the One. But as in all Plotinian texts, it all boils down to interpretation. Emile Bréhier gives us a clear statement of the problem at stake:

“Either matter has always existed ... or else its creation is a necessary consequence of antecedent causes.” (IV.8. (6).6.20-25) In the first case, it is a term distinct from the realities which proceed progressively from the One, and it may set itself against these realities. In the second case, it is the last term in the procession of the realities, that is to say, the sterile stage in which the productive force which has proceeded from the One at last dies out.¹³³

What exactly does Plotinus teach? Is his whole metaphysics consistent with the principle of the One as the ultimate origin of matter or does he dissolve into inadvertent dualism by his inability to convincingly account for the origin of matter-evil? Our biggest asset in this interpretation will be the texts of the *Enneads*. The general picture of the structure of reality in the Plotinian world is that of ‘emanation’ or ‘downward process’ or ‘derivation’ where all things have their source in a principle called the One or Good. “The One is all things and not a single one of them: it is the principle of all things...”¹³⁴ Being most perfectly good, it diffuses of its force in a never ending downward stream and brings forth other realities from the Intellect to Soul and eventually to material realities. The life giving impulse is inherent in its nature. It is a metaphysical necessity by which a stream of vital ‘creative’ force pours out from the One in varying degrees to the level of matter. The danger in this is to think of the One as outpouring itself to other realities and thereby diminishing its power, its being and its perfection. In a text he wrote on the origin of being and the order of beings which come after the First, Plotinus guards against that conception. He correctly notes: “All these are the One and not the One: they are he because they come from him; they are not he, because it is in abiding by himself that he gives them.”¹³⁵ In pouring out of itself, the One does neither diminish nor loose itself in other realities. It is intimately present in them as their ultimate source. What is poured out is not the One itself but its’ vital energy or ‘creative’ force. We now turn to an examination of the principal texts of the *Enneads* dealing

¹³³ Bréhier, Emile, *The Philosophy of Plotinus*, translated by Joseph Thomas, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1958) p 180.

¹³⁴ *Enneads* V.2.1.1-2.

¹³⁵ *Enneads* V.2.2.20-30.

with the origin of matter. An earlier examination of the *Enneads* on the origin of matter has been done by William J. Carroll.¹³⁶ We profited from his analysis of the texts of the *Enneads*.

1.1.1 Enneads IV.8 (6).6: This is one of the earliest treatises composed by Plotinus. It is the sixth in the chronological order given by Porphyry. It is entitled “On the Descent of the Soul into Bodies.” In his introductory note to this treatise, A.H. Armstrong observes the influence on Plotinus, of the ‘pessimistic dualism most strikingly apparent’ in Plato’s thought about the world.¹³⁷ It is still perhaps the earlier stages of Plotinus’s development when he is striving so hard to combat and shake off the influence of Gnosticism. He gives us two branches of a single alternative that could be interpreted differently. Before seeing the alternative interpretations springing from this one text, let us first see the exact words of Plotinus:

The nature of matter then, either existed for ever, and it was impossible for it, since it existed, not to participate in that which grants all things as much good as each one of them can take; or else its coming into being was a necessary consequence of the causes before it...¹³⁸

The translation and interpretation of Emile Bréhier, as shown earlier, presents two different alternatives: either matter is a distinct reality that can be opposed to the One or it is a last term in the procession of the One. The earlier alternative breeds ontological dualism in Plotinus, while the latter alternative safeguards Plotinus’s monistic view of reality. John M. Rist does not doubt that matter is generated. However he thinks that Plotinus’s intention was something else: “He is mentioning though here not attempting to resolve, the problem of whether matter has always existed and is created from eternity, or whether it only exists in time.”¹³⁹ The same cannot be said of Dennis O’Brien who interprets the text as “two branches of a single alternative” that matter cannot be a separate reality from the One. Matter is generated from the One even if

¹³⁶ Carroll, William J, “Plotinus on the Origin of Matter,” in Michael F. Wagner, ed., *Neoplatonism and Nature: Studies in Plotinus’ Enneads*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002) pp 179-207.

¹³⁷ Cf. *Enneads* IV.8., the introductory note by A. H. Armstrong, p 394.

¹³⁸ *Enneads* IV.8 (6).6.16-23.

¹³⁹ Rist, John M., “Plotinus on Matter and Evil,” in *Phronesis* VI, (1961), p 158.

generation here is non-temporal.¹⁴⁰ This matter refers to the intelligible matter. The first alternative is that either matter as “always existed, and in that case, since it ‘is’”, cannot but “participate in the goodness that flows ultimately from the One,” or “the generation of matter follows ‘of necessity’ from principles earlier to matter” such that matter cannot and “does not have to stand wholly “apart,” as though it were altogether out of reach of the One.”¹⁴¹ Whatever way we look at it, Plotinus holds that matter whether intelligible or sensible cannot be ‘separate’ from the One since as intelligible, it draws from the goodness of the One and as sensible, it is the last term in the procession of the One.

1.1.2 Enneads II.4 (12).5: This treatise number twelve, is titled ‘On Matter.’ Plotinus presents us with his discussion of two types of matter: intelligible and sensible matter. Sensible matter is an image of intelligible matter which stands to it as a model. As is obtainable in a platonic inspired model-copy relationship, the copy is vaguer, more unmeasured, and more indefinite since it is farther away from the true reality. This matter of the sensible world cannot become wholly united with form since it is always a pure potentiality, inert, lifeless, and a mere “corpse adorned.”¹⁴² On the contrary, intelligible matter unites with form and makes up a “reality bathed in light,” “endowed with intelligible life.”¹⁴³ However, the one important question that interests us here is this: are these two forms of matter—intelligible and sensible—generated? Or is matter eternal and therefore ungenerated? What does the text of Plotinus tell us?

On the question of intelligible matter, Plotinus notes that it must be investigated as one investigates the ideas, that is, by distinguishing between what has a temporal origin and what is unoriginated.

Intelligible realities are originated in so far as they have a beginning, but unoriginated because they have not a beginning in time; they always proceed from something else, not as always coming into being, like the universe, but as always existing, like the universe

¹⁴⁰ We shall come to a temporal and non-temporal generation of matter in Plotinus. Poor distinction between these two forms of generation largely explains the dualistic interpretation of reality put on Plotinus by some of the modern interpreters of the Enneads.

¹⁴¹ O’Brien, D., *Plotinus on the Origin of Matter. An Exercise in the Interpretation of the “Enneads,”* (Napoli: Bibliopolis, 1991) p 23.

¹⁴² *Enneads* III.4 (15).1.7; II.4 (12).5.18.

¹⁴³ *Enneads* II.4 (12).5.12-23.

There. For Otherness There exists always, which produces intelligible matter; for this is the principle of matter, this and the primary Movement.¹⁴⁴

There is a close relation between the earlier passage of *Ennead* IV.8 (6).6 and this later passage of II.4 (12).5. The close relation, according to our reading, exists in the identification of the intelligible reality which “existed for ever,” which participates in the goodness of the One which gives it being, in IV.8 (6).6.16-20, and the intelligible reality which “always proceed from something else, not as always coming into being, like the universe, but as always existing” (II.4 (12).5.26-30, with intelligible matter. This is the ‘matter’ that Plotinus tells us is generated by ‘Otherness’ and the ‘primary Movement.’ Nothing is said here of the origin of sensible matter. Another important issue that comes up is the question of temporal and non-temporal generation. Put in a different way, is what is eternal generated or ungenerated?

It seems to us that Plotinus, in the quoted passage above, distinguishes between two senses of ‘generation: a generation in time and a generation which has no beginning in time.’¹⁴⁵ Intelligible matter though eternal, is nevertheless, generated without a beginning in time since it proceeds from something that has got an ontological priority over it. It depends on this prior principle. To bring in more clarity to this distinction, O’Brien also specifies two senses of ‘ungenerated’: ‘what is “ungenerated” in the sense that, although it depends upon a prior principle, it is not generated in time, and what is “ungenerated” in that it does not depend upon a prior principle at all. Intelligible matter, as also the ideas, is “ungenerated” in the first sense, but is not therefore “ungenerated” in the second sense.’¹⁴⁶ It is called ‘ungenerated’ because its dependence on its prior principle does not imply a beginning in time.

1.1.3 *Enneads* III.4 (15).1. This treatise called ‘On our Allotted Guardian Spirit,’ is the fifteenth in the chronological order of the *Enneads*. This treatise is a centre of attraction since in it is thought to have been found, Plotinus’s clearest statement on the origin of sensible matter. It is a centre of attraction because, while it is a gold mine for some commentators on the proof of the

¹⁴⁴ *Enneads* II.4 (12).5.26-30.

¹⁴⁵ O’Brien, D., “Plotinus and the Gnostics on the Generation of Matter,” in *Neo-Platonism and Early Christian Thought: Essays in honour of A.H. Armstrong*, edited by H.J. Blumenthal and R.A. Markus, (London: Variorum Publications Ltd, 1981) p 111.

¹⁴⁶ O’Brien, D., *Plotinus on the Origin of Matter*, p.37, note 11.

origin of sensible matter, it is on the other hand, for others the proof that matter (sensible matter) is not generated. Dennis O'Brien is a major proponent of the generation of sensible matter in Plotinus and finds this treatise very supportive of that claim.¹⁴⁷ Kevin Corrigan observes that 'an isolated or partial soul does generate matter in III.4.1. And in fact, it is the only text which yields *conclusive* proof, without need of further argument, of matter's generation.'¹⁴⁸ The major difference is that Kevin Corrigan thinks there is more than one generation of matter in the *Enneads*, and that constitutes his endeavour in the article cited. At the other end is found Phillipus Pistorius who denies that matter is generated because it has absolutely no reality.¹⁴⁹ Jean-Marc Narbonne opposes the interpretation of treatise III.4.1 given by Kevin Corrigan and opposes the reading of the treatise as a proof of the generation of sensible matter. Once matter is not mentioned by name Narbonne argues, it is not convincing that Plotinus is talking about matter in the said passage.¹⁵⁰ He definitely denies that sensible matter is generated. Plotinus notes that soul produces 'absolute indefiniteness,' (*aoristian pantelê*) or 'absolute indetermination' depending on translation. What is this 'absolute indefiniteness'? Are there other texts in the *Enneads* where Plotinus defines what he means by 'absolute indefiniteness'? Before coming to these questions, let us look at the full text itself:

The expressions of some realities come into existence while the realities themselves remain unmoved, but soul has been already said to be in motion when it generates the sense-perception which is its expressed form and the power of growth which extends also to plants. For soul has the power of growth when it exists in us too, but it dominates it because it is only a part; but when it comes to be in plants, this power of growth dominates because it has, so to speak, become isolated. Does this power of growth, then, produce nothing? It produces a thing altogether different from itself; for after it there is no more life, but what is produced is lifeless. What is it then? Just as everything which was produced before this was produced shapeless, but was formed by turning towards its producer and being, so to speak, reared to maturity by it, so here, too, that which is

¹⁴⁷ O'Brien, D., "Plotinus on matter and evil," in Lloyd P. Gerson, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Plotinus*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) pp 181-183.

¹⁴⁸ Corrigan, K., "Is there more than one Generation of Matter in the *Enneads*?" in the *Phronesis* 31, 1986, p 168. For a full length of his article, consult pages 167-181.

¹⁴⁹ Pistorius, Phillipus V., *Plotinus and Neo-Platonism, An Introductory Study*, (Cambridge: Bowes and Bowes, 1952) pp 117-133.

¹⁵⁰ Narbonne, J-M., "Plotin et le problème de la génération de la matière; à propos d'un article récent," *Dionysius XI*, (1987) p.6 « à aucun moment n'est évoquée, sous son nom, la matière. » The full text is from page 3-31.

produced is not any more a form of soul—for it is not alive—but absolute indefiniteness. For even if there is indefiniteness in the things before it, it is nevertheless indefiniteness within form; the thing is not absolutely indefinite but only in relation to its perfection; but what we are dealing with now is absolutely indefinite.¹⁵¹

The key to resolving this impasse lies in identifying what Plotinus calls ‘absolute indefiniteness’ and qualifies as ‘lifeless.’ It is undeniable that Plotinus describes matter as that which is ‘lifeless’ (II.4. [12]5.15-20). This he does for a serious reason. In the procession of all things from the One, whatever proceeds from a higher principle, turns back of its own accord towards the principle from which it has been issued and is ‘formed.’ When the intellect is generated from the One, it returns upon the One in contemplation and “is defined.”¹⁵² Matter of the sensible world is “lifeless” and lacks the ability to turn back in contemplation of the principle from which it has sprung. Otherwise, it wouldn’t have been described elsewhere as a “weak and dim phantasm unable to receive a shape.”¹⁵³ That is why matter is the last end to the process of “going down or going away” and “the last to which nothing else can come into being.”¹⁵⁴ It is that which appears when all the realities of the intelligible world had already come to an end. This text, (*Enneads* I.8 [51].7.15-20) apart from providing an anchor argument for why matter is lifeless, can in itself be developed since it shows the whole outline of the emanative process that comes to a halt at the generation of matter.

But does Plotinus also describe matter as ‘indefinite’ (apeiron-ἄπειρον)? Plotinus in attempting to describe matter as something without any quality clearly defines it as “something indefinite, it is not a quality but the substrate and the matter we were looking for.”¹⁵⁵ He underlines the ‘indefiniteness’ of matter by calling it the plural “others.” What does this mean? A. H. Armstrong brings in some clarity by noting:

To say that something is “other” than something else is a way of helping to define it, to show it as a distinctive unity; this remarkable plural is an attempt to exclude all

¹⁵¹ *Enneads* III.4 (15).1.1-15.

¹⁵² *Enneads* V.2.1.9-13; II.4(12).5.33-35; V.4.2.

¹⁵³ *Enneads* II.5 (25).5.20-25.

¹⁵⁴ *Enneads* I.8 (51).7.15-20; II.5 (25).5.15-20.

¹⁵⁵ *Enneads* II.4 (12).13.5-10.

definition, to speak of matter as absolutely indefinite and incoherent with no sort of distinctive unity.¹⁵⁶

Plotinus never really ceases describing the nature of matter as ‘absolute indefiniteness’, pure potentiality that never actually becomes anything at all. How can it become anything at all when it is unable to turn to its generator? Matter possesses nothing of the principle of growth which engendered it and thus is absolute indefiniteness. To corroborate our interpretation, Collette-Dučić has shown that the expressions “absolute indefiniteness,” “indetermination,” “non-being,” and “lifeless,” also refer to matter in Plotinus. He proceeds by showing that even though these expressions as seen in the passages of *Enneads III 4 [15] 1 and III 9 [13] 3, 7-16* refer to the notion of “place—*topos*,” nevertheless *topos* in this sense refers “to a place interior to all concrete places” whose “only function is to receive intelligible forms, or their shadows.”¹⁵⁷ As we shall see in the next sub-section, Plotinus like Aristotle defines matter as a “receptacle (*hypodochê-ὑποδοχή*) of forms.”

1.2 The Nature of Matter: Non-Being

This first sub section tries to examine what, if it has got any, is the nature of matter. The fact of its ‘indefiniteness’ does not deprive it of its own proper nature. On the contrary, the fact that it has no quality confirms its nature.¹⁵⁸ It is by this nature that it can properly be distinguished from other things. What is matter according to Plotinus? In the second *Enneads*, Plotinus begins his discussion of matter by calling it “substrate” (*hypokeimenon-ὑποκείμενον*) and “receptacle of forms.”¹⁵⁹ This is Aristotle’s¹⁶⁰ interpretation of Plato’s receptacle of becoming in the

¹⁵⁶ *Enneads* II.4 (12).13.28-33, p 140 note 1.

¹⁵⁷ Collette-Dučić, Bernard, *Plotin et l’ordonnement de l’être : étude sur les fondements et les limites de la détermination*, (Paris : Vrin, 2007) pp 92-93: « il s’agit donc d’un lieu antérieur à tout lieu concret et dont la seule fonction est d’accueillir les formes intelligibles, ou en tout cas leurs reflets. »

¹⁵⁸ *Enneads* I.8 (51) 10, 4-5.

¹⁵⁹ *Enneads* II.4.1.1-2.

¹⁶⁰ Aristotle, *Physics*, A. 9. 192a33 in Richard McKeon, ed., *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, (New York: The Modern Library, 2001) p 235. All citations of the physics come from this edition.

Timaeus,¹⁶¹ as matter. Plato in the *Timaeus* describes the receptacle as ‘formless.’ (amorphon-
ἀμορφον)

Wherefore it is right that the substance which is to receive within itself all the kinds should be void of all forms; just as with all fragrant ointments, men ... make the liquids which are to receive the odours as odourless as possible ... so likewise it is right that the substance which is to be fitted to receive frequently over its whole extent the copies of all things intelligible and eternal should itself, of its own nature, be void of all the forms. ... if we describe her as a Kind Invisible and unshaped, all-receptive, and in some most perplexing and most baffling way partaking of the intelligible, we shall describe her truly.¹⁶²

Plotinus in close affinity to Aristotle goes on to call matter ‘undefined, and shapeless.’¹⁶³ Matter for Aristotle is a mere potentiality, ever accepting the shape imposed upon it by form and can never exist alone without the form. It is that ‘out of’ which a thing comes to be. But for Plato as in the above quoted passage of the *Timaeus*, matter represents more a ‘medium’ than a ‘substratum’ and should rather be seen as that ‘in which’ copies of the forms are represented. Plotinus agrees that matter is without quality of any sort except that brought to it by form. “So when the form comes to the matter it brings everything with it; the form has everything, the size and all that goes with and is caused by the formative principle.”¹⁶⁴ The fact that form gives it shape, does not nullify the fact that matter remains impassive. In a passage that is clearly significant,¹⁶⁵ Plotinus notes that even when hot and cold are present in matter as in a receptacle, it undergoes no change of temperature. By the use of metaphors, matter in Plotinus, is likened to a mirror that bounces off images that pass through it without retaining any. It is a mere decorated corpse whose shape is only an image.¹⁶⁶ For the case of clarity, in the very first chapter of the Second book, Plotinus acknowledges two kinds of matter: intelligible matter and the sensible matter. He announces immediately that “the matter, too, of the things that came into being is

¹⁶¹ Plato, *Timaeus* 50D-E7, translated by R. G. Bury, Loeb Classical Library, vol. VII, (London, 1929).

¹⁶² *Timaeus* 50E-51B.

¹⁶³ *Enneads* II.4.2.1-5.

¹⁶⁴ *Enneads* II.4.8.20-25.

¹⁶⁵ *Enneads* III.6.9.20-25: “For the things in matter are images too, and matter is still less liable to affections than are mirrors. For certainly heats and coldness occur in it, but they do not heat it.”

¹⁶⁶ *Enneads* II.4.5: “The divine matter when it receives that which defines it has a defined and intelligent life, but matter of this world becomes something defined, but not alive or thinking, a decorated corpse. Shape here is only an image; so that which underlies it is also only an image.”

always receiving different forms, but the matter of eternal things is always the same and always has the same form. With matter here, it is pretty well exactly the other way round; for here it is all things in turn and only one thing at each particular time; so nothing lasts because one thing pushes out another; so it is not the same forever.”¹⁶⁷ Matter here (sensible matter) has no identity, no quality and no form. It is purely indeterminate and unintelligible. In his different expositions of these two, we perceive the Platonic-Aristotelian influence under which Plotinus labored throughout his philosophical career. This ambivalence would also characterize Maimonides’s treatment of matter. The continuous oscillation in Plotinus from the intelligible to the sensible or corporeal matter may be viewed as a sign of increasing indeterminism for matter, which would leave its status in the physical realm on the borderline of non-existence.¹⁶⁸

In the fifth chapter of the second *Enneads* (on what exists potentially and what actually), Plotinus tries to free himself from the strings of Aristotle to present a clearer view of what he thinks matter to be. Even in the intelligible realm, the matter there is described squarely by Plotinus as form, “Since the soul too, which is form, can be matter to something else.”¹⁶⁹ The soul is matter in the sense that it is inferior to its originating principle that is (the something else) the Intellect, in the Plotinian hierarchical structure. As expressed by W.R. Inge:

Matter is Matter only in relation to that which is next above it and which gives it form, meaning and definite existence. Thus, the same thing may be form (*eidos*) in relation to what is below it, and Matter in relation to what is above it. A thing is Matter insofar as it is acted upon by a higher principle. It is a purely relative term: every stage in the hierarchy of being, except the highest, is *hylē* (matter), every stage except the lowest is *eidos*. Every *eidos* makes its own *hylē*. But *hylē* is generally the name for the lowest rung in the ladder.¹⁷⁰

This perhaps, is an attempt by Plotinus to move away from the attribution of qualities to matter. Matter remains a mere abstraction. Plotinus’s description of matter is closer to Platonic *hylē*, which in itself is formless and measureless, to which the eternal ideas give form. Apart from this

¹⁶⁷ *Enneads* II.4.3.10-15.

¹⁶⁸ Ivry, Alfred, “Neoplatonic Currents in the Philosophy of Maimonides,” in *Perspectives on Maimonides* edited by Joel Kraemer, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991) p 120.

¹⁶⁹ *Enneads* II.5.3.15-20.

¹⁷⁰ Inge, W. R, *The Philosophy of Plotinus*, Vol. 1, (London: Longman’s Green and Co, 1941) p 131.

giving of forms by the Ideas, matter lingers on the borderline of non-being. It is absolute indefiniteness, pure potentiality that never is nor actually becomes anything at all since its being is merely an announcement of what it is going to be.¹⁷¹ In the final effort to explain the shadowy-unreal nature of matter, Plotinus states:

It is only left for it to be potentially a sort of weak and dim phantasm unable to receive a shape. So it is actually a phantasm: so it is actually a falsity ... that then which has its truth in non-existence is very far from being actually any reality. If, then, it must exist, it must actually not exist, so that, having gone out of true being, it may have its being in non-being; for when you are dealing with things which are falsity, if you take away their falsity, you have taken away what substance they have.¹⁷²

If matter has got a nature, Plotinus tells us it is not to be found in the realm of being. It is simply non-being, a mere phantasm and a falsity. Any attempt to invest it with reality, is to destroy its nature. So, the best that could be said of matter is that it is non-being; it only exists outside of being. When Plotinus describes matter as having a slippery hold on being, it is not just 'non-being' in the absolute sense of not existing at all. How can something be non-being and yet share a kind of relative existence? A proper explanation is worthwhile since it plays a major part in Plotinus's conception of matter as evil. Plotinus appeals to the work on negation done by Plato in the *Parmenides*, and in the *Sophist*, in order to resolve this paradox.¹⁷³ 'It is the distinction between non-being in the absolute sense of sheer nothingness and in the relative sense of not yet realized potentiality to be some specific thing.'¹⁷⁴ In one of his very last works probably composed in his later years, Plotinus puts it clearly what he means by non-being:

Non-being here does not mean absolute non-being but only something other than being; not non-being in the same way as the movement and rest which affect being, but like an image of being or something still more non-existent. The whole world of sense is non-existent in this way, and also all sense-experience and whatever is posterior or incidental

¹⁷¹ *Enneads* II.4.6-16; II.5.5.

¹⁷² *Enneads* II.5.5.20-30.

¹⁷³ See *Parmenides*, 160c-162a; and *Sophist*, 237a-254e, 255a-259d.

¹⁷⁴ Hick, John, *Evil and the God of Love*, (New York: Palgrave, 1985) p 42.

to this, or its principle, or one of the elements which go to make up the whole which is of this non-existent kind.¹⁷⁵

To press home the ‘non-beingness’ (*mê on*) of matter, Plotinus makes use of the analogy of a mirror not in the sense that matter is visible like a mirror, but in the sense of being a ‘receptacle’ into which images come and go. More still, he compares matter to the appearance in a mirror that exists in one place but is reflected in another; whose being is only apparent and “a sort of fleeting frivolity” (*paignion pheugon*) and mere phantoms (*eidola*).¹⁷⁶

This type of strange existence requires a strange type of reasoning in order to be apprehended. In faithfulness to Plato, Plotinus refers to the *Timaeus*¹⁷⁷ where Plato talks of “bastard reasoning by the aid of non-sensation,” as the only way of apprehending matter.¹⁷⁸ It is a process of reasoning that does not originate from the mind, a kind of thoughtlessness. To see matter, we must make use of “another intellect which is not intellect,” devoid of every form and being. In other words, matter is not perceptible to the senses and neither is the soul capable of seeing in matter any intelligible principle. According to the interpretation of Collette-Dučić :

Si le raisonnement par lequel l’âme tente d’appréhender la matière peut être dit « bâtard, » c’est parce que l’âme est incapable de « définir ce qui reste, » c’est-à-dire de relier la matière avec un principe intelligible. A vrai dire, il s’agit moins d’une capacité

¹⁷⁵ *Enneads* I.8.3.5-15. According to a more detailed interpretation of ‘non-being’ as used by Plato given by Denis O’Brien: “This part of the stranger’s argument concludes with two definitions of “non-being.” Both definitions turn on the existence of a form of otherness. Non-being is first defined as an opposition between the form of being and that part of the form of otherness that is opposed to being (258a11-b4). A second definition identifies non-being as “that part of the form of otherness which is opposed to the being of each thing” (258d7-e3). The difference between the two definitions lies in the difference between “being” as form and as particular: the form or “nature” of being which is one of the two opposed terms in the first definition is replaced by “the being of each thing” in the second definition. Plotinus takes the second of Plato’s two definitions (258d7-e3) as a definition of matter.” Cf. “Plotinus on matter and evil,” pp 172-173.

¹⁷⁶ *Enneads* III.6.7.20-30: “hence the things which seem to come to be in it are frivolities, nothing but phantoms in a phantom, like something in a mirror which really exists in one place but is reflected in another; it seems to be filled, and holds nothing; it is all seeming.”

¹⁷⁷ *Timaeus* 52B.

¹⁷⁸ *Enneads* II.4.12.30-35: “It is apprehended by a process of reasoning, which does not come from mind but works empty; so it is spurious reasoning, as has been said.”

que d'une impossibilité : si l'âme ne peut relier la matière à l'intelligible, c'est parce qu'il n'existe aucun intelligible à cette matière.¹⁷⁹

The intellect must divest itself of its own light, and go outside of itself to experience “something contrary to itself.”¹⁸⁰ It must become ‘empty’ of intellect in order to apprehend the non-being that is matter.

1.3 Matter and Privation

Plotinus draws on the richness of Aristotle's expositions to establish his own doctrine. Above, we have seen that Plotinus describes matter as mere ‘corpse adorned’ since it exists in perpetual potentiality. Even when it receives form, there is no real union and there is no real transformation of matter into a substantial being as Aristotle would lead us to think. All this Plotinus maintains because, as we are going to see later, sensible matter is pure evil. Plotinus reinforces this teaching by identifying matter with privation (*sterêsis-στέρησις*). How does he do it? Let us go back to Aristotle's distinction between matter and privation, the distinction necessitated by the false discussion or the misunderstanding of his predecessors, notably of Parmenides and of Plato.

They have held that nothing ‘may come to be from what is not.’ Aristotle by way of correction notes that, a thing ‘may come to be from what is not’—in a qualified sense.¹⁸¹ The beginning point of every coming to be is from what is not which is privation. Parmenides and Plato recognized only the substrate and the form but failed to recognize the nature of privation. Privation has the nature of non-being, and is the beginning point of every coming to be.

Aristotle calls privation a lack of a perfection that a subject should ordinarily possess. With the acquisition of this perfection, the lack normally disappears since it has been supplied by the form. Plotinus accepts privation to be a lack but disagrees with Aristotle that this lack ceases to be once the perfection (form) is realized. For Plotinus, this lack continues to exist in the substrate—the matter. He arrives at this conclusion by capitalizing on an example that Aristotle

¹⁷⁹ Collette-Dučić, Bernard, *Plotin et l'ordonnement de l'être*, p 99.

¹⁸⁰ *Enneads* I.8.9.20-25: “so intellect, leaving its own light in itself and as it were going outside itself and coming to what is not its own, by not bringing its own light with it experiences something contrary to itself, that it may see its own contrary.”

¹⁸¹ Aristotle, *Physics* I, 8, 191b10-25; 1, 9, 192a1-15.

himself gave to illustrate the three principles of change or coming to be: privation, matter and form. Form is that which is ‘divine, good, and desirable.’ Matter is the substrate that is always in potentiality to becoming because it contains within itself, the privation which ceases to be at the advent of form. Thus, ‘matter desires the form as the female desires the male and as the ugly desires the beautiful.’¹⁸² Normally, that which is in potency becomes actualized by the advent of form. Following the same logic, Aristotle’s example of the ‘female desires the male’ would mean that the female would become male. If matter loses its potentiality at the advent of form, the female loses its femininity at the advent of the male and would in fact, end up being male, which is not actually the case. This is seemingly, the logical loophole that Plotinus feeds upon to advance his thinking that matter is identical to privation.¹⁸³ Plotinus reasons that instead of becoming male, the female at the advent of the male, “becomes more female” (*mallon thêlunetai*).¹⁸⁴ Thus, contrary to Aristotle’s belief that privation is destroyed at the actualization of matter by the form, Plotinus holds that the privation remains ever present and is in fact, preserved by the form.¹⁸⁵ Like the nature of matter, privation is also impervious to form.

This is contrary to what Aristotle teaches. Once there is privation, there is no real change. The presence of ugliness means there is the absence of beauty. A thing cannot both be ugly and beautiful at the same time. But Plotinus’s discussion of matter seems to suggest exactly that. In the Platonic tradition, the sensible world is only but an image of the real world such that the beauty of this world according to Plotinus is a mere phantasm. In the sensible world, matter remains undefined, shapeless and impassive even in the presence of form. It is likened to a mere mirror that bounces off images that pass through it without retaining any. In the ultimate metaphorical description of matter, Plotinus calls it ‘a mere decorated corpse whose shape is only an image.’¹⁸⁶ It is pure potentiality that never is nor actually becomes anything at all. Matter

¹⁸² Aristotle, *Physics* 1, 9, 192a15-25.

¹⁸³ *Enneads* II.4.14 and 16.

¹⁸⁴ *Enneads* II.4.16.10-18: “for it brings what it naturally is to actuality and perfection, like the unsown field when it is sown, and as when the female conceives by the male, and does not lose its femaleness but becomes still more female: and that is, becomes more what it is.”

¹⁸⁵ *Enneads* II.4.16.10-12: “If it was quantitatively unlimited, limit would do away with it; but as it is, it does not do so; on the other hand, it keeps it in being.”

¹⁸⁶ *Enneads* II.4.5.10-23: “The divine matter when it receives that which defines it has a defined and intelligent life, but the matter of this world becomes something defined, but not alive or thinking, a decorated corpse. Shape here is only an image; so that which underlies it is also only an image. But there the shape is true shape, and what underlies it true too. So those who say that matter is substance must be considered to be speaking correctly if they are speaking of matter in the intelligible world.”

and form are never really united in the sensible world as they are in the intelligible world. The matter-form composite in the sensible world is only an appearance, a sort of fleeting frivolity; nothing but phantoms in a phantom.¹⁸⁷ The logical conclusion of this is that matter remains forever identified to privation, and what is ugly, remains forever ugly even though it may have the appearance of beauty due to the presence of form. Plotinus's identification of matter with privation, reinforces his discussion of matter as evil even when matter, seems to be covered by the appearance of good.

1.4 Matter as Evil:

In Plotinus's metaphysical system, the principles of ontology and ethics are indivisibly synthesized because according to John M. Rist, "these two scales are different ways of looking at the same metaphysical facts."¹⁸⁸ By thinking matter to be evil, Plotinus seems to introduce an ontological principle of evil into the material universe. There are two potential dangers present in the reading of Plotinus on this issue. It is accepted that Plotinus makes the matter difficult by his not so clear position. Where matter is seen as an independent principle of evil, it would be in opposition to the One as the ultimate principle of reality. On the contrary, where matter is dependent on the One, Plotinus would provide a perennial problem for subsequent philosophers as it is a problem that tries to make the First principle, the One, responsible for evil in the world. Maimonides and Thomas Aquinas would be in the fore front of those who tackle this problem in the bid to preserve the perfection of God and exonerate Him from being the ultimate source of evil.

Our inquiry will mostly be centered on the eighth tractate of the first *Ennead* (I.8), number 51 according to the chronological order given by Porphyry. This treatise is written most probably toward the last years of Plotinus's life when according to Porphyry, "his power was already failing."¹⁸⁹ Contrary to Porphyry, Corrigan thinks the treatise contains the "mature statement and full development of Plotinus' thinking about matter-evil."¹⁹⁰ Plotinus begins this by asking what

¹⁸⁷ *Enneads* III.6.7.20-30.

¹⁸⁸ Rist, John M, "Plotinus on Matter and Evil," in *Phronesis* VI, (1961), p 160.

¹⁸⁹ Porphyry, "On the Life of Plotinus," 6.26-36 in Plotinus, *Enneads* I, translated by A. H. Armstrong, (London: Heinemann, 1966-1988).

¹⁹⁰ Corrigan, K., *Plotinus' Theory of Matter-Evil and the Question of Substance*, p 250.

evil is and what its nature is. What is the source of evil? Does it really exist? For something to exist, it must be good and be endowed with form. Good for Plotinus is sufficient to itself, lacking nothing; it is the measure and bound of all things.¹⁹¹ Evil, being the opposite of Good, is marked by its lack of measure and form. Plotinus then arrives at some definition of evil as:

A kind of unmeasuredness in relation to measure, and unboundedness in relation to limit, and formlessness in relation to formative principle, and perpetual neediness in relation to what is self-sufficient; always undefined, nowhere stable, subject to every sort of influence, insatiate, complete poverty: and all this is not accidental to it but in a sort of way its essence.¹⁹²

Whatever lacks form is non-being. “But how could anyone imagine that evil is a Form when it appears in the absence of every sort of good?”¹⁹³ This negative statement is an early indication of where to look for evil, in the absence of good, in the absence of being.

So it remains that if evil exists, it must be among non-existent things, as a sort of form of non-existence, and pertains to one of the things that are mingled with non-being or somehow share in non-being.¹⁹⁴

In our earlier examination of the nature of matter, it is very clear that matter is to be found in the class of non-beings. If evil is to ‘exist,’ it must share in this class of non-existent things where matter belongs. We have already seen that ‘non-being’ in this sense does not mean absolute nothingness. It means rather non-being in the sense that it is the opposite of self-sufficiency, measure, form, perfection. To describe evil as ‘in the class of non-existent things,’ is to underline how low it is in the hierarchy of emanations. Plotinus notes that at the top of that hierarchy, the Good exists and there must be the last end to the process of “going down or going away” from it. This last point below which nothing else can come into being is evil and ‘this is matter, which possesses nothing at all of the Good.’¹⁹⁵ This reading safeguards Plotinus’s monism and makes

¹⁹¹ *Enneads* I.8.2.1-10: “It is that on which everything depends and ‘to which all beings aspire’; they have it as their principle and need it: but it is without need, sufficient to itself, lacking nothing, the measure and bound of all things, giving from itself intellect and real being and soul and life and intellectual activity.”

¹⁹² *Enneads* I.8.3.15-20.

¹⁹³ *Enneads* I.8.1.10-13.

¹⁹⁴ *Enneads* I.8.3.2-8.

¹⁹⁵ *Enneads* I.8.7.20-23: “Now it is necessary that what comes after the First should exist, and therefore that the Last should exist; and this is matter, which possessed nothing at all of the Good.”

the One directly responsible for the deficient derivation of matter which is evil. Plotinus relates matter to evil in the sense that they both are identical; they are both at the lowest remove from being, “one in the scale of existence, the other in the scale of value.”¹⁹⁶

Plotinus distinguishes between absolute evil and secondary evil. “Just as there is absolute good and good as a quality, so there must be absolute evil and the evil derived from it which inheres in something else.”¹⁹⁷ Matter by the virtue of its formlessness, its lack of perfection, its lack of being, its deficiency, is the absolute or ‘primary’ evil, or evil *per se*. Certain things which come to share in evil by their association with matter are called ‘secondary evils.’ They are not evil in themselves as matter is. Examples of such secondary evils include bodies, which are constituted in matter, and souls, which become evil by association with lack of measure.¹⁹⁸ Illness is excess of matter without order and measure; ugliness is matter not measured by form and poverty is lack because of matter whose very nature is to be need.¹⁹⁹ It is by the presence of matter that they are evils in the secondary sense.

So then, let unmeasured be the primary evil, and that which is in a state of unmeasuredness by likeness or participation evil in a secondary sense, because its unmeasuredness is accidental. Primary evil is the darkness, secondary evil the darkened, in the same way. Vice, which is ignorance and unmeasuredness in the soul, is evil secondarily, not absolute evil: just as virtue is not primary good, but that which is made like to or participates in it.²⁰⁰

Plotinus introduces a twist in his teaching on matter as evil, when he seems to raise absolute evil to a level of independent principle. In a very strong formula, perhaps unique in the *Enneads*, Plotinus declares that there are two principles “one of evils, the other of goods” and that these principles are both opposed to each other. Is Plotinus committed to moral dualism in his conception of the physical reality especially where both evil and good are to be attributed to different principles? Is he committed to ontological dualism of two different realities—intelligible and sensible world or God and nature—where one is more real and gives meaning to

¹⁹⁶ Rist, John M., “Plotinus on Matter and Evil,” in *Phronesis* VI, (1961), p 160.

¹⁹⁷ *Enneads* I.8.3.23-25.

¹⁹⁸ *Enneads* I.8.4.1-10: “The nature of bodies, in so far as it participates in matter, will be an evil, not the primal evil... the soul is not in itself evil, nor is it all evil.”

¹⁹⁹ *Enneads* I.8.5.20-25.

²⁰⁰ *Enneads* I.8.8.40-45.

the other? What follows constitutes the alleged moral and even ontological dualism of Plotinus, about which scholars of Plotinus are divided.

Non-substance is contrary to substance, and that which is the nature and principle of evil to the nature of good: for both are principles, one of evils, the other of goods; and all the things which are included in each nature are contrary to those in the other; so that the wholes are contrary, and more contrary to each other than are the other contraries.²⁰¹

There seems to be in the cited passage of the *Enneads*, a neat dualist conception of the world. Plotinus calls them two principles, separate and opposed to each other, one responsible for all that is good while the other is responsible for the evil in the world. Jean-Marc Narbonne, among other commentators, believes in this dualism of Plotinus for he reads Plotinus as giving a distinct reality to matter. It is curious that Narbonne made no distinction here between ontological and moral dualism. However, his reading of the text suggests an ontological dualism in Plotinus. In his book, *La métaphysique de Plotin*, he gives as his concluding opinion:

Par le mal, la matière acquiert enfin dans les *Ennéades* le statut d'Autre, c'est-à-dire de réalité distincte de l'intelligible auquel jusque-là tout restait soumis.²⁰²

But should this text be read as implying dualism in the thought of Plotinus? What exactly does Plotinus want us to understand? A. H. Armstrong in the introductory note to his translation describes the whole of the chapter 6 of the treatise from where the passage is taken as a “commentary on a text taken from the *Theaetetus*, with refutation of objections drawn from Aristotle’s logic.”²⁰³ Denis O’Brien and Kevin Corrigan agree that this passage is Plotinus’s attempt at showing against Aristotle, that there can be a contrary to substance.²⁰⁴ According to the clarification given by Corrigan, Plotinus is only arguing that substance in the widest sense of form has its contrary in matter (non-being) so that if substance is identified with goodness, matter as the contrary of substance, is identified with evil. “Consequently, good and evil as rooted in form-measure and matter-unlimitedness respectively are opposed as two unmediated

²⁰¹ *Enneads* I.8.6.33-38.

²⁰² Narbonne, Jean-Marc, *La métaphysique de Plotin*, (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1994) p 133.

²⁰³ *Enneads* I.8, introductory note by A. H. Armstrong, p 277.

²⁰⁴ Cf. Denis O’Brien, “Plotinus on Matter and Evil,” in Lloyd P. Gerson, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Plotinus*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) pp.175-177; Kevin Corrigan, *Plotinus’ Theory of Matter-Evil and the Question of Substance*, p 251.

fields of reference...”²⁰⁵ O’Brien²⁰⁶ brings more precision by noting that Plotinus makes an improvement on Aristotle’s definition of contraries given in the *Categories* as “things which stand furthest apart within the same genus” (Cat. 6.6a17-18). Example can be sickness and health. They are contraries that exist within the same genus. In Plotinus’s reading, contrariety can also designate things which stand “furthest apart” and which are not in the same genus.

So things which are altogether separate, and have nothing in common, and are as far apart as they can be, are contrary in their very nature: for their contrariety does not depend on quality or any other category of being, but on their furthest possible separation from each other, and on their being made up of opposites and on their contrary action.²⁰⁷

This is the real sense in which the nature and principle of evil is opposed to the nature and principle of good as non-substance to substance. That matter and form are totally opposed to each other does not justify matter as an independent principle given, as we have seen, that matter is generated by soul. And thus, it cannot be an independent principle existing outside of form. The existence of two independent principles of reality would be contradictory to the most consistent statement of Plotinus in the *Enneads*, the derivation of all things from the One.²⁰⁸ This derivation from the One does not exclude diversity in things produced. In this later sense then, it could also be argued that the plotinian system is not even strictly monist. In the words of Jean Trouillard:

L’esprit du plotinisme le maintient éloigné d’un monisme substantialiste compact, et l’écarte en même temps de tout dualisme ontologique.²⁰⁹

By way of summary then, we note that regardless of the ambiguities in the interpretation and reading of the *Enneads*, Plotinus consistently maintained that matter is generated from the soul and as such, it cannot be a separate principle of existence opposed to the One. By the use of ambiguities and the use of metaphors, we could say that Plotinus was a forerunner of Maimonides who, in his *Dux Neutrorum*, proves very adept in the use of metaphors and contradictions in addressing different layers of his audience at the same time. The nature of

²⁰⁵ Corrigan, K., *Plotinus’ Theory of Matter-Evil and the Question of Substance*, p 251.

²⁰⁶ O’Brien, D., “Plotinus on Matter and Evil,” p 175.

²⁰⁷ *Enneads* I.8.6.49-54.

²⁰⁸ *Enneads* VI.6.18.31-43.

²⁰⁹ Trouillard, Jean, *La procession plotinienne*, (Paris : PUF, 1955) p 1.

matter is revealed to be non-being, formless, measureless and as such equated to absolute evil. By consequence, God who as the One is responsible for the diffusion of reality to its minutest detail is faulted as being ultimately responsible for evil. At least, that is what the system of Plotinus seems to suggest. What remains is the rational confrontation of Plotinus's matter-evil against the systems of Maimonides and Thomas Aquinas.

2.0 Maimonides on Matter, Privation and Evil

The discussion that follows is to be located among what Maimonides describes as the 'Account of the Beginning which ought not to be taught in the presence of two men.'²¹⁰ It is basically what, under Aristotle, is called the natural science that deals with examining the first principles of existents subject to generation and corruption. Following Aristotle, Maimonides mentions matter, form and particularized privation, i.e. privation conjoined with matter, as the principles of natural change. In his treatment of these subjects in the *Dux Neutrorum*, there is a steady flow of evidence to suggest that Maimonides moves from Aristotelian to Neo-Platonic accounts.²¹¹ Where he is not being explicit about giving a Neoplatonic account of matter, he is left heavily influenced by the currents of Neo-Platonism.²¹² This may be explained partly by the fact that Maimonides's loyalty to Aristotle is limited. By this we mean that Maimonides regards all that Aristotle teaches about the sublunar realm as almost 'infallible.' When it comes to the realities above the sphere of the moon, Aristotle's teaching is considered as mere guess work.

Everything that Aristotle has said about all that exists beneath the sphere of the moon to the center of the earth is indubitably correct, and no one will deviate from it... On the other hand, everything Aristotle expounds with regard to the sphere of the moon and that

²¹⁰ *Dux Neutrorum*, lib.I, cap.XVII, fol.8: "Non propalandum opus de beresit in duobus:" Cf *Guide* I, 17, p 42.

²¹¹ This is a reading that forms the central axis of Idit Dobbs-Weinstein's work in her: *Maimonides and St. Thomas on the Limits of Reason*, (Albany: State University of New York, 1995) p 91. It is most likely however that what we call "Aristotelian and Neo-Platonic accounts" are the streams of thought common with the Peripatetic tradition, which we know had a great influence on Maimonides.

²¹² Cf. Alfred Ivry, "Neoplatonic Currents in Maimonides' Thought," in *Perspectives on Maimonides*, edited by Joel L. Kraemer, (Oxford: (The Littman Library) Oxford University Press, 1991), pp 115-140; Kenneth Seeskin, "Maimonides and Neo-Platonism," in *The Perennial Tradition of Neo-Platonism*, edited by John J. Cleary, (Leuven: University Press, 1997), pp 458-468.

which is above it is, except for certain things, something analogous to guessing and conjecturing.²¹³

Maimonides tends to align more with Neo-Platonism when it concerns God, the heavens and the origins. Neo-Platonism would invoke the doctrine of emanation, which by a chain of intermediary forces, would give rise to matter. If intelligences could give rise to other intelligences, that would be acceptable to Maimonides. But the fact that intelligences come to produce something composed of matter and form, by way of emanation, is not totally acceptable to Maimonides. He, together with Aristotle, accepts the principle of all those who have ever philosophized that “it is impossible that anything but a single simple thing should proceed from a simple thing.”²¹⁴ Perhaps, that difficulty explains why Maimonides seems to embrace the free and spontaneous will of a creating agent, as the best explanation for the origin of matter. What would tend to doubt his embrace of “free and spontaneous will of a creating agent,” or suggest a different interpretation, is Maimonides’s conviction based on philosophical grounds that God’s essence is unchangeable and does not admit of affirmative attributes like knowledge, will, life etc.²¹⁵

Maimonides’s movement from one theory to another could explain why it is said that he “is committed to a two-world ontology in which it is very difficult to take principles that apply to one realm and extrapolate to the next.”²¹⁶ Could it then be said that Maimonides moves between these ontologies as it suits his purpose? It will also become evident that Maimonides adopts the Neoplatonic view according to which reality is divided into two: higher and lower spheres that operate differently. The ideal and the real world of Plato are only but an example. Plotinus’s attempt to solve the problem of the One and the many, and bridge the gap between the higher

²¹³*Dux Neutorum*, lib.II, cap.XXIII, fol.54: “Quicquid dixit Aristoteles in omnibus entibus quae sunt a sphaera Lunae usque ad centrum terrae: verum est sine dubio, nec repellit illud, nec deviat ab eo: nisi qui non intelligit: vel qui consecutus est aliquas opiniones quas vult defendere: vel illae opiniones trahunt eum, ut neget ea quae apparent. Quicquid vero locutus est Aristoteles de his quae sunt a sphaera Lunae superius, est verisimile propter quaedam et praesertim quae dixit in ordine intelligentiarum separatarum et in parte rerum spualium secundum quod ipse credit: et sunt in eis deceptiones multae.” Cf *Guide* II, 22, p 319f.

²¹⁴*Ibid*: “Quod ex simplici non potest provenire nisi unum simplex. » Cf *Guide* II, 22, p 317. Cf. Arthur Hyman, “From What is One and Simple Only What is One and Simple Can Come to Be,” in Goodman, Lenn E, ed., *Neoplatonism and Jewish Thought*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992) pp 111-135.

²¹⁵*Dux Neutorum*, lib.I, cap.LII, fol.19: “Inducam autem similitudinem et exemplum in virtute rationali quae invenitur in homine: et est una potentia, nec est in ea multitudo.” Cf *Guide* I, 53, p 121. In our latter chapters, we shall treat Maimonides’s theory of divine attributes.

²¹⁶ Seeskin, Kenneth, «Maimonides and Neo-Platonism, » in Cleary, John J, ed., *The Perennial Tradition of Neo-Platonism*, (Leuven: University Press, 1997), pp 459-460.

and the lower sphere, may have led him to the adoption of the theory of emanation, which in the final analysis, leaves more to be desired. Maimonides makes apparently inconsistent use of the model of emanation and seems to suggest that it is useful in certain circumstances and to be rejected in others. As a tool for bridging the gap between the incorporeal and the corporeal level, Maimonides's use of emanation may not have greatly succeeded. In fact, he seems to have widened it more by his subsequent teachings on divine attributes and on how not to talk about the unknowable God. But the Neoplatonic view of higher and lower realities acting differently remains very evident. This difference in operation between the two realms will become very clear when Maimonides talks about two kinds of matter, and labels the inferior, sublunar matter as the source of evil. Maimonides's interpretation will also highlight the positive aspect of matter as it plays a major part in generation and constitution of being. Beyond the material aspect, Maimonides would show the importance of pursuing the intelligibles as they are what assure man protection from evil.

2.1 The Origin of Matter

Maimonides's examination of the origin of matter falls within his discussion of the origin of the world. The basic assumption in that discussion of the origin of the world is the certainty of an existent deity.²¹⁷ The point of contention in that discussion is how that existent deity has brought about the world. Philosophers base their contentions on the scientific fact that nothing comes into existence out of nothing. Thus, the problem of whether matter can be generated from absolute non-existence would form the central philosophical issue around which opinions would be divided. The positions to be considered have both metaphysical and theological implications on the nature of God and His relation with the world. Maimonides mentions an opinion according to which the world has come to be by chance, that is, by mechanical principles without any reference to a deity. This opinion he credits to Epicurus and his followers, and rejects it on the philosophical ground that the existence of God can and has been proved demonstratively, and

²¹⁷*Dux Neutorum*, lib.II, cap.XIII, fol.46: "Opiniones hominum de antiquitate vel novitate mundi apud omnes qui credunt quod deus est, sunt tres. » Cf *Guide* II, 13, p 281.

more importantly, that the system of Epicurus is not philosophically sound.²¹⁸ It is a system that would promote anarchy since it recognizes no fixed natural order under an intelligible structure. Among the three philosophical positions divided by the pre-existence or not of matter, is first what Maimonides calls the opinion of the Law “which is the opinion of all who believe in the *Law of Moses our Master*.” According to the Law, the world as a whole “was brought into existence by God after having been purely and absolutely nonexistent.”²¹⁹ It is interesting to note that Maimonides explains this to mean that God brought the world into existence by an act of ‘His will’ and ‘His volition.’ Matter did not pre-exist but was brought into existence by God. That is, God brought into existence “out of nothing all the beings as they are, time itself being one of the created things.”²²⁰ As against the opinion of Wolfson, Harvey has underlined the need to distinguish this theory—the *opinion of the Law of Moses our Master*—from creation *ex nihilo*. Whereas the latter could be interpreted to signify the “continuous creation out of nonexistence or the eternal information of matter” and thus compatible with the eternity of time, the former, “which is the opinion of all who believe in the *Law of Moses our Master*,” states that before creation, there was complete nonexistence. As clearly stated, time was nonexistent. This renders the opinion of the *Law of Moses*, incompatible with the eternity of time.²²¹ Maimonides later calls this opinion “a basis” of the Law, second only to the belief in the unity of God. Briefly then, this opinion contains four distinct propositions: that God brought the world into existence after absolute nonexistence; that He brought everything into existence through His will and volition; that He did so not from anything whatsoever; and that time is one of the things He created.²²² The second opinion belongs to a certain sect among which is found Plato. He is the hub around

²¹⁸Ibid. fol.47: “Qui vero ignorat creatorem esse, sed putat quia res generantur et corrumpuntur per viam congregationis et segregationis casu : et quod non ordo nec rector in esse, ipse est Epicurus et sequaces ipsius...Et non habemus probationem in rememoratione contradictionum suarum : quoniam iam probatum est creatorem esse. Inutile autem est narrare sententias hominum qui fundaverunt opiniones suas super radicem, cuius destructio demonstratur. » *Guide II*, 13, p 285.

²¹⁹Ibid. fol.46: “omnia entia praeter creatorem fecit ipse esse post privationem veram et absolutam.” Cf *Guide II*, 13, p 281.

²²⁰Ibid. “postea vero fecit esse omnia entia secundum quod sunt cum voluntate sua et non de aliquo. » Cf *Guide II*, 13, p 281. ‘Out of nothing’ could be the equivalent of saying ‘from nothing.’

²²¹ Cf W. Z. Harvey, “A Third Approach to Maimonides’ Cosmogony-Prophetology Puzzle,” *Harvard Theological Review* 74, (1981) p 289, note 9 For an extensive discussion of the doctrine of “*ex nihilo*”, see H. A. Wolfson, “The Meaning of *Ex Nihilo* in the Church Fathers, Arabic and Hebrew Philosophy, and St. Thomas,” in Twersky, I and Williams, G, eds., *Studies in the History of Philosophy and Religion*, vol 1, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1973) pp 207-221.

²²² For a separate discussion of these propositions, see Arthur Hyman, «Maimonides on Creation and Emanation, » in *Studies in Medieval Philosophy*, ed. By J.F Wippel (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1987) pp 48-50.

which this opinion revolves and that is why this opinion goes by his name. This opinion holds on to the eternity of both the deity and matter even though the matter owes its existence to the deity.

Hence they believe that there exists a certain matter that is eternal as the deity is eternal... They do not believe that it has the same rank in what exists as He, may He be exalted, but that He is the cause of its existence; and that it has the same relation toward Him as, for instance, clay has toward a potter or iron toward a smith; and that He creates in it whatever He wishes.²²³

God is the creator of the world through an eternal matter that owes its existence to God. The opinion of the Law and that of Plato agree in the fact that it is by His will and His volition that God brought about the world. The minor difference is in the fact that according to Plato, creation takes place out of a preexistent matter. The Aristotelian (third) opinion is credited with saying that matter cannot be created from absolute nonexistence and that the heaven is not subject to generation and passing-away; “that time and motion are perpetual and everlasting and not subject to generation and passing-away.”²²⁴ The world is eternal since God’s will which is His essence is eternal. In other words, the world exists by virtue of necessity and will always exist. Nothing can be changed nor modified in the world as it is.²²⁵ If God creates by what we normally understand as will and volition, Aristotle argues that this introduces change in God since it would imply that God wishes at one time and does not at another time.²²⁶ Maimonides’s reply is to examine the true essence of the will and to differentiate will in a material substance from an immaterial substance that is God.

For the true reality and the quiddity of will means: to will and not to will. If the will in question belongs to a material being, so that some external end is sought thereby, then the will is subject to change because of impediments and supervening accidents. But as for a

²²³*Dux Neutorum*, lib.II, cap.XIII, fol.47: “Omnes autem isti credunt quod materia est antiqua, sicut et creator: nec ipse est sine ea, nec ipsa sine eo: neque credunt quod est sicut gradus eius in sua essentia: sed ipse est causa essentiae suae: et ipsa est ei per viam similitudinis: sicut argilla figulo: et ferrum fabro, de quo facit quod sibi placet: » Cf *Guide* II, 13, p 283.

²²⁴*Ibid.* “Et quod tempus et motus sunt sempiterni esse, nec sunt generabilia, nec corruptibilia. » Cf *Guide* II, 13, p 284.

²²⁵*Ibid.* lib.II, cap.XXVI, fol.55: “Quod eius natura non mutatur omnino : » Cf *Guide* II, 25, p 328.

²²⁶*Ibid.* lib.II, cap.XIII, fol.47: “Et sicut est impossibile quod deficiat esse ipsius, vel ut mutetur substantia eius: sic videtur ei impossibile quod mutetur in eo voluntas, vel renovetur in eo appetitus: ut sit universum esse sicut est modo et sicut fuit ante, et sicut erit post : » Cf *Guide* II, 13, p 284.

being separate from matter, its will, which does not exist in any respect for the sake of some other thing, is not subject to change. The fact that it may wish one thing now and another thing tomorrow does not constitute a change in its essence...²²⁷

God's will like His essence is unknown. Again His will is not activated at a particular instant just like a human will. The fact that will is attributed to Him must be understood equivocally according to Maimonides, since there is no likeness between God's will and human will. Thus, Aristotle's argument that the world is eternal since caused by an eternal God whose will does not change, is seemingly invalidated.²²⁸ At stake in the creation-eternity debate is the nature of God. The belief in the eternity of the world contains, according to Maimonides, "the destruction of the foundation of the Law and a presumptuous assertion with regard to the deity."²²⁹ How could a Creator-God be under the force of necessity? How could a being denied of the ability to will or not to will be considered a Creator-God? By accepting will and volition in God, Maimonides seemingly distances his God from an Aristotelian indifferent, thought-thinking-itself deity constrained by the law of necessity. Maimonides safeguards a God who though is transcendent, incorporeal, and unknowable, but yet is possessed of will and volition and hence capable of intervening in the universe as and how His wisdom decides best. This concept of God assures the belief in the Law and makes possible the miracles, and puts to definite rest all questions as to regard why things are as they are. The simple answer is that God in His wisdom wants them to

²²⁷Ibid.lib.II, cap.XIX, fol.50: "Quoniam veritas voluntatis et substantia eius est ut velit vel nolit. Si vero fuerit illa voluntas ad haerens materiae per quam volens quaerat aliquem finem qui est extra ipsum : erit tunc illa voluntas mutabilis secundum impedimenta vel renovationes. Voluntas autem separati quae non est propter aliud ullo modo, non est variabilis : et cuius velle modo aliquid, et cras velle aliud, non dicitur variatio in eius substantia. » Cf *Guide* II, 18, p 301.

²²⁸ Could Maimonides be hiding his affiliation to Aristotle's opinion just to please his Jewish public? The argument for the creation or eternity of the world has polarized scholars of the *Guide of the Perplexed*. This is explained by Maimonides's professed goal of trying to hide the 'secrets' of the *Guide* from the ignorant masses. Among modern scholars who think that Maimonides believed in the creation of the world by the divine will and out of nothing include: H. Davidson, *Moses Maimonides*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005) pp 365-373; A. Hyman, "Maimonides on Creation and Emanation" in J. F. Wippel, ed. *Studies in Medieval Philosophy* (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1987) pp 45-61; N. M. Samuelson, "Maimonides' Doctrine of Creation" in *The Harvard Theological Review*, 84, no. 3, (1991), pp 249-271; H. A. Wolfson, "The Platonic, Aristotelian and Stoic Theories of Creation in Hallevi and Maimonides" in I. Twersky and G.H. Williams, eds. *Studies in the History of Philosophy and Religion*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1973) pp.234-249. Those who think that Aristotle's opinion on the eternity of the world is the esoteric position of Maimonides include: W. Z. Harvey, "A Third Approach to Maimonides' Cosmogony-Prophetology Puzzle," *Harvard Theological Review* 74, 1981, pp. 287-301; Leonard S. Kravitz, *The Hidden Doctrine of Maimonides' Guide for the Perplexed*, (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1988) pp. 99-154; T.M. Rudavsky, *Time Matters* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000), pp 30-38.

²²⁹*Dux Neutrorum*, lib.II, cap.XXIII, fol.54: "Universaliter etenim opinio illa habet in se destructionem fundamenti legis nostrae: et commenta eorum quae non conveniunt Creatori. » Cf *Guide* II, 23, p 321.

be like that.²³⁰ But would this belief in the ‘opinion of the Law’ not be an exoteric reading of the Bible given that Maimonides never offered any demonstrative arguments in favor of it? Would all his insistence about “will and volition” in God not be a smoke screen hiding his real intentions, since Maimonides himself denied the predication of positive attributes of God? As we shall still find out as our research gets thick, the nature of God as simple requires that there can be in Him no separate attributes.²³¹ Why then single out the “will” as the determining factor in the debate? Without getting much involved in the debate on which of the three opinions Maimonides really adopted, it is worthwhile to note that Maimonides takes the idea of a creating God into account in his discussions of the origin of the world and the origin of matter.

In one of his exegetical analysis of biblical terms and figures, Maimonides gives a clear indication that prime matter derives from God and that it is the first created thing in the order of generation and corruption.

For what they apprehended was the true reality of prime matter, which derives from Him, may He be exalted, He being the cause of its existence... Accordingly their apprehension had as its object the first matter and the relation of the latter to God, inasmuch as it is the first among the things He has created that necessitates generation and corruption; God is its creator *ex nihilo*.²³²

This reading of Maimonides in this passage of the *Dux Neutorum* is quite different from the Neoplatonic reading that makes prime matter the last thing in the chain of emanation and thus ultimately linked, in that chain, to God. In that chain, matter which is considered evil is indirectly related to God. Logically, Neo-Platonism makes God ultimately responsible for all the evil in the world. This is a dilemma Maimonides tries to avoid. As a creature, prime matter is a metaphysical and ontological principle that plays a positive role in the natural process of generation and corruption. That is, it is “one of the permanent conditions for composition,

²³⁰Ibid. lib.II, cap.XXVI, fol.56: “Responsio vero super omnibus huiusmodi quaestionibus est, quia sic ipse Creator voluit : vel sic ordinavit eius sapientia, secundum quod mundus factus est voluntate in ista forma : » Cf *Guide* II, 25, p 329.

²³¹Ibid. lib.I, cap.LII, fol.19: “Et ipsa substantia creavit quicquid creatum est: et scit id quod scit non per rem aliquam additam ullo modo.” Cf *Guide* I, 53, pp 122-123.

²³²Ibid. lib.I, cap.XXVII, fol.10: “Et quod appraehenderunt seniores est veritas materiae primae quae est ex parte creatoris : quae est causa eius... Seniores appraehenderunt materiam unam: et assimilata est creatori: quia et principium creaturarum generabilium et corruptibilium: et fecit de nihilo. » Cf *Guide* I, 28, p 61.

potentiality, actuality, in fact for the existence of all composite entities.”²³³ Prime matter as a creature of God is subject to generation and corruption. By thus doing, it constitutes a principle that goes into the composition of being. Maimonides goes on to note that the principles of the existents subject to generation and corruption are three: matter, form and particularized privation.²³⁴ As principles, Maimonides following Aristotle understands them to be the inherent constituents of being.²³⁵ Matter is always concomitant with privation (lack) which expresses its readiness to receive form. It is this fellowship with privation that makes matter entail death and evils. Maimonides’s attempt to exonerate God of responsibility for evil in creation falls short because he makes matter the source of all that is evil. Logically, he is still saying the same thing with the Neo-Platonism of Plotinus. The failure to account for human will and human intellect as important in the desire and realization of evil is exploited by Aquinas. His ontology would eventually free both God and matter of any responsibility in evil since it is a part of the goodness of God’s creation.

2.2 Matter as Source of Evil

Maimonides aligns very closely to the teaching of Aristotle on matter. The essence of matter for both Aristotle and Maimonides is receptivity and passivity.²³⁶ It is active only by accident. In *Exodus 24:10* which says: “And there was under his feet, as it were, a work of the whiteness of sapphire stone,” Maimonides interprets it to be a reference to the transparency and indeterminacy of the first matter or prime matter. Transparency is not a color in itself otherwise it would not allow all the colors to be seen through it. Because it lacks a color of its own, it is receptive to all which explains its ability to receive all forms in succession.²³⁷

²³³ Dobbs-Weinstein, Idit, “Matter as Creature and Matter as the Source of Evil: Maimonides and Aquinas,” in Lenn E. Goodman, ed., *Neoplatonism and Jewish Thought*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), p 221.

²³⁴ *Dux Neutrorum*, lib.I, cap.XVII, fol.8: “Tu autem scis quod principia rerum generabilium sunt tria: materia, et forma, et privatio determinata.” Cf *Guide I*, 17, p 43.

²³⁵ Ibid. lib.II, cap.XXXI, fol.55: “Scito quod differentia est inter primum et principium, quoniam principium est res in eo cuius est principium: vel cum eo, licet non praecessit ipsum in tempore. Secundum quod dicitur quod cor est principium vitae animalium.” Cf *Guide II*, 30, p 348. Cf also Aristotle, *Metaphysics V*, 1, 1013a1-5.

²³⁶ Ibid. lib.I, cap.XXVII, fol.10: “quia materia sicut scis semper recipit ab alio.” Cf *Guide I*, 28, p 61.

²³⁷ Ibid: « Ideo dictum est: sicut opus. Sed lapis crystalli seu candor eius hoc habet ut peruius et translucens, non propter colorem ipsius : quia nullum habet. Nam peruium et translucens si colorem proprium haberet non reciperet alios, sed occultaret. Nunc autem recipit omnes: quia est sine colore. » Cf *Guide I*, 28, p 61.

In this it resembles the first matter, which in respect of its true reality lacks all forms and on this account is capable of receiving all forms in succession.²³⁸

Maimonides refers to Onkelos²³⁹ interpretation of the *Exodus 24:10* text, in order to underline the sublunary location of the matter described while implying there is a different and a higher form of matter. For Onkelos, “And there was under his feet,” should be interpreted as “and under the throne of His glory.”²⁴⁰ ‘Throne,’ among other interpretations could refer to God’s governance over “this lower world.”²⁴¹ Every suggestion of corporeality in God should be totally abolished. This matter that necessitates generation and corruption, and entails the ability to receive all forms in succession is a lower matter. In the explicit indication given of these two matters by Maimonides, he notes:

However, its author has in any case rendered us a great service by making it quite clear that the matter of the heavens is other than that of the earth and that they are two altogether distinct matters. One of them is attributed to Him, may He be exalted, and this is the lowly matter that the author of the statement makes out to derive from the snow under the throne of glory.²⁴²

Maimonides calls it a ‘great mystery’ that there are two matters: a high and an inferior matter. The sages, according to Maimonides, attributed the creation of everything in the heavens to derive from one common matter of a higher type whereas, the creation of everything under the sphere of the moon, derives from one common matter, an inferior matter totally different from the higher.²⁴³ Under the cover of the secrets of *Torah*, Maimonides is preparing the assault he

²³⁸ Ibid: “Et ideo simile est illud materiae primae, quae in se et ex se nullam habet formam : sed recipit omnes unam post aliam. » Cf *Guide* I, 28, p 61.

²³⁹ Maimonides describes Onkelos as a «Proselyte who was perfect in Hebrew and Syrian languages and directed his efforts toward the abolition of the belief in God’s corporeality. » Cf *Guide* I, 27, p 57. In the ancient times, Onkelos is thought to be a famous convert to Judaism, considered as the author of the Aramaic translation of the Hebrew Bible. His translations and interpretations favor a rejection of anthropomorphisms in favor of allegorical readings. Maimonides was influenced by his interpretations.

²⁴⁰ *Dux Neutorum*, lib.I, cap.XXVII, fol.10: “in hoc est opinio de Anqelos sicut scis ut suis referatur ad cathedram qui vocatur sedes in dicendo sub throno gloriae suae.” Cf *Guide* I, 28, p 60.

²⁴¹ Ibid. lib.I, cap.IX, fol.7: “et regunt mundum inferiorem cum largitate bonitatis eorum.” Cf *Guide* I, 9, p 34.

²⁴² Ibid. lib.II, cap.XXVII, fol.56: “In hoc tamen fuit nobis utilitas magna: quia fecit scire quod materia coelorum non est materia terrae: et quod sunt duae materiae inter quas est magna differentia: et quod una est attributa Creatori propter suam sublimitatem et pulchritudinem : et quia est de lumine vestimenti eius : altera vero longe est a gloria ipsius : et est materia inferior : et dixit quod est de nive quae est sub throno gloriae eius. » Cf *Guide* II, 26, p 331.

²⁴³ There is every indication that Maimonides is here influenced by the doctrine of Plotinus who has held the existence of two matters: the intelligible matter and the matter of the sensible world. Cf *Enneads* II.4.3.

would unleash on terrestrial matter as the source and the cause of everything that is evil. This approach has all the hallmarks of Neo-Platonism.

Maimonides's quest to get hold of sublunar matter can be traced back to his early exegesis of some terms found in the Scriptures. He draws attention to the terms man [*'ish*] and woman [*'ishshah*]. As typical of his method, he begins by giving a physical sense to the terms and moves on to more derivative and then philosophical senses of the terms in question. In the physical sense, man and woman signify "a human male and a human female."²⁴⁴ Maimonides learns this from the Scriptural text of *Genesis* 7: 2 "Of every clean beast thou shalt take to thee seven and seven, the man and his woman." Moving on to a more derivative meaning, Maimonides notes that the term woman was used to designate:

Any object apt for, and fashioned with a view to being in conjunction with some other object. Thus it says: The five curtains should be coupled together, a woman to her sister. (Exod. 26: 3)²⁴⁵

This definition of a woman in figurative terms as "an object fashioned with a view to being in conjunction with some other object," belongs to what Sara Klein-Braslavy calls "a structure of meaning." This means that the reader would have to fill the content of each sentence structure by "looking at its semantic axis and taking account of its context."²⁴⁶ In the definition given above, Maimonides leaves us in the dark as to what this 'other object' is. But later in the *Dux Neutrorum*, Maimonides tries to fill the "structure of meaning with a philosophical content." He identifies woman whom he earlier defined as the "object fashioned with a view to being in conjunction with some other object," with matter and he identifies this "other object" as form. Perhaps, because of matter's readiness 'to enter into conjunction with some other object,' Maimonides gives it a new image—that of a 'married harlot—*mulieri vagae et coniungatae*' who is never satiated by one man and is always in search of men.²⁴⁷ The image of matter as a

²⁴⁴ *Dux Neutrorum*, lib.I, cap.VII, fol.7: "Ysha in hebraico sonat homo et mulier. Et sunt accommodata ad significandum masculinum et foemininum cuiuscunque generis. » Cf *Guide* I, 6, p 31.

²⁴⁵ Ibid: "Rursus accommodaverunt nomen mulieris omni rei aptae recipere aliam rem, sicut dicitur Exodi.xxxvi: Cortinae iunguntur sibi, foemina cum sorore sua." Cf *Guide* I, 6, p 31.

²⁴⁶ Klein-Braslavy, Sara, "Bible Commentary," in *The Cambridge Companion to Maimonides*, edited by Kenneth Seeskin, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005) p 248.

²⁴⁷ This analogy of a "married-harlot," according to Klein-Braslavy, "is not perfect: the married harlot is a wife and a harlot at the same time, but matter is always tied to one form. It merely changes the form to which it is tied. Maimonides seems to have overlooked the dimension of time in the relations of matter and forms and set up the

‘married harlot’ belongs to the second type of parables where “the parable as a whole indicates the whole of the intended meaning,”²⁴⁸ what we have earlier described in the language of Klein-Braslavy as “a structure of meaning.” The designation of woman as matter and man as form is a tradition that dates back according to Maimonides, to Plato and his predecessors.²⁴⁹ Matter never exists independently of form.

How extraordinary is what *Solomon* said in his wisdom when likening matter to a *married harlot*, for matter is in no way found without form and is consequently always like a *married woman* who is never separated from a *man* and is never free. However, notwithstanding her being a *married woman*, she never ceases to seek for another man to substitute for her husband, and she deceives and draws him on in every way until he obtains from her what her husband used to obtain. This is the state of matter. For whatever form is found in it, does but prepare it to receive another form.²⁵⁰

Beyond the poetic or metaphoric language that Maimonides uses, there is a consistent nature of matter that he wants us to grasp: the indeterminacy of matter, “its inherent transiency, its impermanent and corruptible nature.”²⁵¹ This is the sublunar matter that is always accompanied by privation and is the cause of all passing-away and corruption or deficiency. Aristotle’s reading of matter and form composite avoids a dualistic view of a world divided into sub and supralunar realms. His presentation of matter underlines the importance of matter for substantial existence and its positive function in individualization. Aristotle presents form as the principle of act that actualizes the potentiality of matter. In other words, form is the controlling principle in

metaphor only on the basis of the types of relations that matter has with forms and a married harlot has with men.” Cf Sara Klein-Braslavy, “Maimonides’ Strategy for Interpreting “Woman” in the *Guide of the Perplexed*,” in *Ecriture et Réécriture des Textes Philosophiques Médiévaux*, J. Hamesse et O. Weijers, eds., (Turnhout: Brepols Publishers n.v., 2006), p 299 n 17.

²⁴⁸*Dux Neutrorum*, Prooemium Authoris, fol.2: “Sunt etenim quidam similitudines in quibus quodlibet verbum demonstret aliquid super aliquo separatism. Secundus autem modus est quod erit universa similitudo demonstrativa rei assimilatae in ipsa. Erunt tamen multa verba in ipsa similitudine: quorum nullum adiiciet aliquid in ipsa re assimilata.” Cf *Guide I*, Introduction, p 12.

²⁴⁹*Ibid.* lib.I, cap.XVII, fol.8: “Unde Plato et qui praecesserant eum vocabant materiam foeminam, et formam masculum. » Cf *Guide I*, 17, p 43.

²⁵⁰*Ibid.* lib.III, cap.IX, fol.74: “Quod dulcia sunt verba Salomonis in sapientia sua cum comparat et assimilat materiam mulieri vagae et coniugatae: quia non invenitur materia nisi cum forma ullo modo. Quod si ita est, semper est uxor alicuius viri : nec invenitur sola. Licet autem est uxor viri, non abstinet quin quaerat alium virum. Eodem modo se habet materia : quia quaecumque forma est in ea, ipsa forma preparat materiam ad recipiendum aliam formam: nec prohibet se quin exuat formam in ea existentem et quaerat aliam. » Cf *Guide III*, 8, p 431.

²⁵¹Ivry, Alfred L, “Providence, Divine Omniscience, and Possibility: The Case of Maimonides,” in *Maimonides: A Collection of Critical Essays*, edited by Joseph A. Buijs, (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988) p 177.

the composition that results from the union of matter and form, even though each is indispensable, in the making of the composite substance. Maimonides seemingly takes a different way from Aristotle and logically fails to bridge the gap between a sub and supralunar existence. He fails to acknowledge the role of matter in union with form, as essential for human actualization. Rather, Maimonides underscores the role of matter in corruption. The first suggestion of this is seen in Maimonides's interpretation of the fall of Adam and Eve. It is not lost to Maimonides that it was the woman, Eve (matter) who first yields to the temptation because she is always suffering from a lack (privation). She it was who was in direct relations with the *Serpent*. "It was through the intermediation of Eve that Adam was harmed and that the *Serpent* destroyed him."²⁵² When man (form) yielded to the solicitations of the woman (matter), he abandoned the life of the intellect and got absorbed in the passions and the corruptions of matter.²⁵³ This Adam-Eve interpretation will feature again in our discussion of evil and providence. The second suggestion is seen in Maimonides's figurative account of matter as a 'married harlot,' where Maimonides presents form as "powerless before the correlative force of matter."²⁵⁴ Sarah Pessin brings attention to the fact that Maimonides calls matter not just harlot, but a married harlot. This has enormous implications. By so doing, Pessin thinks that matter acquires a new ontological role of a "marriage-breaker" in the sense that it is "a force that stands in the way of the proper union between two sacredly joined partners."²⁵⁵ Maimonides sees the goal of the human person as consisting in intellectual perfection made possible when the human intellect conjoins with the Active Intellect. It is this conjunction that also assures divine overflow of providence and protects man from the reach of evil. Thus as a "marriage-breaker," matter is a potential threat to that union that should ensure man not only unhindered access to providence and protection from evil, but also to eternal truths coming from the Active Intellect, which would guarantee man's intellectual perfection. Pessin then concludes that "it is in this sense that matter

²⁵²*Dux Neutorum*, lib.II, cap.XXXI, fol.61: "Quod debes etiam scire, et docebo te super hoc: est quod serpens non venit ad Adam primo ullo modo: neque locutus est cum eo: sed ordinatio verborum eius fuit cum Eva: et ea mediante damnum pervenit ad Adam: et interfecit eum coluber Inimicitia vero perfecta non est, nisi inter colubrum et Evam, et semen unius semen alterius." Cf *Guide* II, 30, p 356. The interpretation of the images of *Serpent* and *Satan* will be seen later.

²⁵³*Ibid.* lib.I, cap.II, fol.5: "Cum vero peccavit et secutus est concupiscentiam suam et desideria carnis: sicut dictum est, Vidit quod esset pulchrum visu et ad vescendum suave: inflicta est ei poena. Scilicet recessit ab eo intelligibilium apprehensio." Cf *Guide* I, 2, p 25.

²⁵⁴Dobbs-Weinstein, Idit, "Matter as Creature and Matter as the Source of Evil: Maimonides and Aquinas," p 225.

²⁵⁵Pessin, Sarah, "Matter, Form, and the Corporeal World," in Nadler, S and Rudavsky, T. M., eds., *The Cambridge History of Jewish Philosophy. From Antiquity through the Seventeenth Century*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p 273.

threatens to stand in the way of the human intellect's final nuptial, its union with its one true mate, namely, the Active Intellect."²⁵⁶ It would be very interesting to note that Maimonides assigns matter a negative epistemological role of blocking man's access to true knowledge. Even though Aristotle and the scholastics would emphasize the actualizing effect of form over matter, Maimonides seems to inverse that role and readily presents form as subjugated by matter.²⁵⁷ By so doing, Maimonides makes matter solely responsible for all the physical and even moral evils that afflict man.

Thus in the case of a man, for instance, it is clear that the deformity of his form, the fact that his limbs do not conform to their nature, ... that all this is consequent upon his corrupt matter and not form. Similarly every living being dies and becomes ill solely because of its matter and not because of its form. All man's acts of disobedience and sins are consequent upon his matter. ... his eating and drinking and copulation and his passionate desire for these things, as well as his anger and all bad habits found in him, are of them consequent upon his matter.²⁵⁸

In all this discussion, there is one positive statement that Maimonides makes about matter. He calls it 'good' because by its ability to generate and corrupt, it assures the perpetuity of being

²⁵⁶ Ibid. p 274.

²⁵⁷ This move should not surprise us since Maimonides wants to highlight the negative effects of matter on man's pursuit of his final goal, the intellectual apprehension of the divine. This denigration of matter is sympathetic to platonic sensibilities which regarded the body as a prison for the soul. This Maimonidean ploy must be a way of warning us from getting attached to corporeal desires which, in relation to man's ultimate goal, is shameful and detestable. Cf *Dux Neutrorum*, lib.III, cap.IX, fol.74: "Propter hoc igitur distincti sunt gradus hominem illorum scilicet qui nituntur semper quantum possunt quaerere honestatem et vitam sempiternam secundum quod exigit honorabilis forma sua...Cum vero tales trahuntur ab instigatoribus qui sunt in materia ad immunditiam eorum quae manifesta est, angustiantur propter illud in quo vagantur, et erubescunt propter vulnus inflicto sibi: et laborat talis homo quantum potest diminuere de motu illo illicito: et ut absteineat ab illo modis omnibus. » Cf *Guide* III, 8, p 432: "Among men, there are individuals who aspire always to prefer that which is most noble and to seek a state of perpetual permanence according to what is required by their noble form... Whenever the impulses of matter impel such an individual toward the dirt and the generally admitted shame inherent in matter, he feels pain ... is ashamed and abashed ... and desires to diminish this shame ... and be preserved from it in every way."

²⁵⁸ *Dux Neutrorum*, lib.III, cap.IX, fol.74: « Expositio vero huius rei patet in hoc, causa exempli: quoniam variatio creationis formae suae et exitus membrorum suorum assuetudine naturae, et debilitas...operationum eius, vel defectus eorum, vel labor: non refert utrum haec omnia sint in radice creationis: vel quod renouentur in ipso: quia omnia sequuntur materiam corruptibilem, non formam. Eodem modo omne animal non moritur, nec infirmatur: nisi propter materiam quam habet: non propter formam suam. Omnia etiam peccata hominis consequuntur materiam suam non formam: mores autem eius honesti et bonitates eius sequuntur formam ipsius...comedere vero et bibere, et...concupiscere talia, et irasci, et omne vitium sive omnis deformitas quae invenitur in homine, omnia inquam illa comitantur materiam eius. » Cf *Guide* III, 8, p 431.

through succession.²⁵⁹ Again Maimonides also refers to matter figuratively as Solomon would say: “A woman of virtue who can find?” (Prov. 31: 10) From a *married harlot*, matter has become a *woman of virtue*. This type of matter neither dominates man nor corrupts his constitution, and Maimonides calls this matter “a divine gift—*donum Dei*.”²⁶⁰ Our attempt, to comprehend this “divine gift” as the celestial matter, is quickly put to doubt when Maimonides assigns it an epistemological role of an obstacle, a ‘dark veil’ preventing man from apprehending intellectual realities.

Matter is a strong veil preventing the apprehension of that which is separate from matter as it truly is. It does this even if it is the noblest and purest matter, I mean to say, even if it is the matter of the heavenly spheres ... Hence whenever our intellect aspires to apprehend the deity or one of the intellects, there subsists this great veil interposed between the two.²⁶¹

Since neither sublunar nor celestial matter is exempt from bringing about a negative effect, how then do we understand this matter, ‘a woman of virtue’ that Maimonides calls “a divine gift?”²⁶²

²⁵⁹Ibid. lib.III, cap.XI, fol.75: “Etiam existentia huius materiae inferioris secundum rationem et modum suae existentiae et coniunctionis cum privatione ex quo sequitur mors et omnia alia mala: totum istud bonum est in sempiternitate generationis et permanentiae entium cum variatione accidentium.” Cf *Guide* III, 10, p 440.

²⁶⁰Ibid. lib.III, cap.IX, fol.74: “Manifesta est parabola in hoc quod cum accidit homini mulier bona qui non damnet ordinem corporis, donum Dei est. » Cf *Guide* III, 8, p 433.

²⁶¹Ibid. lib.III, cap.X, fol.75: “Materia paries magnus est ante nos: unde non apprehendimus intelligentiam separatam secundum quod est quamvis sit materia nobilis et limpida id est licet sit materia coelorum, quanto magis illa materia turbida et infima et obscura quae in nobis est! Et hoc est corpus. Propter hoc igitur cum noster intellectus nititur apprehendere Creatorem...aliquam de intelligentiis seperatis, invenit parietem illum magnum dividendum inter ipsum et illa intelligibilia.” Cf *Guide* III, 9, p 436f. Pessin tries to diminish the obstructing effect of celestial matter in the process of intellection by exonerating it from getting in the way of intellection enjoyed by the separate intellects. This reading misses the mark since Maimonides is not referring to the apprehension by the separate intellects but by material substances. Cf Sarah Pessin, “Matter, Metaphor, and Privative Pointing: Maimonides on the Complexity of Human Being,” in *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 76, no. 1, (2002) p. 81. On another occasion, Pessin presents celestial matter as free of negativity: “it is clear that Maimonides speaks of celestial matter as the ‘high matter,’ a matter that clearly is not the subject of his negative tirades against the vicissitudes of ordinary (i.e., terrestrial) matter.” Cf Sarah Pessin “Matter, Form, and the Corporeal World,” p 285. As a confirmation that Pessin misses the mark, Maimonides insists in lib.III, cap.XIII, fol.78: “Non sunt mundi in conspectu eius, scilicet quia sunt materiati: licet enim materia illa est munda, et clara, et lucida, tamen cum comparaveris ipsos coelos intelligentiis separatis, erunt turbidi et obscuri, non mundi vel clari. » “And though they have the purest and most luminous matter, it is—if compared to the separate intellects—obscure, dark, and not clear.” Cf. *Guide* III, 13, p 455.

²⁶² In the effort to understand Maimonides figurative designation of matter as ‘a woman of virtue,’ Dobbs-Weinstein refers to it as Maimonides’ “model exhortations habituating human beings to shun material pleasures and satisfy material needs only to the extent that they are necessary rather than in pursuit of pleasure.” Cf. Idit Dobbs-Weinstein, *Maimonides and St. Thomas on the Limits of Reason*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995) p. 93. This is only a side of the story. Maimonides emphasizes the power of form over matter and insists that

Our thoughts turn to the interpretation given by Klein-Braslavy. She considers the allegory of “a woman of virtue” as a “description of the ideal woman.”²⁶³ In a very simplistic reading of this allegory, Klein-Braslavy, understands it as an antithesis of a “married harlot” who is unfaithful to her husband and does not attend to the welfare of her household.

The metaphoric of a “woman of virtue” is created on the basis of only one type of relation—the relation of a woman to her husband. It represents a rare and special kind of human matter—matter that helps man attain his goal. The woman of virtue is a wife; she is bound to one man, serving him and his household, just as the man’s good matter is tied to his form, the intellect, does not cause him to pursue bodily desires, and thereby helps him attain his perfection and the vocation of humankind.²⁶⁴

The above interpretation is not incorrect but we think however that Maimonides means more than comparing a mere harlot to a virtuous woman. Instead of taking these allegories in isolation, Maimonides expects us to go deeper into his texts, and join together the various “chapter headings” in order to come up with a more profound and correct interpretation of his allegories.

The use of the term ‘woman’ to designate “any object apt for, and fashioned with a view to being in, conjunction with some other object,” must not be lost to us. Even though it is the cause of all evil and corruption, one positive thing about matter is its ability and readiness to be perfected by the “other object” that is form. All virtues Maimonides tells us are consequent upon form. The understanding of form that Maimonides has is that of Aristotle. “It is the notion according to which a thing is constituted as a substance and becomes what it is.”²⁶⁵ To fully appreciate the human form, Maimonides refers to two terms “image” and “likeness” from the Scripture: “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.” (Gen 1: 26). The term “image” is a homonym that includes at least two different meanings. It could refer to a physical thing for instance ‘the shape and the configuration of a thing.’ But this could not be applied to the deity since the deity is not corporeal. In its second meaning, “image” signifies the “natural form.” In man, it is that “from

the human form, the intellect, is equipped to domesticate matter and bring it to the path of virtue. When unsuitable matter is made suitable, it becomes figuratively a ‘woman of virtue’ that is a divine gift.

²⁶³ Klein-Braslavy, Sara, «Maimonides’ Strategy for Interpreting « Woman » in the *Guide of the Perplexed*, » p 308

²⁶⁴ Ibid., p 310

²⁶⁵ *Dux Neutrorum*, lib.I, cap.I, fol.5: “Nomen autem quod est celem, convenit formae naturali quae est perfectio rei et essentia: » Cf *Guide* I, 1, p 22.

which human apprehension derives.”²⁶⁶ It is the intellect that is the form of man and it is from it that all good things including the control of matter comes to man.

For example, man’s apprehension of his Creator, his mental representation of every intelligible, his control of his desire and his anger, his thought on what ought to be preferred and what avoided, are all of them consequent upon his form.²⁶⁷

Thus, to distinguish form from the correlative effect of matter, Maimonides reverts back to the controlling, actualizing function of form over matter. This position is Aristotelian in its entire ramification. Tenebrous, turbid and dark matter has been given to man to be quelled by the help of his natural form, the intellect. That’s why commandments and the Law are given to man to help him “quell all the impulses of matter”²⁶⁸ giving rise to the habits consequent upon desire and anger and to set limits for them in the soul. Neither matter nor form is an independent principle. They both need each other to exist in the sublunar world. Maimonides makes us to think that it is God’s will that man’s noble form be made “in the image of God and His likeness,” and endowed with all the powers to dominate and tame matter and make it “a woman of virtue.” Maimonides would definitely place Moses, the prophets and the patriarchs among those who have received this “divine gift” because of their singular ability to domesticate matter and bring it to a path of virtue.²⁶⁹ Dark, sublunar and turbid matter brings upon man every imperfection and corruption, but the form is endowed with the ability to keep it under control and pursue the ultimate goal of man *qua* man—the pursuit of intellectual apprehension of truth.

²⁶⁶Ibid: “Sicut est in homine intellectus humanus.” Cf *Guide* I, 1, p 22.

²⁶⁷Ibid. lib.III, cap.IX, fol.74: “huius rei exemplum est: quia apprehensio Creatoris et intellectus omnis intelligibilis : et compescere frenum concupiscentiae suae : et irae, et cogitationem in his in quibus necesse est ut prevaleat : et removere a se quod necesse est removeri : omnia inquam illa in homine sequuntur formam eius.” Cf *Guide* III, 8, p 431.

²⁶⁸Ibid: “Praecepta vero legis et prohibitiones eius sunt ad frangendum omnes vires istius materiae.” Cf *Guide* III, 8, p 433.

²⁶⁹To live a virtuous life for Maimonides would tantamount to living a life of intellectual apprehension of the divine things. But this type of life cannot be limited only to Moses as Dobbs-Weinstein makes us to believe. Cf “Matter as Creature and Matter as the Source of Evil: Maimonides and Aquinas,” p 234 n.21.

He granted it—I mean the human form—power, dominion, rule, and control over matter, in order that it subjugate it, quell its impulses, and bring it back to the best and most harmonious state that is possible.²⁷⁰

Our interpretation of matter as ‘married harlot—woman of virtue’ metaphor, is corroborated by Diamond’s reading. In his attempts to come to grips with Maimonides’s metaphors, Diamond juxtaposes Jacob’s dream to Solomon’s “married harlot.” He interprets Jacob as a model of subjugated matter (woman of virtue) because of his singular ability to quell his sexual urges. Continuing he notes:

Consistent with this model is the midrashic address by Jacob to his son Reuben, where he is self-described as having “never had a seminal emission before [engendering Reuben] (Guide II, 29, p. 345), rendering him the human embodiment of the noble *woman of virtue* composite.”²⁷¹

It is of importance to note that it is this Jacob’s singular ability to domesticate matter and bring his material impulses to a proper control, “that leads to true harmony between “husband and wife” or human form and matter.”²⁷²

In this discussion of matter as evil, Maimonides movement to and fro, Neo-Platonism and Aristotelianism is very evident. When he makes a perfect distinction between matter and privation, he shifts away from Neo-Platonism for whom matter is strictly privation and evil. How do we explain this seeming ambivalence in Maimonides’s discussion of matter?

²⁷⁰*Dux Neutorum*, lib.III, cap.IX, fol.74: “Humanae vero formae data fuit potestas et imperium quae est in eo: et ut reducat ipsum ad illud quod conveniens est.” Cf *Guide* III, 8, p 432. Contrary to seeing form as powerless before the corruptive force of matter, Alfred L. Ivry argues that it is form which remains predominant in Maimonides’s thinking. “Thus, what must be said here is that Maimonides accepts the Aristotelian definition of substance as including matter, but places it within a Neoplatonized value scheme in which the substantiality of matter is markedly inferior to that of form. It is form which is preeminently substance for Maimonides...” Cf. “Providence, Divine Omniscience, and Possibility: The Case of Maimonides.” Ibid. p178

²⁷¹ Diamond, James Arthur, *Maimonides and the Hermeneutics of Concealment*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002) p.33

²⁷²Ibid. pp 33-34. Compare Pessin’s interpretation which places emphasis on the cognitive status of human being. “It is the essential co-presence of man’s actual hylomorphic and potential angelic existence—his simultaneous cognitive limitation and limitlessness—that renders appropriate Maimonides’ dual metaphors of matter as married harlot and woman of valor: through the image of the married harlot ..., Maimonides points to the limited actuality of human knowing, demarcating the essence of human being from angelic purity by using a description of matter as a stumbling block; and yet, points us at the same time to the unlimited potentiality of human existence, which is revealed upon carefully considering the role of material particularity as a stepping stone to arriving at our highest state of knowing.” Sarah Pessin, “Matter, Metaphor, and Private Pointing: Maimonides on the Complexity of Human Being,” pp 76-77

One of the points worth emphasizing is the freedom of Maimonides in pursuing the logics of his rational thoughts without paying much attention to philosophical alliance with one authority or the other. His acceptance and criticism of Aristotle proves us right. Those who define Maimonides as purely Aristotelian should better take note. In a very large sense of the term, we could say that Maimonides accepted two distinct ontologies having their root in the peripatetic school—Aristotelian and Neoplatonic, but was seemingly at odds to find a balance between them. This seeming inability, to find a proper balance between the different ontologies, manifests in the ambivalence evident in Maimonides's discussions. The issue of esotericism and exotericism in Maimonides's texts could perhaps explain the abundant divergences or inconsistencies in the interpretation of Maimonidean scholarship. Among the seven causes of contradictions enumerated by Maimonides in his *Dux Neutrorum*, two—the fifth and the seventh, are of great importance since they specifically apply to the types of contradictions or contraries or divergences employed by Maimonides himself in the composition of the *Dux Neutrorum*. The understanding of these two causes could help us explain the seeming ambivalence in Maimonides's exposition of matter and other sensitive issues in the *Dux Neutrorum*.

In the case of the seventh cause, all the genuine contradictions or contraries or divergences we may find in the *Dux Neutrorum* are, by the testimony of Maimonides, traced back to this cause. “In speaking about very obscure matters it is necessary to conceal some parts and to disclose others.”²⁷³ The discussion of matter, as we have seen Maimonides do in the above sections, has nothing to suggest of any concealment. What is very clear is the divergence or the ambivalence inherent in the discussion. Why is this and how do we explain it? Perhaps, the fifth cause has a clue.

According to Maimonides, the fifth cause “arises from the necessity of teaching and making someone understand.”²⁷⁴ It follows that in any given matter, the teacher must take account of the progressive development of the student's ability and knowledge. This will enable the teacher to make a progressive exposition of a given subject that in its earlier stages would seem not to be fully accurate or even would seem to be a misrepresentation of the real point. The teacher “will

²⁷³ *Dux Neutrorum*, Prooemium Authoris, fol.2: “Causa septima est cum necesse est sapienti loqui in rationibus nimis profundis: quarum partem conveniens est occultare et partem explicare : » *Guide I*, Introduction, p 18.

²⁷⁴ Ibid: “Causa quinta est, necessitas addiscendi cuius expositio est cum fuerit profunda ratio ad intelligendum difficilis discipulis : » Cf *Guide I*, Introduction, p 17.

not undertake to state the matter as it truly is in exact terms, but will leave it so in accord with the listener's imagination that the latter will understand only what he now wants him to understand."²⁷⁵ Later when the student is ready, the earlier point is corrected. This fifth cause is a pedagogic tool in the hands of the teacher meant for the advantage of the student. This method could create tensions or ambivalences in the texts but never a contradiction. The discussion of matter above seems to have been modeled by Maimonides as a pedagogic tool with the intention of bringing out what is true of matter in both Aristotelian and Neoplatonic traditions. By presenting matter as a corruptive force in nature, Maimonides *à la façon néoplatonicienne* "is warning against the pursuit of bodily pleasures and desires."²⁷⁶ By presenting matter as dominated and subjugated by form, Maimonides *à la façon aristotélienne*, is projecting among other things, the preeminent position of the human form, the intelligence, in the pursuit of the ultimate goal of man *qua* man: the apprehension of Intelligibles. This Maimonidean insight would help our interpretation of evil as the privation of providence that comes through the intellect.

2.3 Privation

Maimonides discusses two types of privation: absolute and relative privation. The concept of absolute privation he takes from his criticism of the Mutakallimun's understanding of privation. Maimonides notes that the account given by the Mutakallimun is fraught with two major errors: (a) that account recognizes privation as absolute non-being; and (b) it treats privation as an existent thing.²⁷⁷ Thus, privation as an absolute non-being enjoys according to the Mutakallimun, an actual existing state and an independent ontological status. The Mutakallimun understood privation in only one sense, that is, the absolute non existence of a thing. But Maimonides would

²⁷⁵ Ibid: "Et idcirco necesse est ut praemittatur ratio levis quoniam semper incipiendum est a levioribus. Et erit necessarium doctori ponere oculum suum in doctrina primae rationis secundum quod possibile fuerit cum speculatione grandi: et volet disputare veritatem rationis: sed omittet intellectum auditoris, donec intelligat quod necesse est ut faciat ipsum intelligere: » Cf *Guide* I, Introduction, p 18.

²⁷⁶ We agree with Sara Klein-Braslavy that the "married harlot" is an "ethical allegory" dealing with a practical rather than a theoretical issue: "warning men against the pursuit of desire." Cf "Maimonides' Strategy for Interpreting "Woman" in the *Guide of the Perplexed*," p 303.

²⁷⁷ *Dux Neutrorum*, lib.III, cap.XI, fol.75: "Licet autem dicant quod privatio non indiget operatore: dicunt tamen in suis principalibus quod Creator excaecat videntes: et loquentem trahere facit: et rem motam quiescere: quoniam illae privationes secundum sententiam ipsorum habent existentiam." Cf *Guide* III, 10, p 438.

criticize this understanding of privation as misplaced. Nothing can be an absolute privation. When an agent removes a certain *habitus* like sight, hearing, etc., that a certain subject should ordinarily possess, the agent is said to produce the corresponding privation of blindness or of dumbness, though that privation is not an existent thing outside of the subject in lack. This is relative privation because it is a lack in reference to a particular existing subject.

Like Aristotle, Maimonides holds privation to be an absence of a given *habitus* that a subject should ordinarily have. It is a lack, an absence in a subject and it enjoys, generally speaking, an existence that belongs to the subject. That is to say, it does never exist in itself outside of the subject and that's why Maimonides says that matter never ceases to be joined to privation.²⁷⁸ It is opposed to form. Because it does not enjoy an independent existence, privation can never be said to be caused by an agent. "On the other hand, that which is produced by an essential act of the agent is necessarily a thing that exists whoever the agent may be, for his act can only be connected with an existing thing."²⁷⁹ Matter is an existing thing that is produced by an agent. Privation is not an existing thing and thus, it can not essentially be produced by an agent. This is the understanding that Maimonides takes into his discussion of evil.

2.4 Evil and its Types

Maimonides tends to think of evil as 'a category imposed by man upon things, rather than something real existing in them.'²⁸⁰ This is the logical conclusion of calling privation a nonexistent. Just as privation exists only in the subject that is in lack, evil for Maimonides exists only in a given subject in lack of a particular perfection. Nothing is evil in itself but in relation to something. All evils are relative privations.

For this reason the following proposition may be enunciated in an absolute manner: all evils are privations. With respect to man, for instance, his death is an evil, since death is

²⁷⁸Ibid. lib.III, cap.IX, fol.74: "quia non invenitur materia nisi cum forma ullo modo." Cf *Guide* III, 8, p 431.

²⁷⁹ Ibid. lib.III, cap.XI, fol.75: "Iam igitur patet tibi quod secundum nullam opinionem privatio est opus operatoris: sed dicitur aliquis operari privationem: et hoc per accidens: sicut ostendimus. Quod autem operator operatur per se, est ens necessario quodcumque sit illud opus: vel dependet ab ente." Cf *Guide* III, 10, p 439.

²⁸⁰ Dobbs-Weinstein, Idit, "Matter as Creature and Matter as the Source of Evil: Maimonides and Aquinas," p 225.

his nonbeing. Similarly his illness, his poverty, or his ignorance are evils with regard to him, and all of them are privations of habitus.²⁸¹

Since evil is a privation and thus nonbeing, it cannot be caused in itself by an agent.²⁸² Here Maimonides, unlike Neo-Platonists, seems to exonerate God of all responsibility for evil. As a Creator, the end point of His creation is being which is good. The only reproach Maimonides indirectly reserves for God may be because of matter, not all matter anyway, but the inferior matter of the sublunar world. The nature of this inferior matter consists in being “a concomitant of privation,” that is, it suffers from a lack, an absence of a perfection which explains its readiness to always pass from one form to another. As it receives one form, it is deprived of another and this state of continuous lack is the nature of matter, the cause of all passing-away and of all evil.²⁸³ Even the being of this inferior matter is also considered good by the virtue of its generative force by which the permanency of being is assured through succession.²⁸⁴ With the help of this distinction between absolute and relative privation, Maimonides succeeds in denying the seemingly ontological status of evil, the result of the Mutakallimun’s error concerning the nature of existence.

Because Maimonides is convinced that evil is nothing existing in reality, his discussion is based on the principle that ‘all evil is as a result of ignorance, that is, the privation of knowledge.’²⁸⁵ Ignorance is responsible for man’s mistaken opinion about evil. Ignorance is also responsible for man’s mistaken opinion about the purpose of creation and man’s place in the universe. It is this privation of knowledge that leads man to think that all creation exists for the sake of man and that all must serve to the advantage of man. That is the popular belief that dates back to Saadia

²⁸¹*Dux Neutorum*, lib.III, cap.XI, fol.75: “Et propter hoc dicunt praecise quod omnia mala sunt privationes...Homo cuius est mors mala : et est privatio : et omnis infirmitas sua et paupertas, et omnia mala qui accidunt ipsi sunt privationes dispositionum acquisibilium. » Cf *Guide* III, 10, p 439.

²⁸² Ibid: “Post ista igitur omnia quae praemisimus scito quod de Creatore non dicitur praecise quod ipse faciat malum, id est, quod ipse habeat primam intentionem faciendi malum: sed omnia opera eius sunt pura bonitas: qua non operatur nisi entia et omnia quae bona sunt.” Cf *Guide* III, 10, p 439f.

²⁸³ Ibid : « Et propter hoc istud est causa omnis corruptionis et malitiae. » Cf *Guide* III, 10, p 440.

²⁸⁴ Ibid: « Etiam existentia huius materiae inferioris...totum istud bonum est in sempiternitate generationis et permanentiae entium cum variatione accidentium.” Cf *Guide* III, 10, p 440.

²⁸⁵ Ibid. lib.III, cap.XII, fol.75: “preveniunt ex privatione scilicet ignorantia qui est contraria sciae : » Cf *Guide* III, 11, p 440.

Gaon.²⁸⁶ Without man, nothing has purpose and nothing has meaning. Maimonides would rather think that man has superiority to all other realities in the sublunar world because of his natural form, the intelligence. But when brought in comparison to the totality of existence, man is merely nothing.

Hence, be not misled in your soul to think that the spheres and the angels have been brought into existence for our sake ... Consider accordingly your substance and that of the spheres, the stars, and the separate intellects; then the truth will become manifest to you, and you will know that man and nothing else is the most perfect and the most noble thing that has been generated from this inferior matter; but that if his being is compared to that of the spheres and all the more to that of the separate beings, it is very very contemptible.²⁸⁷

When man has a balanced view of the purpose of the universe and his place in that universe, it will be very clear to him that the universe is not made for the purpose of man. All that exists exists according to the will and wisdom of God and it is useless looking for another final end whatever.²⁸⁸ This understanding enables man to cope with the problem of evil, the real cause and the extent of evil in the sublunar existence. The ignorance of this truth has led the multitude and certain “learned people,” Maimonides mentions a famous physician and philosopher Razi²⁸⁹, to believe that there exists more evil than good in the universe.

The reason for this whole mistake lies in the fact that this ignoramus and those like him among the multitude consider that which exists only with reference to a human

²⁸⁶ For a deeper research on man’s place in the universe in the medieval Jewish philosophy, consult: Norman Lamm, “Man’s Position in the Universe: A Comparative Study of the Views of Saadia Gaon and Maimonides,” in *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, vol. 55, 3, (1965), pp 208-234.

²⁸⁷ *Dux Neutorum*, lib.III, cap.XIII, fol.78: “Non decipias animam tuam ut putes quod caeli et angeli non fuerunt entes nisi propter nos. Iam enim fecerunt nos scire comparationem nostri gradus...Cum vero consideraveris substantiam eius et substantiam coelorum : et stellarum et intelligentiarum abstractarum : tunc intelliges veritatem : et scies quod homo est perfectior et nobilior omnibus quae possint inveniri in hac materia. Sed cum eius esse comparaverimus esse coelorum, quanto magis esse intelligentiarum separatarum, erit vilissimum omnino : » Cf *Guide* III, 13, p 455.

²⁸⁸ *Ibid*: “Necesse autem habemus credere quod universum esse est propter intentionem Creatoris secundum voluntatem suam, neque quaeremus aliam rationem in finem in hoc ullo modo: sicut nec quaeremus finem sui esse: ita non quaeremus finem voluntatis suae ex qua renovata sunt omnia nova secundum quod sunt. » Cf *Guide* III, 13, p 454f.

²⁸⁹ Shlomo Pines notes that Abu Bakr Muhammad Ibn Zakariyya al-Razi (died between 923 and 932), known as the Rhazes by the Latin West, was a famous physician and philosopher who attacked religion based on prophetic revelation. Cf *Guide* III, 12, p 441, n 3. For a detailed note on this physician that attracted the wrath of Maimonides, refer to the “Translator’s Introduction to the Guide,” pp cxxxi-cxxxii.

individual. Every ignoramus imagines that all that exists exists with a view to his individual sake... And if something happens to him that is contrary to what he wishes, he makes the trenchant judgment that all that exists is an evil. However, if man considered and represented to himself that which exists and knew the smallness of his part in it, the truth would become clear and manifest to him.²⁹⁰

Maimonides goes on to enumerate three kinds of evil that befall man: (i) that which nature does to man in terms of generation and corruption; (ii) that which men do to one another in terms of domination, raping and murder; and (iii) that which man does to himself in terms of sloth and vice. They all fall within the category of things that man terms evil and not things that are evil in themselves. We may call these evils natural, social and moral evils.

2.4.1 Evils as a result of Matter

Matter enters into the natural constitution of things that are subject to generation and corruption. Because of this fact, Maimonides terms all evils that arise as a result of matter's composition of things, natural evil. They are natural because they come from matter, the natural constituent of things. Among the evils caused by matter are weakness, infirmities, deformity, natural afflictions, passionate disorders, moral sin and death. These befall man because of his being endowed with matter.²⁹¹ Such evils could come to man because of certain changes in the natural elements such as air pollution, fire storm, thunderbolts, and earthquakes. Maimonides quotes the respectable authority of Galen to support his thinking that man is subject to the imperfections of matter.

²⁹⁰*Dux Neutorum*, lib.III, cap.XIII, fol.76: «Causa vero huius erroris est quod iste stultus et similes ei in gentibus, non considerat in entibus nisi uno homine solummodo. Et quilibet talis stultus opinatur quod universum esse est propter ipsum : quod nihil aliud est nisi ipse. Et cum accidit in his quae spectant ad ipsum contrarium voluntatis suae, deficit et dicit quod universum esse malum est. Si autem consideraret homo universum esse : et intelligeret quam parva pars est homo universi esse : tunc videret veritatem et cognosceret quod errores isti : » Cf *Guide* III, 12, p 442.

²⁹¹*Ibid* : « Primus modus est mala quae accidunt homini ex parte generationis et corruptionis ex parte materiae : ex cuius parte contingunt homini casus et infirmitates in principio creationis. » Cf *Guide* III, 12, p 443.

Do not set your mind on the vain thought that it is possible that out of menstrual blood and sperm there should be generated a living being that does not die, is not subject to pain, is in perpetual motion, or is as brilliant as the sun.²⁹²

The logical conclusion of this type of reasoning, and the conclusion which Maimonides does not shy away from accepting, is that this type of evil must necessarily exist because the condition for its existence is implanted in nature by God. There is no escaping from it. And it doesn't seem there is much man can do to prevent it. This raises the legitimate question why God should create a state of affairs conducive to evil when, as omnipotent, He could have done otherwise. Or is it impossible for God to divest matter of its inherent imperfection? Confronted with this question, Maimonides examines what God can do and not do in his discussion of the possible and the impossible. According to Maimonides, all men of speculation agree to the existence of a class of impossible things, for example, "the coming together of contraries at the same instant and at the same place and the transformation of substances, I mean the transformation of a substance into an accident and of an accident into a substance, or the existence of a corporeal substance without there being an accident in it."²⁹³ Those things are logically impossible and not even an all powerful being can make them possible. It goes with saying that God cannot bring into existence another deity like Himself nor become a body, nor even annihilate Himself. In more obvious cases as to whether God can bring into existence an accident that exists alone without a substratum, or whether He can create a corporeal thing "out of no matter whatever," the philosophers consider all of them impossible whereas the Mutazilites assumed the former to be possible while Maimonides considers the latter to be possible. Maimonides by these examples is saying that there are things that even God cannot do or change; the ability to make matter such that it ceases to bring about generation and corruption is one of such things. According to Maimonides, the "power to bring them about cannot be ascribed to the deity. The fact that He does not change them signifies neither inability nor deficiency of power on His part."²⁹⁴ Such things belong to the class of the impossible and God cannot do what is logically impossible.

²⁹² Ibid : « Non decipias animam tuam in vanitate quod invenias animal in mundo ex spermate et sanguine quod non moriatur : vel quod non doleat : ...quod motus eius non sit sempiternus : ...quod luceat sicut Sol. » Cf *Guide* III, 12, p 444.

²⁹³ Ibid. lib.III, cap.XVI, fol.79 : « Verbi gratia, coniunctio duorum contrariorum in eodem subiecto: et conversio substantiae in accidens: et accidentis in substantiam : vel esse substantiae corporeae posse inveniri sine accidenti : » Cf *Guide* III, 15, pp 459-460.

²⁹⁴ Ibid : « nec est dicendum de Creatore quod habet potentiam super illa : nec est istud defectus eius quod ei convenit, nec diminutio potentiae suae quia non fecerit ut essent. » Cf *Guide* III, 15, p 461.

Thus the mere fact of having a material constitution requires that we be subject to generation and corruption and all the pains that accompany it. Against the ignoramus and those like him who think that the occurrence of evils in the world is more frequent than the occurrence of good, Maimonides responds that this class of evils occurs very seldom and that most human beings are born normal except in rare cases of accident.

2.4.2 Social Evils (Evils Inflicted upon Others)

These are evils that men inflict upon one another as in the case of tyrannical domination of others. Maimonides cites that this class of evil is more frequent than the first because of obvious reasons. As a being meant to live in society, this evil arises out of social contact and friction and sometimes, it cannot be avoided. In every social unit, Maimonides notes that people should be regarded according to “their various states with respect to which they are indubitably either like domestic animals or like beasts of prey.”²⁹⁵ Since not even the most perfect and solitary man can avoid some form of social contact that may arise because of his own personal needs, the best one can do to keep safe is to avoid injury from those of them who are harmful “like the beasts of prey,” and to obtain some benefits from those who are sociable “like domestic animals.”²⁹⁶ This evil is not even widespread and can only be common in the case of widespread wars. Wars of this type do not even happen very often. However, when evil of this class takes place, “the wronged man has no device against them.”²⁹⁷ In a certain sense, this type of evil may also be considered ‘necessary’ since it enters into the nature of social living, that there may originate social contact and friction as a result of human needs.

²⁹⁵ Ibid. lib.II, cap.XXXVII, fol.64 : «Est etiam ei necessarium ut cognoscat homines secundum suas diversitates: secundum quasi ipsi sunt sine dubio : qua cupiditas eius est sicut bestia mala, vel serpens : » Cf *Guide* II, 36, p 372.

²⁹⁶ Ibid : « cui cum obviaverit vir bonus, non cogitat nisi qualiter evadere possit a malitia ipsius : nisi forte velit aliquam utilitatem consequi ab ipsa in aliqua suarum necessitatum. » Cf *Guide* II, 36, p 372.

²⁹⁷ Ibid. lib.III, cap.XIII, fol.76 : « Sed homo cui vis inferitur non potest ea repellere : » Cf *Guide* III, 12, p 444.

2.4.3 Moral Evils (Self-Inflicted Evils)

These are evils that man inflicts upon himself out of his own doing. Unfortunately, this evil happens in most cases and is much more common than the evil of the second type. We call it moral because of that quality of choice and because man is solely blamable for bringing it upon himself. They are constituted by vices that could lead to both physical ills and spiritual or moral ills. In the definition of Maimonides:

This kind is consequent upon all vices, I mean concupiscence for eating, drinking, and copulation, and doing these things with excess in regard to quantity or irregularity or when the quality of the foodstuff is bad.²⁹⁸

Spiritual or moral ills affect the soul in two ways: in the first way because the soul is a corporeal faculty, any alteration in the body constituents affect the moral qualities of the soul. Secondly, once the soul is affected by vain pleasures, it becomes habituated in its desire of inordinate passions and things superfluous that are unnecessary either for the preservation of the individual or for the preservation of the species. Because such desires are superfluous, unnecessary and insatiable, men become sad by their inability to attain them and often expose themselves to great ‘dangers such as arise in sea voyages and the service of kings with the aim of obtaining these unnecessary luxuries.’²⁹⁹ Instead of making use of their reason, they follow their imaginations and not being able to obtain their desires, they blame God. It is not to be forgotten that Maimonides blames precisely the bodily faculty of imagination which is also called “the evil impulse,” for leading man astray into moral transgressions.

²⁹⁸ Ibid : « Species autem illa cohaeret omnibus malis moribus scilicet multae concupiscentiae cibi et potus et aliorum similium. » Cf *Guide* III, 12, p 445.

²⁹⁹ Ibid: “De praedictis additamentis non necessariis: et propter multa talia committit animam suam periculis magnis...regibus serviendo. Fons autem omnium istorum est ut consequatur superflua praedicta et pluribus illorum non indiget. » Cf *Guide* III, 12, p 446. See Maimonides’ comment on Aristotle’s theory of chance: “If, as he states, the foundering of a ship and the drowning of those who were in it ... are due to pure chance, the fact that the people went on board ... is, according to our opinion, not due to chance, but to divine will in accordance with the deserts of those people as determined in His judgments.” *Guide* III, 17, p 472. This could still come into Maimonides’s interpretation of providence.

All this follows imagination, which is also in true reality the *evil impulse*. For every deficiency of reason or character is due to the action of the imagination or consequent upon its action.³⁰⁰

Imagination is the voice of the body that leads man against the voice of reason. It epitomizes the havoc that matter untamed by form, could wreck in man. And it is actually this that leads to indulgence in bodily excesses as explained above. Maimonides would return again to the part imagination plays in the enigma of evil and providence, with particular reference to the situation of a 'just man' Job. The solution to this type of evil is for man to move away from imagination, and activate his intellect, that is, turn to that end for which he is intended as man, namely, apprehension.³⁰¹ The proper use of intelligence helps man decipher what is necessary and vanquish what is superfluous.

3.0 Aquinas on Matter, Privation and Evil

From our earlier studies, we have seen the enormous philosophical problems that Aquinas would be confronted with. The First Principle of all things, the One in the philosophy of Plotinus, is accredited with originating matter that is considered the absolute evil. Maimonides in his treatment of the issue considers matter just like Plotinus, as evil and the cause of evil in the physical world. The logical conclusion is that God is the ultimate cause of evil since matter the cause of evil, is originated from Him. A better treatment of this thorny issue would differentiate Aquinas from his illustrious predecessors. Aquinas then must try to come to terms with some complicated philosophical problems that attack directly the perfection and the goodness of the Creator. Is matter created by God? Is matter evil and the cause of evil in the physical world? If not, what is evil? What is its ontological status? What is the cause of evil? Because we do not have any concrete evidence that Aquinas directly consulted the *Dux Neutrorum* of Maimonides while developing his ideas on evil especially as is found in the *De Malo*, our attempt in this section will be to compare the ideas of Maimonides with those of Aquinas. Where necessary, we

³⁰⁰Ibid. lib.II, cap.XIII, fol.46: "Haec autem tria contingunt eis: quia sequuntur imaginationem quae est creatura mala vere. Omnis namque mos defectum patiens, qui est in sermone, vel in aliis operationibus corporis, est operatio imaginationis, vel sequitur ipsam. » Cf *Guide* II, 12, p 280.

³⁰¹ Ibid: "Et propter hoc possuerunt finem suum illud propter quod facti sunt homines scilicet apprehensionem intellectus." Cf *Guide* III, 12, p 446.

shall try to present an interpretation that Aquinas would do were he to have consulted Maimonides on the given topic of discussion.

Aquinas's major approach will be to determine the place of matter and evil in existence and that is why the question "what is evil?" would lead him to the metaphysical answer of evil as a privation.³⁰² This definition came from Augustine³⁰³ for whom it represented a fundamental breakthrough since it is a much sought solution to the problem of evil. The Manicheans had posited two eternal principles—good and evil—as responsible respectively, for the goods and the evils in the world. But under the influence of Plotinus, Augustine came to realize that evil is not a substance. Whatever is substance has an ontological status. As Augustine notes in his *Confessions*: "I was ignorant and had not yet learnt that no substance is evil."³⁰⁴ Without a proper grasp of Aquinas's philosophy of being progressing from matter, privation and form to substance, we cannot begin to understand what it means when he defines evil as a privation and denies it an ontological status. God is the giver of 'being' and if evil has no 'being,' how do we sustain the logical implication of Plotinus's and Maimonides's metaphysics that evil derives ultimately from God, the First Principle of all reality? Aquinas would perhaps, prefer to look for the cause of evil elsewhere. In this exposition, we have a problem of choosing which text of Aquinas to begin with. This is because he repeats his treatment of various issues in his numerous works containing parallel passages, and most of the time of equal value. This is very much the case in his various commentaries and interpretations of Aristotelian corpus. From whichever text we begin, we note however, that we are aiming at arriving at the same goal that is, giving a clear and correct interpretation of St. Thomas Aquinas on the topic at stake. That is our guiding principle. Our point of departure is the analysis of change in terms of three principles which have to be understood differently in relation to what comes to be, two *per se* principles matter and

³⁰² De malo q.1, a.1 : « alio modo potest intelligi ipsum malum, et hoc non est aliquid, sed ipsa privatio alicuius particularis boni. » All the English translation, we have taken from « *On Evil* » translated by Richard Regan, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).

³⁰³ Augustin, *Les Confessions de Saint Augustin*, 3.7.12 : « quia non noueram malum non esse nisi priuationem boni usque ad quod omnino non est. » « Parce que je ne savais pas que le mal n'est que la privation du bien, privation dont le dernier terme est le néant. » dans « Œuvres Complètes de Saint Augustin, » Traductions françaises sur la direction de M. Raulx, Bar-le-Duc, 1869 <http://www.abbaye-saint-benoit.ch/saints/augustin/index.htm>

³⁰⁴ Augustin, *Les Confessions de Saint Augustin*, 4.15.24 : « non enim noueram neque didiceram nec ullam substantiam malum esse » « J'ignorais et n'avais pas encore appris que nulle substance n'est le mal, » dans « Œuvres Complètes de Saint Augustin, » Traductions françaises sur la direction de M. Raulx, Bar-le-Duc, 1869 <http://www.abbaye-saint-benoit.ch/saints/augustin/index.htm>

form which go into the composition of being and one *per accidens* principle privation, which can be known only in the enduring subject of change, matter.

3.1 The Nature of Matter:

The teaching of Aquinas on matter is heavily influenced by Aristotle. In its strong lines, Aquinas closely reproduces what the Greek philosopher has said about generation and corruption. In his ‘*On the Principles of Nature*,’ St. Thomas starts his discussion by examining what matter is and the two general ways of referring to matter. These follow upon the two general ways a being can be: substantial or accidental. Substantial being exists *simpliciter* while accidental being exists *secundum quid*. Aquinas opens his discussion by bringing to light, the difference between what exists in potency and what exists in act.

Note that a certain thing can be and is not, but that something is. That which can be is said to be potency; that which already is, is said to be act.³⁰⁵

Aquinas uses the examples of human body parts in generation, to illustrate what he means by existence in potency and in act. The sperm or ovum is in potency to be man, a substantial being. Man can be in potency to be either white or black. Whiteness or blackness enjoys only accidental existence that Aquinas describes as ‘existence *secundum quid*.’ Then he specifies the nature of matter:

Just as that which is in potency to substantial being, as that which is in potency to accidental being can be called matter, like sperm is of man, and man is of white.³⁰⁶

Both of these two potencies are called matter but there is a clear difference between them. According to Aquinas, the matter that is in potency to substantial existence is called ‘matter from which’ (*materia ex qua*), whereas the matter that is in potency to accidental existence is called

³⁰⁵ *De principiis naturae* c.1, line 1-4 : “Nota quod quoddam potest esse licet non sit, quoddam vero est. Illud quod potest esse dicitur esse potentia, illud quod iam est, dicitur esse actu. » All the English translations of this text is ours.

³⁰⁶ *De principiis naturae* c.1, line 12-16: “Tam illud quod est in potentia ad esse substantiale quam illud quod est in potentia ad esse accidentale potest dici materia, sicut sperma hominis, et homo albedinis.”

‘matter in which’ (*materia in qua*). In a pure Aristotelian distinction, Aquinas names the matter related to the substantial being ‘prime matter’ and the matter related to accidental being ‘subject.’ From Aristotle, we learn that prime matter is “the first subject of each thing, from which, since it is intrinsic, something which is not *per accidens* comes into being.”³⁰⁷ Although, prime matter is a real substantial principle, it does not have an independent existence and cannot be known in itself except through its form. In his commentary on Aristotle’s metaphysics, Aquinas notes:

Matter does not of itself have any traits by which it may be known, since the principle of knowing is form. But it is known by means of an analogy; for just as sensible substances of this kind are related to artificial forms, [...] so also is first matter related to sensible forms.³⁰⁸

Prime matter is pure potency. That is its very nature. The only reality it enjoys is that of a potential being.³⁰⁹ Being in potency “as the subject of form and privation, it is called prime matter by reason of this that before itself, there is no other matter.”³¹⁰ Being a principle of nature does not give prime matter a determinate individual existence outside of another principle of nature, form. It is called ‘being’ only in the sense that it is in potency to form. How can something be in potency and yet enjoy some sort of being? That is a question that would occupy us when we come to examine the origin of matter.

3.1.1 Matter in a Composite:

Aquinas insists that the only thing that can be known is what is in ‘act.’ For a potential principle to be realized there must be an actual principle that brings it into act. And when the potency passes into act, it is only then that it can be known and be defined since it has gone into a composition. Matter is a potential principle that looks to form for its actualization. It is this

³⁰⁷ Aristotle, *Physics* 1.9.192a31.

³⁰⁸ *In duodecim libros Metaphysicorum Aristotelis Expositio* (hereafter *In Meta.*), VII, lect. 2, n.1296, translated by John Rowan, (Chicago: Henry Regnery Comp., 1961) p 501.

³⁰⁹ Lang, David P., “The Thomistic Doctrine of Prime Matter” in *Laval Théologique et Philosophique*, 54/2, (1998), p 371. He gives a very useful exposition of Aquinas’ teaching on matter. pp 367-385.

³¹⁰ *De principiis naturae* c.2, line 74-78 : “Ipsa autem materia quae intelligitur sine qualibet forma et privatione, sed subiecta formae et privationi, dicitur materia prima, propter hoc quod ante ipsam non est alia materia. Et hoc etiam dicitur ulye.”

composite of matter and form that gives rise generally to being. Our emphasis in this sub-section will be on the other principles of nature that make up with matter, the composite that is called being. We shall try as well to determine what Aquinas means by ‘being.’ But these key notions of matter, form and composite are clearly distinguished by Aquinas. In one of such distinctions in his commentary on the Aristotle’s *De Anima*, Aquinas notes:

Matter is that which of itself is not a determinate thing but is only in potency to be a particular thing. Form is that by which it is already a particular thing in act. Substance is the composite, which is a particular thing ... complete in being and species ... There is then, a difference between matter and form, because matter is being in potency, while form is entelechy, that is, act. Through it matter is actualized. The composite which results is being in act.³¹¹

In that composite, there is an act-potency relation whereby form as act perfects matter and the latter as potency limits form. Form as the act, exercises some sort of primacy over matter since it is only by form that matter can be known and explained. Form is the principle of existence whether it is substantial or accidental existence. Aquinas gives us again the example of man who, though white in potency becomes actually white through the form of whiteness. That is accidental existence thanks to the accidental form of whiteness. Sperm is man in potency but becomes actually man through the soul, which is the substantial form of man. And thus Aquinas concludes:

Because form makes to be in act, form is therefore said to be act. That however, which makes substantial being in act is substantial form; and that which makes accidental being in act is called accidental form.³¹²

Form is not to be conceived as if existing anywhere alone as Plato would think, but, is rather always individualized in its union with matter. It is the act by which, according to Gilson, “the matter is made to be the matter of such or such a determined substance. The proper role of the

³¹¹ *In Aristotelis Librum de Anima* (hereafter *In De Anima*), II, lect.1, n.215, translated by Herman Reith, in *An Introduction to Philosophical Psychology*, (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, Prentice-Hall, 1956) pp 46-47.

³¹² *De principiis naturae* c.1, line 42-46 : “Et quia forma facit esse in actu, ideo forma dicitur esse actus. Quod autem facit actu esse substantiale est forma substantialis, et quod facit actu esse accidentale, dicitur forma accidentalis. »

form is, therefore, to constitute substance as substance.”³¹³ The composite that is substance, is a complete whole that is capable of being given a definition. This means that it can be known positively as not existing in another. Thus understood, to explain a being as substance is to say why this being is “what it is” (*quid est*) and not what makes it to exist. To the extent that substance is expressed positively in a definition, it is called “essence” or “quiddity.” Aristotelian physics would get to the height of essence but never to the height of existence. For Aristotle, being is taken for granted. But not for Aquinas who would go on to inquire “that by which a thing is.” Oliva Blanchette brings out clearly this major point of interest in the quest for the meaning of being in Aquinas.

Matter and substantial form as ontological principles, pertain only to the order of essence and not to the order of existence. They account for things that come to be and cease to be in their substance, and not in their *be* or in the *act* of their being.³¹⁴

In relation to “that by which a thing is,” form ceases to appear as the ultimate determination of being. Over and above form which makes a thing be such a being belonging to a given determined species, Aquinas therefore places ‘esse’ or ‘the act of being’ which is “that by which a thing is” and is constituted into an existent being. It is thus ‘esse’ or ‘the act of being’ which constitutes substance into an existent being. This explication implies then twofold composition in finite beings, a composition that further reveals the potential nature of substance.

In substances composed of matter and form, there is a twofold composition of act and potentiality: the first, of the substance itself which is composed of matter and form; the second, of the substance thus composed, and being; and this composition can be said to be of *that which is* and being, or of *that which is* and *that by which a thing is*.³¹⁵

Substance in its need of ‘esse’ exists in the mode of potency as receiving and being perfected by ‘esse,’ its act of being. It is the same relation of potency-act that exists in the composite of matter and form. Each and everything is in act through having ‘esse.’ As Gilson observes, “substance

³¹³ Gilson, E., *The Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas*, translated by L.K Shook, (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, 1956) p 32.

³¹⁴ Blanchette, O., *Philosophy of Being: A Reconstructive Essay in Metaphysics*, (Washington: the Catholic University of America Press, 2003) p 334.

³¹⁵ SCG II, 54, 9: “In substantiis autem compositis ex materia et forma est duplex compositio actus et potentiae : prima quidem ipsius substantiae, quae componitur ex materia et forma ; secunda vero ex ipsa substantia iam composita et esse ; quae etiam potest dici ex *quod est* et esse ; vel ex *quod est* et *quo est*. »

exists by itself in this sense that whatever in it is, belongs to it by virtue of a single act of existing, and is accounted for by this act, as by the cause why it exists.”³¹⁶ Thus we arrive at the Thomistic conclusion that it is ‘esse’ which defines and gives value to being. Whatever has no ‘esse’ can not be said to have any existence in being. For outside of being, there is nothing.

3.1.2 The Origin of Matter:

While sketching the history of philosophical reflection on the origin of being, Aristotle notes and accepts the common opinion of the pre-Socratics, the philosophers of nature that *ex nihilo nihil fit*, (out of nothing comes nothing). That is their conviction when it comes to the origin and the nature of things. Anaxagoras posited as a principle an original mixture from which things came to be by combination and separation. Parmenides denied the reality of generation and corruption since being is one and nothing comes to be either from what is not nor from what already is. Aristotle calls matter the first principle and describes it as a being that, by virtue of its potential nature, is a medium between absolute non-being and being in act. He acknowledges that matter is ungenerated and incorruptible.³¹⁷ This common opinion of the early philosophers, backed by the respected authority of Aristotle, seems to make matter an ontological principle of reality existing in its own right independent of God, and exercising its own influence in the coming to be of things. It must be noted that Aquinas accepts as true, this common opinion of the early philosophers namely, that out of nothing comes nothing, as regards particular making of things; one that is made inasmuch as it is this being, for example, a man or a fire.³¹⁸ In natural agency, there is always a movement which necessitates an antecedent subject, matter, underlying the action. That is what obtains in ordinary generation. Restricted to this level of reality, the common opinion of the philosophers is correct. But when we consider the production of the total being in what is called creation; it is the conviction of Aquinas that the first philosophers did not attain to

³¹⁶ Gilson, E., *The Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas*, p 31.

³¹⁷ In Phys., lect. 9, 59: Quod etiam ab omnibus naturalibus philosophis supponebatur, quo scilicet ex nihilo nihil fit. (60) Ut enim non cogerentur ponere aliquid de novo fieri quod prius omnino non esset, posuerunt aliqui omnia prius extitisse : vel in aliquo uno confuso, sicut Anaxagora et Empedocles ; vel in aliquo principio materiali Et omnes hi decepti fuerunt quia nesciverunt distinguere inter potentiam et actum. Ens enim in potentia est quasi medium inter purum non ens et ens in actu.

³¹⁸ SCG II, 37, 2: « Communis enim philosophorum positio ponentium ex nihilo nihil fieri, ex quo prima ratio procedebat, veritatem habet secundum illud fieri quod ipsi considerabant. »

such an idea.³¹⁹ Creation has to do with a supernatural agent as a universal principle of all things. In his *Quaestiones Disputatae De Potentia Dei* (Disputed Questions on the Power of God), St. Thomas engages in some rational battles with the philosophers' opposition to the idea of something coming from nothing. The major point of contention is the idea of prime matter. It is said that every agent produces its like.³²⁰ God is pure Act and must thus produce what is in act. But matter is pure potency and thus cannot be made by God.³²¹ This seems to confirm the position of the early philosophers that whatever comes to be comes to be from an already existing subject. Does prime matter stand outside of God's creative causality? If it does, then God and prime matter would be two opposing principles neither of which comes from the other.³²² The major task of St. Thomas would be to show that prime matter does not stand outside of God's creative causality and does not, by that fact, constitute an opposing principle independent of God.

St. Thomas acknowledges that prime matter does not subsist in itself,³²³ and *ipso facto* cannot be created *per se*. Prime matter, as we have earlier seen in this section, enters into composition with the form to give a substance. It is only a subsistent being that can be said to be in act, and thus is the final terminus of creation. If matter with form, enter into the composition of a subsistent thing, it means that matter is produced in the substance, by God. "So we have to lay down that even primary matter is caused by the all-embracing cause of beings."³²⁴ But because we are talking of what cannot be positively expressed in a definition, St. Thomas finds an inclusive vocabulary that extends to all the components of a subsistent being. Thus matter, form and accident are said to be con-created with the subsistent being.

Properly speaking neither matter, nor form, nor accident are said to be made: but that which is made is the thing that subsists. For since to be made terminates in being, it belongs properly to that to which it belongs *per se* to be, namely a subsistent thing:

³¹⁹ SCG II, 37, 2: « Et hanc quidem factionem non attigerunt primi naturales, quorum erat communis sententia ex nihilo nihil fieri. » In the English translation, it is number 3.

³²⁰ SCG II, 20, 3: "eo quod omne agens agit sibi simile"

³²¹ De pot. 3, 1 obj. 12: "Omne autem agens agit secundum quod est in actu. Ergo nihil fit nisi quod est in actu. Sed materia prima non est in actu. Ergo fieri non potest, praecipue a Deo, qui est purus actus; »

³²² S. T 1a, q. 44, a.2, obj. 2: "Sed sicut primum principium activum est Deus, ita primum principium passivum est materia. Ergo Deus et materia prima sunt duo principia contra se invicem divisa, quorum neutrum est ab alio."

³²³ S. T 1a, q.7, a.2, ad 3: "Materia prima non existit in rerum natura per seipsam, cum non sit ens in actu, sed potentia tantum, unde magis est aliquid concreatum, quam creatum."

³²⁴ S. T 1a, q.44, a.2, ad 1: "Et sic oportet ponere etiam materiam primam causatam ab universali causa entium.

wherefore neither matter, nor form, nor accident are said properly speaking to be created, but to be concreated: whereas a subsistent thing, whatsoever it may be, is properly said to be created.³²⁵

Another way St. Thomas tries to explain the origin of matter is by describing it as a being in potency. “Prime matter in some way is, for it is potentially a being.”³²⁶ The very major reason for insisting on the ‘beingness’ of matter even if in a limited way, is to differentiate matter from non-being. Plato failed to make this distinction and classed matter and privation as nonbeings. That error is evident in Plotinus and came to its culmination when he identified matter as evil. Maimonides made a distinction between matter and privation but still identified matter with privation as evil. How does matter enjoy being since it is in potency? St. Thomas appeals to the notion of participation. Whatever is in potency has a very weak being and thus is not nonbeing. If this ‘weak being’ is taken away from it, matter disappears into nonbeing. This leads logically to the fact that even the weak ‘being’ it has received according to its proper mode, is received from a source different from itself. Matter participates in the nature of being. The essence of matter is not being. St. Thomas expresses it clearly by noting:

A thing whose essence is not its being, consequently, is not through its essence but by participation in something, namely being itself. But that which is through participation in something cannot be the first being, because prior to it is the being in which it participates in order to be.³²⁷

By participation, St. Thomas means “to take a part” of what belongs fully to the other. It means to have a “certain likeness to that which is said to be such by essence.”³²⁸ By the fact that matter has a “certain likeness to,” “a part” of what belongs to the cause shows how ontologically

³²⁵ De pot. 3, 1 ad 12: “... Unde neque materia neque forma neque accidens proprie dicuntur creari, sed concreari. Proprie autem creatur res subsistens, quaecumque sit.” The English text and the subsequent quotations is and will be taken from *On the Power of God*, literally translated by the English Dominican Fathers, (Eugene (Or): Wipf and Stock, 2004).

³²⁶ SCG II, 16, 12: « Materia prima aliquo modo est: quia est ens in potentia. »

³²⁷ SCG I, 22, 9: “Nulla igitur res cuius essentia non est suum esse, est per essentiam suam, sed participatione alicuius, scilicet ipsius esse. Quod autem est per participationem alicuius, non potest esse primum ens : quia id quod aliquid participat ad hoc quod sit, est eo prius. »

³²⁸ SCG I, 40, 3: « Quod per participationem dicitur aliquale, non dicitur tale nisi inquantum habet quandam similitudinem eius quod per essentiam dicitur : »

dependent matter is on the cause. By means of participation, St. Thomas shows how much intrinsically matter is created by God.

3.2 Privation:

We have earlier noted that there are three principles of change matter, form and privation. Matter and form are considered *per se* principles because they go into the composition of being. Matter as a substrate is the subject of change. It is not in act *per se*, but exists in potency towards being. Form, the other intrinsic principle, is considered the *terminus ad quem* of change. It is the point where change terminates in opposition to the *terminus a quo*, the point of departure of change which is privation. We borrow the example of a hot water as given by Oliva Blanchette.³²⁹ A hot water is thought to have become hot by going from cold to hot. At its initial point of departure, it was not hot. But the subject remained in potency to being hot. While, it makes that motion from coldness, the substrate that is water remains throughout the process. When it becomes hot, it has taken a new form of hotness. The composition of the two brings about hot water, something quite different from water and heat. There is another principle that goes into this composition, but a *per accidens* principle since it can be known only in the subject that changes. Aquinas explains that it is “a *per accidens* principle because actually it is coincident with matter.”³³⁰ This third *per accidens* principle of change is what is called privation. It is the opposite or the privation of what is to become. It is the *terminus a quo* of change. Let’s take for example the case of water. “What becomes hot is not just water, but water that was not hot.” And thus because of this opposite, “we speak of *coming to be from*, while we speak of the subject as that which *comes to be* with a new form.”³³¹ That explains why being cold or the privation of heat, along with the subject of becoming hot, that is water, is a principle of change. Matter is the subject to the form of what comes to be and also to the privation of that form. But matter should not be confused with privation for they are quite different.

Matter is clearly understood as being in potency. It is in a sense a positive principle since it is very close to being a thing in act just like a bronze is very close to being a statue. It is not in act since that can be true only of the form. Privation is the absence of what should be in a given

³²⁹ Blanchette, O., *Philosophy of Being: A Reconstructive Essay in Metaphysics*, p 257.

³³⁰ *De principiis naturae*, c.2, line 8-10: “Unde privatio dicitur esse principium non per se sed per accidens, quia scilicet concidit cum materia.”

³³¹ Blanchette, O., *Philosophy of Being: A Reconstructive Essay in Metaphysics*, p 259.

subject. It is considered as nonbeing not in the sense of absolute non existence but in the sense of a lack of what should be in a determined subject. This is the teaching that Aquinas takes into determining the reality of evil. Aquinas drives the teaching home by using as an example, the negativity that is blindness. We say the dragon does not see and we can also say that stones do not see. But not-seeing does not mean the same thing for the two species. Blindness cannot be said of stones because they are not apt to see, but it can be said of dragon. For a stone, blindness is not a privation since it is not in its nature to see. Thus Aquinas remarks that “privation is not said of a determined subject unless of that in which actually by origin, the *habitus* is to be; just as blindness is not said unless of those things which are born to see.”³³² Blindness like whiteness can be considered accidental being since its presence or absence, which must be in a determined subject, does not contribute to the essential composition of a being. Apart from that, privation is only a negation, an opposition, a nonbeing of what comes to be and it cannot in reality be a constitutive principle of being. It is only a *per accidens* principle as already explained above. In a brief summary given by Blanchette, we note:

Strictly speaking, privation is *per se* a negation of being, what Parmenides referred to as nonbeing in general and what we now refer to as determinate nonbeing. While we associate privations with matter as being in potency, matter itself is not privation ... but something positive constitutive of things that come to be in a new form.³³³

Compared to matter and form which are principles both in existence and in becoming, privation is only a principle in becoming. This is so because privation ceases the moment the ‘lack’ is accomplished by the presence of the form. Matter and form on the other hand provide the basis on which a thing is subject to movement and change, and also enter into the composition of that which is. What is composed of matter and form is good and perfect through the form. Aristotle in the book of the *Physics* describes form as ‘what is divine, best and desirable.’³³⁴ It is divine, best and desirable because it is in act and thus is a likeness of the divine that is Pure act. The form is the fulfillment and the perfection of the potency “since having potentiality is simply being ordained for actuality.” In the final analysis, matter being in potency, desires form as its

³³² *De principiis naturae* c.2, line 30-33: “Sed privatio non dicitur nisi de determinato subiecto, in quo scilicet natus est fieri habitus; sicut cecitas non dicitur nisi de hiis quae sunt nata videre. »

³³³ Blanchette, O., *Philosophy of Being: A Reconstructive Essay in Metaphysics*, p 297.

³³⁴ In I Phys., lect.15, 135: « Forma est quoddam divinum et optimum et appetibile. »

terminus. Form is a good for matter since the end of everything is its good. In his disputed questions on evil, Aquinas argues that whatever has the nature of potentiality has the nature of good since act to which potency looks to, is good. Prime matter by this fact of its potentiality is thus good.

Therefore, whatever has potentiality, from the very fact that it does, evidently has the nature of good. Therefore, every subject, even prime matter, insofar as it has potentiality regarding any perfection, by that very fact has the nature of good.³³⁵

Privation on the contrary, is an absence of form and hence, an evil in the sense that it expresses a lack of perfection or of goodness. By this reasoning, Aquinas distances himself from his predecessors (Plotinus³³⁶ and Maimonides), who think that matter is evil and introduces evil in the physical world. Plotinus precisely, identifies matter and privation and thereby, reinforces his account of matter as evil. Let us conclude then with Blanchette saying:

Matter, on the other hand, even as recipient of form is neither evil nor negation of form, but it is a positive desire, a dynamism or a potency for form and as such, is already good insofar as it already is potentially a principle of being.³³⁷

The goodness of matter has been confirmed and clearly distinguished from the evil of privation. There is however one question waiting to be resolved. How then do we describe evil as privation?

³³⁵ De malo q.1, a.2 : « Patet ergo quod id quod est in potentia, ex hoc ipso quod est in potentia, habet rationem boni. Omne ergo subiectum in quantum est in potentia respectu cuiuscumque perfectionis, etiam materia prima, ex hoc ipso quod est in potentia, habet boni rationem. »

³³⁶ Aquinas may not have had a direct and clear contact and knowledge of the work of Plotinus but suffice it to say that he may have got indirect knowledge of Plotinus through the tradition of Neo-platonism. According to the observation of Bonino, « il est vrai qu'il était difficile à saint Thomas d'identifier toujours cette source. D'une part, il en ignorait largement les textes fondateurs, en particulier ceux de Plotin, et d'autre part, les connaissances médiévales en matière d'histoire de la philosophie ne permettaient guère de soupçonner ni l'importance du néo-platonisme ni l'ampleur de son opposition à l'aristotélisme. Le néo-platonisme médiéval est donc avant tout un ensemble diffus de thèmes qui présentent un air de famille. Ces thèmes sont véhiculés par trois sources principales où s'alimente le néo-platonisme thomasiens : la source latine (Augustin, Boèce), la source grecque (Denys) et la source arabe (Avicenne ; *De causis*). » Cf Serge-Thomas Bonino, *Thomas d'Aquin. De la Vérité ou La Science en Dieu*, (Fribourg : Editions Universitaires Fribourg, 1996) p 80.

³³⁷ Blanchette, O., *Philosophy of Being: A Reconstructive Essay in Metaphysics*, p 297.

3.2.1 Evil as Privation

Aquinas approaches the question of evil from the point of view of the world as created and governed by a perfectly good God who is also omnipotent and omniscient. At the background of his thought is the conviction that nothing evil can come from a good and provident God. It could be said that Aquinas tries to understand God in the face of the evil in the world metaphysically. He talks about the conceptual aspects of evil-the nature and the cause of evil, and seems not to have addressed the ‘existential’ or the ‘concrete’ dimensions of evil. That perhaps may explain why Aquinas’s treatment of evil is seen as ‘abstract’ and ‘out of touch’ with reality. Some even say that his contribution to the problem of evil is negative. The major point here would be determining what reality means in Aquinas’s metaphysical world view and whether evil has a part in that reality.

In Aquinas’s metaphysical worldview, whatever has being ‘*esse*’ is said to be real and good. Act, as we have earlier seen, is perfection and is good in its very concept. Potency inasmuch as it is ordained to act, possesses goodness and being. But evil is neither act nor potency, and *ipso facto* cannot be good or real in the sense of being. And evil is not an essence where essence means “that through which and in which the thing has existence.”³³⁸ From our earlier treatment of matter above in its composite status, we made it clear how form is ‘that through which and in which’ matter receives its existence and together with form, constitutes a substance. Evil neither has form since it is its complete absence, nor does it exist as substance does. Aquinas following in the tradition of Augustine calls evil a privation of being in the sense that it represents an absence of goodness or perfection in a particular subject. Maimonides also called evil a privation.³³⁹ In spite of the influence of Augustine on Thomas Aquinas,³⁴⁰ this latter distinguishes his doctrine from that of Augustine on both conceptual and analytical levels.³⁴¹ On the conceptual level, Aquinas’s definition of evil surpasses that of Augustine. To define evil as a mere privation of good, that is the absence of being is not completely correct. It must be shown to be a privation of good that a subject should have for its perfection, the absence of which

³³⁸ *De Ente et Essentia* c.1, line 50-52 : « Sed essentia dicitur secundum quod per eam et in ea ens habet esse. »

³³⁹ *Dux Neutorum*, lib.III, cap.XI, fol.75 : “quod omnia mala sunt privationes » Cf *Guide* III, 10, p 439.

³⁴⁰ Steel is arguing however, that in answering the question touching on the ontological status of evil, it is from Avicenna that Thomas finds the main inspiration for his understanding of evil as privation. Cf Carlos Steel, “Avicenna and Thomas Aquinas on Evil,” in Jules Janssens et al, eds., *Avicenna and His Heritage*, (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2002) pp 171-196.

³⁴¹ Kuolt, Martin, *Thomas d’Aquin : Du Mal*, (Paris : L’Harmattan, 2009) p 43.

renders it imperfect. The examples that Aquinas would give in his exposition, would further expose the inadequacy of the Augustinian definition.

In fact, evil is simply a privation of something which a subject is entitled by its origin to possess and which it ought to have, as we have said. Such is the meaning of the word “evil” among all men. Now, privation is not an essence; it is rather, a negation in a substance.³⁴²

However, Aquinas makes it clear that not every negation or absence of good is evil. When the absence of good is taken negatively, it is not evil. To take every absence of good as evil, in the light of Augustine’s definition, means to take whatever does not exist as evil. For example a flying man is good but does not exist, and therefore it is evil. It would also mean that anything that does not have the good belonging to something else is evil. For instance, a man would be evil who does not have the strength of a lion.³⁴³ But the absence of good is evil only when it is taken in a privative sense, as an absence of a good that ought and should be in a given subject. Sight is a good that perfects man. When this good is lacking in man, he is said to be deprived of the sense of sight, and this privation is what is called evil. But the same lack is not an evil for a stone because it is not in the nature of stone to see. When we come to locating the cause of evil, we shall still find out that Augustine’s solution is limited and unsatisfactory. The analysis of Aquinas is more enriching and satisfactory than what Augustine has left us. The later correctly identifies the will as the cause of moral evil in man, but fails to explain how the human will could forgo a superior good for an inferior good. For him, the cause of the deficient will is non-being. Aquinas will build on that and correctly identifies good as deficient, as the cause of the deficiency in the human will. This richness in analogy is a proof of better methodology and more organized noetics found in Aquinas. The integration of Aristotle in his treatment of evil has been identified as the springboard that holds Aquinas’s treatment relevant not only to the needs of his time but also to the needs of today.³⁴⁴

³⁴² SCG III, 7, 2: “Malum enim, ut dictum est [cap.6], nihil est aliud quam privatio eius quod quis natus est et debet habere : sic enim apud omnes est usus huius nominis malum. Privatio autem non est aliqua essentia, sed est negatio in substantia [III Metaph., II, 8 ; 1004a]. »

³⁴³ S. T 1a, q.48, a.3 : « iterum quod quaelibet res esset mala, ex hoc quod non habet bonum alterius rei, utpote quod homo esse talus, quia non habet velocitatem capreae, vel fortitudinem leonis. »

³⁴⁴ Maritain, Jaques, *Distinguer pour unir ou Les degrés du savoir*, (Paris : Declées de Brouwer, 1935) p 609-610 : « Un organisme qui n’arrive pas à se constituer, comment pourrait-il croître ? C’est précisément parce qu’il s’est

St. Thomas tells us that there are two ways in which something can be called evil: one is absolutely and the other is in a particular respect.³⁴⁵ Something is evil absolutely when it consists in the privation of a particular perfection that a subject ought and should have. Blindness is absolute evil for a man because it deprives him of the vision of sight that is required for his perfection as man. Evil in a particular respect is not evil as such; “rather, we call evil in a particular respect what befalls something because it is deprived of a good that is required for the perfection of something else, not one that is required for its own perfection.”³⁴⁶ The example that St. Thomas gives is fire that is deprived of the form of water, which is required for the perfection not of fire itself, but of water. In that case, fire is evil for water, not evil as such. It is not very clear why St. Thomas even called this later example, a form of evil albeit, in a particular respect. Unless he means to say that evil is also a privation in a given subject, of a good that is required for the perfection of something else.³⁴⁷ Thus, evil as a privation has got two meanings: when it is evil absolutely and when it is evil in a particular respect. Later in the same text, St. Thomas tells us that even privation is also of two kinds: a privation of the perfection of being (*esse*) itself (like death which is the privation of life and blindness which is the privation of sight), and a privation that is inductive of such lacks of perfections (for e.g., illness or ophthalmia which induces death or blindness in a being).³⁴⁸ Privation and ipso facto evil is nothing positive, a mere absence of being in a thing capable of having it.

Evil is not absolute non-being since in a certain way, it could be called a being. St. Thomas like Aristotle gives two nuances of being.

In one way, being means the essence of a thing, and thus it falls into the ten categories; so taken, no privation can be called a being. In another way, being means the truth in a

constitué comme science, avec un outillage systématique bien défini (celui d’Aristote...) que le thomisme, inachevé lui aussi mais en un autre sens, est capable de progresser et de s’accroître sans fin. »

³⁴⁵ De malo q.1, a.1, ad.1: « quod aliquid dicitur esse malum dupliciter: uno quidem modo simpliciter, alio vero modo secundum quid. »

³⁴⁶ De malo q.1, a.1, ad.1: « Sed secundum quid dicitur esse malum quod non est malum secundum se, sed alicuius; quia scilicet non privatur aliquo bono quod sit de debito suae perfectionis, sed quod est de debito perfectionis alterius rei, sicut in igne est privatio formae aquae, quae non est de debito perfectionis ignis, sed de debito perfectionis aquae; unde ignis non est secundum se malus, sed est malus aquae. »

³⁴⁷ It does seem that it is actually what St. Thomas means to say. For example, in SCG III, ch.6, 2, he repeats a similar statement: “Thus, for a man to be deprived of a hand is an unqualified evil, but for matter to be deprived of the form of air is not an unqualified evil, though it is an evil for the air.”

³⁴⁸ De malo q.1, a.1.ad.2: “Sed duplex est privation: una quidem quae est in privatum esse, ut mors et caecitas ; alia vero quae est in privari, ut aegritudo, quae est via in mortem, et ophthalmia, quae est via in caecitatem. »

judgment; in this meaning, privation is called a being, inasmuch as something is said to be deprived by virtue of a privation.³⁴⁹

In the second sense of being, evil is said to exist. For example, blindness is the absence of sight in a given subject that should have it. As blindness is not an additional reality to the eyes, but a defect to the eyes, evil is taken to ‘exist’ in the same way that blindness exists in the eye; as a defect or an absence in the eye. Evil does not in this way enjoy any independent reality away from the given subject in which it inheres. When we say that there is a hole in the wall, there is a truth in the judgment if the hole is seen in the wall. But the hole does not and cannot exist independently of the wall. The hole is there due to an absence of the part of the wall that should be there. It is in this sense that privation, absence or evil is said to be. St. Thomas gives two quick measures for every being: does it exist? And what is it?

We speak of being in the second way as a response to the question “Does it exist?” and then evil, just like blindness, exists. Nonetheless, evil is not an entity, since being an entity signifies both the response to the question “Does it exist?” and the response to the question “What is it?”³⁵⁰

As a conceptual being verified by means of judgment, evil answers ‘yes’ to the question ‘*an est*’ (does it exist)?” But the same cannot be assumed of the second question “what is it?” This is simply because, the question ‘*quid est*,’ (what is it) signifies a substance, the essence or the quiddity of a thing. According to the explanation given by Gilson, ‘substance, essence, quiddity refers to a concrete ontological unit taken in itself, then taken as susceptible of definition, and finally taken as signified by the definition.’³⁵¹ Evil does not qualify here because it is not a real entity. Only being in the first sense qualifies because it is posited in reality.

³⁴⁹ SCG III, 9, 6 : « *Ens enim dupliciter dicitur, ut Philosophus in Metaphysica* [lib. IV, VII, 4,5; 1017a] docet. Uno modo, secundum quod significat essentiam rei, et dividitur per decem praedicamenta: et sic nulla privatio potest dici ens. Alio modo, secundum quod significat veritatem compositionis: et sic malum et privatio dicitur ens, inquantum privatione dicitur aliquid esse privatum. »

³⁵⁰ De malo q.1, a.1 ad.19: “Alio modo secundum quod respondetur ad quaestionem an est; et sic malum est, sicut et caecitas est. Non tamen malum est aliquid; quia esse aliquid non solum significat quod respondetur ad quaestionem an est, sed etiam quod respondetur ad quaestionem quid est. »

³⁵¹ Gilson, E., *The Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas*, p 30.

3.2.2 Is Evil a Cause?

In his *Physics*, Aristotle says “knowledge is the object of our inquiry and we do not think that we know a thing till we understand the ‘why’ of it.”³⁵² The notion of cause as that which explains the ‘why’ of the other, presupposes the idea of being, the idea of an agent. A cause presupposes the idea of a positive being that exercises a positive influence in some way on the existence of things.³⁵³ But evil is not an existent in itself and cannot be an agent. Is there any way of explaining evil as a cause since the absence of being in a given subject is an effect of evil? That explains why causation should claim a prominent place in any complete metaphysical enterprise. It was Aristotle who first enumerated four ways of being a cause: material, formal, moving or agent, and final cause.

In one sense then, (i) that out of which a thing comes to be and which persists, is called ‘cause,’ e.g. the bronze or the statue, the silver of the bowl, and the genera of which the bronze and silver are species. In another sense (ii) the form or the archetype, i.e. the statement of the essence, and its genera are called ‘causes.’ ... (iii) the primary source of the change or coming to rest; e.g... what makes of what is made and what causes change of what is changed. ... (iv) in the sense of end or ‘that for the sake of which’ a thing is done.³⁵⁴

In what way can evil be said to be a cause? Material cause is that out of which a thing comes to be and which persists in the process of change. It is a major characteristic of matter to be a potential substrate. Evil is shown to be neither matter nor potency and thus cannot be a material cause *per se*. But because evil is a privation of good that exists in some subject, its presence in that subject makes the subject an accidental material cause of evil.³⁵⁵ It is accidental because it is not intended by the subject and because, every cause is oriented towards the perfection of being. This distinction is very important since it addresses Plotinus’s and Maimonides’s relation of evil to a material cause. The form is that through which something comes in act. Evil as privation has

³⁵² Aristotle, *Physics*, II, 2, 194b17, translated by R.P Hardie and R.K. Gaye, in the *Basic Works of Aristotle*, edited by Richard McKeon, (New York: Random House, 1941) p 240.

³⁵³ Hart, Charles A., *Thomistic Metaphysics: An Inquiry into the Act of Existing*, (Englewood Cliff, N.J: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1959) p 374.

³⁵⁴ Aristotle, *Physics*, II, 3, 194b20-35, *ibid.* pp 240-241.

³⁵⁵ King, Bill, “Thomas Aquinas on the Metaphysical Problem of Evil,” *Quodlibet Journal*, vol.4, (2002), p 8. <http://www.Quodlibet.net>

been shown to be the opposite of form and thus, cannot be a formal cause. The agent is that which moves a thing from potency into act. It is only a being in act that can be an agent. Evil is not in act and thus cannot be an agent cause but can be a ‘defective agent cause’ if evil is present on a subject as a result of a defect in the agent. The end of a thing is its good intended and its perfection. The absence of a perfection that a thing should have cannot be an end in itself. Evil, as a privation of a perfection that should be in a particular subject, cannot be a final cause. Aquinas acknowledges that it is fitting that evil, in some manner, should have a cause³⁵⁶ and that evil should in some sort, be a cause. In what manner then, does evil cause? And in what manner, does evil have a cause? We address the first question.

To address this particular issue, Aquinas distinguishes between a *per se* (intrinsic) and a *per accidens* (accidental or extrinsic) causes. These distinctions are by no means original to Aquinas. In his treatment of causes, Aristotle already talked of proper causes and accidental causes and that both causes may be spoken of in combination. For example, it is the sculptor that makes a statue but this sculptor could happen to be ‘Polyclitus.’ Thus we may say not ‘Polyclitus’ nor ‘the sculptor,’ but ‘Polyclitus the sculptor.’³⁵⁷ The only thing necessary for the production of the statue is a sculptor. That this sculptor is also Polyclitus is accidental. Aquinas makes use of this distinction in explaining the manner in which evil could be said to be a cause. A *per se* cause is that in which it belongs necessarily of itself, to bring about an effect. It enters intrinsically into the composition of the effect. Matter and form are described as intrinsic causes of substance because they constitute the nature of material substance in such a way that the material substance cannot exist without them. For Jan Aertsen, “that which belongs to a thing ‘*per se*’ is necessarily in it, always and inseparably.”³⁵⁸ Evil thus, is not a *per se* cause just like matter and form are causes because it does not and cannot enter into the internal composition of a being. Aquinas provides three characteristics of every *per se* cause.³⁵⁹ The first is that a *per se* cause aims to

³⁵⁶ S. T 1a, q.49, a.1: “quod necesse est dicere quod omne malum aliquo modo causam habeat.”

³⁵⁷ Aristotle, *Metaphysics* V, 2, 1013b30-1014a15, translated by W.D. Ross in the *Basic Works of Aristotle*, edited by Richard McKeon, (New York: Random House, 1941) pp 753-754.

³⁵⁸ Aertsen, Jan, *Nature and Creature*, (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1988) p 97.

³⁵⁹ De malo q.1, a.3 : « Sciendum est enim, quod malum causam per se habere non potest. Quod quidem tripliciter apparet. Primo quidem, quia illud quod per se causam habet, est intentum a sua causa; quod enim provenit praeter intentionem agentis, non est effectus per se, sed per accidens; sicut effossio sepulcri per accidens est causa inventionis thesauri, cum provenit praeter intentionem fodientis sepulcrum. » « Secundo idem apparet, quia omnis effectus per se habet aliquo modo similitudinem suae causae, vel secundum eandem rationem, sicut in agentibus univocis, vel secundum deficientem rationem, sicut in agentibus aequivocis; omnis enim causa agens agit secundum

bring about its effect, that means, it operates for an end. Any other thing that happens in addition to this aim is accidental. “For example, the digging of a grave is by accident the cause of finding treasure if the discovery is beyond the intention of the gravedigger.” The second is that *per se* cause brings about its likeness, in some way, in its effect. This underlines the intimate, inseparable nature of *per se* cause, seen in its effect. And the third character is that “every intrinsic cause has a sure and fixed ordination to its effects. But what results by ordination is not evil; rather, evil results when ordination is neglected.”³⁶⁰ The *per se* cause is directed towards a fixed goal as its final end. It doesn’t act by chance.

On the other hand, *per accidens* cause depends on something other than itself to bring about a contingent effect. “As in predication ‘*per accidens*’ something is said of something as belonging to it contingently, so the exceptional effect is ascribed to a cause ‘*per accidens*,’ namely, “chance.”³⁶¹ The discovery of treasure by a gravedigger, in the example given above, is only caused accidentally by the digging. That was not the direct, intended end or aim of the gravedigger, but happened by chance. That is the type of ‘causality’ that evil exercises, a *per accidens* cause. “Again, evil is a privation, as we have seen before. Now, privation is an accidental principle in beings subject to motion, just as matter and form are essential principles. Therefore, evil is the accidental cause of something else.”³⁶² In what manner then, does evil have a cause? What is the cause of evil?

3.3 Good as the Cause of Evil

Does evil really have a cause? Augustine, more than any other philosopher, struggled so much in his personal life with evil as sin or moral fault. In his long association with Manichaeism, he found it hard to accept that evil is as a result of an evil principle while good is from a principle of

quod actu est, quod pertinet ad rationem boni. Unde malum, secundum quod huiusmodi, non assimilatur causae agenti secundum id quod est agens. Relinquitur ergo quod malum non habeat causam per se. »

³⁶⁰ De malo q.1, a.3 : « Tertio idem apparet ex hoc quod omnis causa per se, habet certum et determinatum ordinem ad suum effectum; quod autem fit secundum ordinem non est malum, sed malum accidit in praetermittendo ordinem. Unde malum, secundum quod huiusmodi, non habet causam per se, oportet tamen quod malum aliquo modo causam habeat. »

³⁶¹ Aertsen, Jan, *Nature and Creature*, p 97.

³⁶² SCG III, 14, 3: “Malum est privatio quaedam, ut ex praedictis [cap.7] patet. Privatio autem est principium per accidens in rebus mobilibus, sicut materia et forma per se [I Phys., VII, 13; 190b]. Malum igitur est alicuius causa per accidens. »

good. An independent evil principle would challenge the omnipotence of God and this is unacceptable to Christian faith. Neither is it acceptable to say that God who is good in Himself is the cause of evil. Augustine places the responsibility for evil in a created will of a rational creature. This supposed escape route lands Augustine into trouble with the Pelagians who argue that man, by his own will can return to the good since it is by his will that he deviates from the good. By this thinking, Pelagians doubt the place of grace (divine assistance) in human salvation.³⁶³ The development of Augustine's thought, on the free will as the cause of evil, is found in his work *De Libero Arbitrio*, written in the form of a dialogue with a certain Evodius.³⁶⁴ Augustine used this dialogue to oppose the doctrine of Manichaeism that made an independent evil principle-matter responsible for all that is evil. Rather than accepting the existence of such an external principle, Augustine looks into man and highlights the place and the importance of his will-the *libre arbitre* in man's choices. In the early exchanges, Augustine gives two senses in which the word evil directly affects a man: the evil a man does and the evil that he suffers.³⁶⁵ These are the two divisions of evil that Thomas Aquinas will later give as the evils found in a rational nature. God is the source of evil that man suffers as when he suffers some punishment for some wrong done. But the problem is the evil that man does. How can man created by the good God act evilly by his will and yet God, the maker of man's will, is exonerated of any responsibility even if minimal?³⁶⁶ What is the cause of the will being moved away from an unchangeable to a changeable good, from a superior to an inferior good?³⁶⁷ Augustine does not really know and calls the cause of the will's perversion an 'unknowable non-being'.³⁶⁸ No other

³⁶³Evans, G. R., *Augustine on Evil*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982) p 113f. The whole controversy about grace and salvation is not our concern here.

³⁶⁴ Evodius was said to be a very learned friend of Augustine who had been baptized earlier than Augustine. He later became the Bishop of Usala in North Africa. Cf Martin Kuolt, *Thomas d'Aquin: Du Mal*, p 55.

³⁶⁵Augustine, *De Libero Arbitrio* [1.1], 1.1 : « Duobus enim modis appellare solemus malum: uno, cum male quemque fecisse dicimus; alio, cum mali aliquid esse perpessum. » « Car nous prenons ordinairement ce mot dans deux sens. Dans le premier nous disons: cet homme a mal agi, et dans le second : cet homme a souffert de grands maux. » « Œuvres Complètes de Saint Augustin, »Traductions françaises sur la direction de M. Raulx, Bar-le-Duc, 1869 <http://www.abbaye-saint-benoit.ch/saints/augustin/index.htm> All references to the *De Libero Arbitrio* comes from this source.

³⁶⁶*De Libero Arbitrio* [1.2], 2.4 : « Deum Mouet autem animum, si peccata ex his animabus sunt quas Deus creauit, illae autem animae ex Deo, quomodo non paruo interuallo peccata referantur in Deum. » «Mais voici ce qui trouble notre esprit : si les âmes que Dieu a faites sont les auteurs des péchés, si ces âmes ont Dieu pour auteur, comment ne pas voir une relation de cause assez étroite entre le péché et Dieu? »

³⁶⁷*De Libero Arbitrio* [2.20], 20.54 : « quoniam mouetur uoluntas cum se auertit ab incommutabili bono ad mutabile bonum, unde iste motus existat: » «Lorsque la volonté s'éloigne du bien immuable pour se tourner vers le bien changeant, elle est mue; d'où lui vient donc ce mouvement? »

³⁶⁸*De Libero Arbitrio* [2.20], 20.54 : « Motus ergo ille auersionis, quod fatemur esse peccatum, quoniam defectiuus motus est, omnis autem defectus ex nihilo est, uide quo pertineat, et ad Deum non pertinere ne dubites. » « Mais ce

explanation is forth coming from the *De libero arbitrio*. In his book the *City of God*, Augustine examines an ideal case of angelic beings, who because of the perversion of their will, chose to disobey God and became devils.³⁶⁹ Why did their will become perverted while that of the rest did not? A second scenario presented by Augustine, is that of two men of equal composition exposed to the attractiveness of a beautiful woman. One man's will yields to the temptation of impurity while the other man's will resists and does not falter. At a closer examination, Augustine notes that 'no cause' could really be said to be responsible for the different attitudes of the will. Thus, even though evil is caused by the perverted will of a rational creature, nothing can explain why the will is perverted in the first place.

No one then should look for an efficient cause of an evil will, for the cause is not one of efficiency but of deficiency even as the evil will itself is not an effect but a defect... Further, since the causes of such defections are not efficient but deficient causes, to wish to trace them is as if someone were to set his heart on seeing darkness or hearing silence.³⁷⁰

There is no cause for the perverted will of a rational creature. If this were to be true as Augustine seems to be saying,³⁷¹ is he not indirectly making the perverted will an independent, uncaused principle of evil that the Manicheans have long since held? We must turn to Thomas Aquinas to examine how he approaches the problem of the cause of evil.

We have seen Aquinas follow the Neoplatonic tradition of calling evil a privation of good that should be in a given subject. We have already seen him adopt in an Aristotelian way, a distinction between matter, privation and form in the constitution of a natural thing. Some in the Neoplatonic tradition like Plotinus, and Maimonides, failed to make this distinction and have logically but erroneously, called matter the absolute evil and the cause of evil in the world.

mouvement de la volonté qui s'éloigne du Dieu suprême, et que nous appelons le péché, est défectueux; d'un autre côté, toute défectuosité vient du néant; vois donc à quoi se rattache ce mouvement, et reconnais sans hésiter qu'il ne se rattache pas à Dieu. »

³⁶⁹ Augustine, *The City of God*, 12.6, translated by Philip Levine, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1966) pp 23-33. A discussion of these examples has been done by Carlos Steel, in his well written article: "Does Evil have a Cause? Augustine's Perplexity and Thomas's Answer," in the *Review of Metaphysics*, 48, (1994) pp 251-273. We owe the discussions to him.

³⁷⁰ Augustine, *The City of God*, 12.7, p 33.

³⁷¹ Cf. Steel, Carlos, "Does Evil have a Cause? Augustine's Perplexity and Thomas's Answer," in *Review of Metaphysics* 48 (1994), p 256.

Matter for Aquinas is a potential principle geared towards act. It is not even an independent principle since it cannot exist without some form. Because, it is geared towards act, it shares, though minimally, in *esse* and therefore it is good. Only an existent thing is good. Matter shares in existence and is therefore good. It is said to be ‘concreated’ with a subsistent being, that we call substance. It is only a substance that exists in act that can be a cause. Evil is not an act and cannot be the cause of evil. This is a rejection of the Manichean principle that evil comes from an evil principle. Evil enjoys the existence that a concept enjoys in the mind. When it is seen in a concrete thing, it is seen as an accident on the subject that exists. “Every subject, because it is some sort of substance, is a good.”³⁷² The evil that exists in a subject exists in a good and has the good as its accidental cause. Thus, Thomas Aquinas arrives at the conclusion that only a good thing can be the cause of evil. Blindness is said to exist because of the defect seen in the eye. A hole in the wall is said to exist because of the opening in the missing part of a wall. Outside of the eye and the wall, blindness and hole do not exist. Therefore, evil can only exist in a given subject. It is this given subject, on which evil exists, that is called the accidental cause of evil, since it is necessary that what subsists in some other thing as its subject has a cause. St. Thomas designates two ways in which good causes evil:

In one way, good as deficient, causes evil; in the second way, good as an accidental cause causes evil. And this is indeed easily evidenced in the things of nature.³⁷³

In the things of nature, St. Thomas notes, if the power of an organ of digestion is weak, it causes imperfect digestive malfunctioning. This imperfect digestive malfunctioning is accidental to the agent who is an agent necessarily by possessing the power to act. The evil of improper digestion is caused accidentally by the defect in its power. In the second case, we see that the perfection or the good of fire is in burning. While achieving its perfection, fire accidentally causes the privation of the form of air. The more perfectly it burns, the more it deprives the form of air, accidentally. Thus, good as deficient, causes evil and as an accidental cause, also causes evil.

By having good as the cause of evil, St. Thomas denies the Manichean tendency noted in Plotinus, of having evil as a first principle independent of the good. He successfully also defends

³⁷² SCG III, 11, 2 : « Omne autem subiectum, cum sit substantia quaedam, bonum quoddam est. »

³⁷³ De malo q.1, a.3 : « Est ergo duplex modus quo malum causatur ex bono. Uno modo bonum est causa mali in quantum esticiens; alio modo in quantum est per accidens. Quod quidem in rebus naturalibus de facili apparet; huius enim mali quod est corruptio aquae, causa est virtus ignis activa. »

matter as being good, and thus, not evil in itself. He implicitly accepts that the goodness of creation and the goodness of God play an accidental role in bringing about evil in the world. Perhaps, evil even if caused accidentally, enters into the universal plan of God for the perfection of the universe. A lion in devouring other animals, is acting towards the perfection of its being, even if it accidentally causes the loss of being of other animals. This point we shall see in detail, when we come to the topic of Divine Providence.

3.4 Types of Evil

Like in his examination of the nature of evil, St. Thomas faithfully follows Augustine in classifying evil into two types: the evil of moral wrong and the evil of punishment.³⁷⁴

3.4.1 The Evil of Moral Fault—*Malum Culpa*

Evil, which is the privation of the good in a given subject, is found in a special way in rational creatures endowed with intelligence and will. Rational creatures know their ends and can freely choose the means to achieve their ends. Good, is the object of the will and end of the intellectual being. When St. Thomas talks about end, he means “that in which the appetite of an agent or mover, and of the thing moved, finds its rest.”³⁷⁵ It is a designated and determined goal to which the rational creature aspires. Good, as we have earlier determined, is also the subject of evil and it consists in two major perfections: the perfection of forms or dispositions necessary for the integrity of a subject and the perfection of the activities or operations of the subject, e.g. knowing and contemplating.³⁷⁶ Evil as related to rational creatures are linked to these two perfections as we shall see shortly. Rational creatures, in pursuit of their ends, come under the natural laws of justice put in place by Divine Providence.³⁷⁷ When a rational creature, voluntarily chooses an undue end which deprives the agent of the perfection of its operations, it is called the evil of moral wrong.

³⁷⁴ De malo q.1, a.4. s.c : « Sed contra, est quod Augustinus dicit in Lib. de fide ad Petrum : geminum est creaturae rationalis malum ; unum quo voluntarie deficit a summo bono ; alterum quo in vita punitur ; per quae duo exprimitur poena et culpa. Ergo malum dividitur per poenam et culpam. »

³⁷⁵ SCG III, ch 3, 3: “Finis est in quo quiescit appetitus agentis vel moventis, et eius quod movetur. »

³⁷⁶ De malo q.1, a.5 : « Actus autem est duplex: scilicet primus, qui est habitus vel forma; et secundus, qui est operatio sicut scientia et considerare. »

³⁷⁷ S. T 1a, q. 48, a.5 : « praecipue supposito quod omnia divinae providentiae et iustitiae subdatur:”

And the evil of moral wrong is formally the deprivation of measure, form, and order in the will's very act.³⁷⁸

In the evil of moral wrong, the agent is blamed and rendered culpable for voluntarily engaging in disordered acts.³⁷⁹ Moral wrong is the evil of the very action. Hart describes it "as the free agent's deliberate neglect of the rule of reason and the Divine law."³⁸⁰ Why an agent endowed with intelligence, should voluntarily choose an act that is contrary to his good, is seen in the explanation given by Thomas Aquinas above. Good causes evil in one of the two ways: as a deficient cause and as an accidental cause.³⁸¹ If an evil effect is produced by a good will, it could be said to have been produced accidentally. The example is fire that accidentally causes the privation of air while attaining its perfection that is burning. But how can a defect in the agent, in this case the will, be considered still a voluntary moral fault and thus punishable? If this defect in the will is natural, that is, inborn, it cannot be considered a moral fault since it completely removes moral fault or diminishes it.³⁸² This defect in the will must be in the action of the will for it to be voluntary and morally evil. Firstly, we note that the will is not an independent faculty in itself. It is guided by the practical judgment of reason but not obliged to follow the dictates of reason otherwise, it would no longer be voluntary. It, the will, is like a secondary agent acting through the power of a primary agent, the reason.

While therefore, a secondary agent remains in a position of subordination to the first agent, it acts without any defect, but it becomes defective in its action if it happens to turn away from its subordination to the primary agent, as is illustrated in the case of an instrument, when it falls short of the motion of the agent.³⁸³

³⁷⁸ De malo q.1, a.4, ad. 7 : « Malum autem culpae formaliter est privatio modi, speciei et ordinis in ipso actu voluntatis. »

³⁷⁹ De malo q.1, a.4 : « in qua manifestum est quod inordinata actio voluntatis habet rationem culpae: ex hoc enim aliquis vituperatur et culpabilis redditur, quod inordinatam actionem voluntarie operatur. »

³⁸⁰ Hart, Charles A, *Thomistic Metaphysics: An Inquiry into the Act of Existing*, p 371.

³⁸¹ De malo q.1, a.3 : « Est ergo duplex modus quo malum causatur ex bono. Uno modo bonum est causa mali in quantum est deficiens; alio modo in quantum est per accidens. »

³⁸² SCG III, 10, 11 : « Non enim ex defectu virtutis sequi videtur morale vitium : cum infirmitas virtutis morale virtutum vel totaliter tollat, vel saltem diminuat ; infirmitas enim non meretur poenam , quae culpae debetur, sed magis misericordiam et ignoscentiam ; »

³⁸³ SCG III, 10, 15 : « Cum igitur secundum agens manet sub ordine primi agentis, indeficienter agit : deficit autem in agendo si contingat ipsum ab ordine primi agentis deflecti ; sicut patet in instrumento cum deficit a motu agentis. »

Our sensible appetites can present a lot of seeming goods to the reason. It is the function of reason to judge which is the proper end of the agent. But when the will deviates in pursuit of a particular good, contrary to the dictates of reason, because it seems good to it, a moral evil occurs. ‘Now this defect in ordering is voluntary, for to will and not to will lie within the power of the will itself. And it is within the power of the reason to make or to abstain from making an actual consideration of this or that alternative.’³⁸⁴ From the example given by Carlos Steel, “people can consider health as a supreme good or consider instead the pleasure of smoking. They can have in view the intense pleasure involved in a passionate relationship and freely refrain from considering the possible catastrophic consequences of acting on their passions.”³⁸⁵ What becomes morally evil is when the will actually performs an action contrary to its proper end as directed by right reason. That is how the good as deficient, in this case the will, causes evil. Thus we conclude with Aquinas that:

Moral fault is found primarily and principally in the act of the will only, and so, it is reasonable to say, as a result, that an act is moral because it is voluntary. Therefore, the root and the source of moral wrongdoing is to be sought in the act of will.”³⁸⁶

Thomas Aquinas brings to light Augustine’s mystery of the uncaused efficient cause of evil. He also solves his predecessors’ (Plotinus and Maimonides) dilemma, who not knowing how to come to terms with evil, places the responsibility on matter.

3.4.2 The Evil of Punishment—*Malum Poenae*

It is in line with the dictates of reason and the Divine law that moral wrong be corrected by punishment. When a rational agent is deprived of the forms or dispositions necessary for its integrity as a rational nature, it is called the evil of punishment. In the words of St. Thomas:

³⁸⁴ SCG III, 10, 17 : « Hic autem ordinis defectus voluntarius est: nam in potestate ipsius voluntatis est velle et non velle. Itemque est in potestate ipsius quod ratio actu consideret, vel a consideratione desistat ; aut quod hoc vel illud consiederet. »

³⁸⁵ Steel, Carlos, “Does Evil Have a Cause? Augustine’s Perplexity and Thomas’s Answer,” p 261.

³⁸⁶ SCG III, 10, 13: “Morale vitium in solo actu voluntatis primo et principaliter inveniatur : et rationabiliter etiam ex hoc actus moralis dicatur, quia voluntarius est. In actu igitur voluntatis quaerenda est radix et origo peccati moralis. »

Intellectual creatures also suffer evil when they are deprived of forms or dispositions or anything else potentially necessary for good activity, whether the things belong to the soul or the body or external things. And such evil ... needs to be called punishment.³⁸⁷

Three characteristics belong to the nature of punishment: (i) it is the consequence of a moral fault in the rational nature; (ii) it is contrary to the will of the one suffering; and (iii) it consists of being acted upon by an external cause.³⁸⁸ These three characteristics properly differentiate moral fault or wrong from the evil of punishment. By taking so much pain treating evil in rational creatures, St. Thomas places the responsibility for evil, not in the material nature but in the will of the rational creature. To rectify the wickedness wrought by the willing agent, God causes the evil of punishment. "And it is clear that the wisdom of God introduces punishment in order that moral wrong should be avoided either by the one who is punished, or at least by others."³⁸⁹ This enters into the general thinking of St. Thomas Aquinas according to whom, it is the plan of Divine Providence to sometimes permit evil in order to bring about the perfection of the universal order.

4.0 Evaluation:

This first section has a precise objective to respond to very important metaphysical questions: Is evil a thing? What is the cause of evil? How is it possible that such should exist in a world under the providential care of God? The fundamental problem is that such questions tend to contradict the fact that God is said to be omnipotent, omniscient and all good. If evil is something created by God, then all responsibility for evil in the world lies on God and we cannot say that He is all good. But if evil is not a thing created by God, then it must be that another rival principle must

³⁸⁷ De malo q.1, a.4 : « Est autem et in creatura intellectuali invenire malum secundum privationem formae aut habitus, aut cuiuscumque alterius quod posset esse necessarium ad bene operandum, sive pertineat ad animam, sive ad corpus, sive ad res exteriores; et tale malum, secundum fidei Catholicae sententiam, necesse est quod poena dicatur. »

³⁸⁸ De malo q.1, a.4 : « Sunt enim tria de ratione poenae. Quorum unum est quod habet respectum ad culpam; dicitur enim proprie aliquis puniri quando patitur malum pro aliquo quod commisit. ...Secundum vero quod pertinet ad rationem poenae, est quod voluntati repugnet. ...Tertium vero esse videtur de ratione poenae ut in quadam passione consistat. Ea enim quae contra voluntatem eveniunt, non sunt a principio intrinseco quod est voluntas, sed a principio extrinseco, cuius effectus passio dicitur. »

³⁸⁹ De malo q.1, a.5: « Manifestum est autem quod Dei sapientia poenam inducit ad hoc quod vitetur culpa vel ab eo qui punitur, vel saltem ab aliis. »

be responsible; otherwise, how do we explain the presence of evil? We have taken the pain to show how the treatment of Aquinas's predecessors much influenced his discussion of the problem of evil. Plotinus and Maimonides seemed to single out matter as the ultimate cause of evil in the world. This follows from their metaphysics of emanation according to which all existence flows in a hierarchical order, from the Necessary Being to the last of the forces which as diminished, produces matter, an absolute evil. Maimonides's treatment is ambiguous in the sense that he uses the smokescreen of creation to explain the origin of matter. But he assigns to matter ontological and epistemological functions: last in the hierarchy of emanations and the absolute source of evil. The composition of matter and privation poses a great problem to Maimonides because, according to him, it is the composition with privation that makes matter entail death and evils. On both the ontological and moral levels, it is matter that is responsible for decomposition and moral deficiency. Maimonides's description of matter as a "married harlot" gives upon matter a new ontological role of a "marriage breaker" (preventing perfect union between matter and form) and a negative epistemological role of preventing a perfect acquisition of intelligibles. Ultimately, matter prevents access to divine providence. By calling matter the source of evil and by having its source firmly on the First Principle of all things God, Plotinus and Maimonides place the responsibility for evil in the world ultimately on God. Though Maimonides describes evil as privation, the useage he makes of it in some instances leaves to wonder the status of evil in his system. If we accept that matter is always in concomitant with privation and thus evil, does that not leave to think that evil has acquired an ontological status since wherever there is matter-privation, there is evil? The consequences of this thinking are many. As poignantly represented by Kuolt:

Faire la matière le mal comme tel, signifie matérialiser le mal et ériger en face de Dieu un Principe à la fois purement mauvais et source de tout mal. Imaginons les conséquences : tout existant corporel, c'est-à-dire composé de matière, serait naturellement infesté de mal ; de ce fait, le péché serait la victoire d'un Principe mauvais (matière/corps), dont l'homme n'est que la scène, mais non l'auteur, comme le croyait par exemples les Cathares et Albigeois.³⁹⁰

³⁹⁰ Kuolt, Martin, *Thomas d'Aquin : Du Mal*, p 448.

In order to properly answer to the questions being asked by the earlier discussions of his predecessors, Aquinas makes use of both Aristotle and Augustine. He clearly distinguishes between matter, privation and evil. While he accords matter an ontological status, he denies such status to evil because it cannot be the direct effect of a willing agent. Privation is considered as nonbeing, not in the sense of absolute non existence, but in a sense of a lack of what should be in a determined subject. By calling evil a privation of good that should necessarily obtain in a subject, Aquinas answers the question as to the ontological status of evil and delicately negates the suggestion that evil is an entity in the mode of a substance. The only existence that evil has is accidental. Matter is ‘concreated’ by God and thus, cannot be evil. Whatever God creates, whatever He posits in act is good. Against emanation, Aquinas posits the theory of creation according to which God brought everything into existence *ex nihilo*. The logical implication of creation is that even matter, created by God enjoys some form of existence. Hence, *contre* Plotinus and Maimonides, Thomas Aquinas holds that matter is not evil since it enjoys some form of existence. The cause of evil would have to be located in the perverse or defective will of a rational creature. Neither Plotinus nor Maimonides thought of this possibility.

Regardless of their differences, Maimonides and Aquinas share a lot in common. When it comes to matter, Aquinas could have readily taken the creation of matter from Maimonides.³⁹¹ They both believed that matter could only have come from the action of a willing agent. Their thoughts perfectly meet and agree with each other on the question of privation and evil. According to Maimonides:

The act of an agent can in no way be connected with a privation; the agent can only be said to have produced the privation by accident.³⁹²

This means that what is produced by an intentional agent must be something good, something existing. God according to Maimonides produces being, and all being is good.³⁹³ Aquinas seems to have taken the idea of accidental cause from Maimonides as he repeats almost the same thing:

³⁹¹ *Dux Neutrorum*, lib.I, cap.XXVII, fol.10: “Et quod appraehenderunt seniores est veritas materiae primae quae est ex parte creatoris : quae est causa eius... Seniores appraehenderunt materiam unam: et assimilata est creatori: quia et principium creaturarum generabilium et corruptibilium: et fecit de nihilo. » Cf *Guide* I, 28, p 61

³⁹² Ibid. lib.III, cap.XI, fol.75: “Iam igitur patet tibi quod secundum nullam opinionem privatio est opus operatoris: sed dicitur aliquos operari privationem et hoc per accidens: » Cf *Guide* III, 10, p 439.

³⁹³ Ibid. lib.III, cap.XI, fol.75: “Sed omnia opera eius sunt pura bonitos: quia non operatur nisi entia et omnia quae bona sunt. »

privation is principally said to be not by itself but by accident.³⁹⁴ The consequences extend to the nature of evil to which Aquinas denies an ontological status, thanks to his idea of privation. Because privation is a *per accidens* principle, Aquinas calls the cause of evil a *per accidens* cause. But the same thinking has earlier existed in Maimonides for whom the agent can only be an accidental cause of privation that is evil. Aquinas explains that the evil that exists in a subject exists in a good and has the good as its accidental or deficient cause.³⁹⁵ God thus cannot be responsible for evil. This agrees with the first part of Maimonides's thesis:

It will be known with certainty that it may in no way be said of God...that He produces evil in an essential act; I mean that He, may He be exalted, has a primary intention to produce evil.³⁹⁶

To this extent, Maimonides and Aquinas are in agreement. Even their definition of evil is almost the same. For Maimonides and for Aquinas, evil is a privation of a good that should exist in a given subject.³⁹⁷ Blindness in a man is evil because it is the absence of the good of sight that the particular man should ordinarily possess. Maimonides gives the examples of illness, death, poverty, ignorance as evils with regard to man. For example, "his death is an evil because death is his nonbeing. Similarly, his illness, his poverty, or his ignorance are evils with regard to him, and all of them are privations of habitus."³⁹⁸ They part ways however, when Maimonides insists on privation as concomitant with matter entailing deficiency and all evils. Because God has created matter, God is directly responsible for all the evils in the world.

Aquinas charts a different territory. Matter is not evil and matter is not the cause of evil. Even though it is the nature of matter to entail generation and corruption, this is not evil since matter is being faithful to its existence and to its goal. This is where Aquinas brings up the idea of

³⁹⁴ *De principiis naturae*, c.2, line 8-10: "Unde privatio dicitur esse principium non per se sed per accidens, quia scilicet concidit cum materia."

³⁹⁵ *De malo* q.1, a.3 : « Est ergo duplex modus quo malum causatur ex bono. Uno modo bonum est causa mali in quantum est deficiens; alio modo in quantum est per accidens. Quod quidem in rebus naturalibus de facili apparet; huius enim mali quod est corruptio aquae, causa est virtus ignis activa. »

³⁹⁶ *Dux Neutorum*, lib.III, cap.XI, fol.75 : « Post ista igitur omnia quae praemisimus scito quod de Creatore non dicitur precise quod ipse faciat malum id est quod ipse habeat primam intentionem faciendi malum. »

³⁹⁷ *Ibid.* lib.III, cap.XI, fol.75: "Et propter hoc dicunt precise quod omnia mala sunt privationes. » Cf *Guide* III, 10, p 439. *De malo* q.1, a.1 : « alio modo potest intelligi ipsum malum, et hoc non est aliquid, sed ipsa privatio alicuius particularis boni. »

³⁹⁸ *Ibid.* lib.III, cap.XI, fol.75: "Homo cuius est mors mala : et est privatio : et omnis infirmitas sua et paupertas, et omnia mala quae accidunt ipsi sunt privationes dispositionum acquisibilium. »

accidental cause of evil since in matter is found this potentiality to destruction and the absence of good. Thomas Aquinas actually provides for this possibility in the plan of providence since, as we shall see, he will argue that providence preserves rather than corrupts nature, and thus, does not prevent corruption, deficiency, and evil from being found in things.³⁹⁹ Everything is ordered to its end. Fire has been ordered by providence to its perfection which is to burn. Even if fire burns down a house in which a family is sleeping, it nevertheless achieves its natural perfection and goodness though it accidentally causes the death of a family.⁴⁰⁰ It is the same providence that will expose Job to a great suffering in the hope that a greater good will emerge from it. Thus to interpret Maimonides, Aquinas would actually say that God does not directly cause evil; He indirectly permits evil, since He puts in place, the possibility giving rise to destruction and the absence of good. Describing good as the cause of evil, does not totally go down well with some authors since the idea tends to make evil an agent “using goodness for a malevolent end”⁴⁰¹ and indirectly makes God who is the source of goodness, an unwilling agent of evil. It leads to an absurd situation where what is described as non-being and privation, exerts such influence and power that even the Creator of goodness, indirectly falls subject to its goal. In response to this idea of evil “using goodness for a malevolent end,” we say that there is an inherent contradiction in the formulation of the idea. This is because only a subject having an ontological status, could actually have an end or perfection. If evil is a privation and thus nonbeing, it cannot have an end of itself and neither can it make God an unwilling agent for its purposes. Evil is nonbeing and thus cannot be the nature of God. What then is the nature of God? What language can man employ in talking about this God and His relation to the world? These are questions that would constitute the second section of our enquiry where Maimonides’s propositions are fully examined and interpreted by Aquinas.

³⁹⁹ SCG III, 71: “Quod divina providentia non excludit totaliter malum a rebus.”

⁴⁰⁰ Steel, Carlos, “Avicenna and Thomas Aquinas on Evil,” p 178f.

⁴⁰¹ Torrance, T.F., *Divine and Contingent Order*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981) p 90.