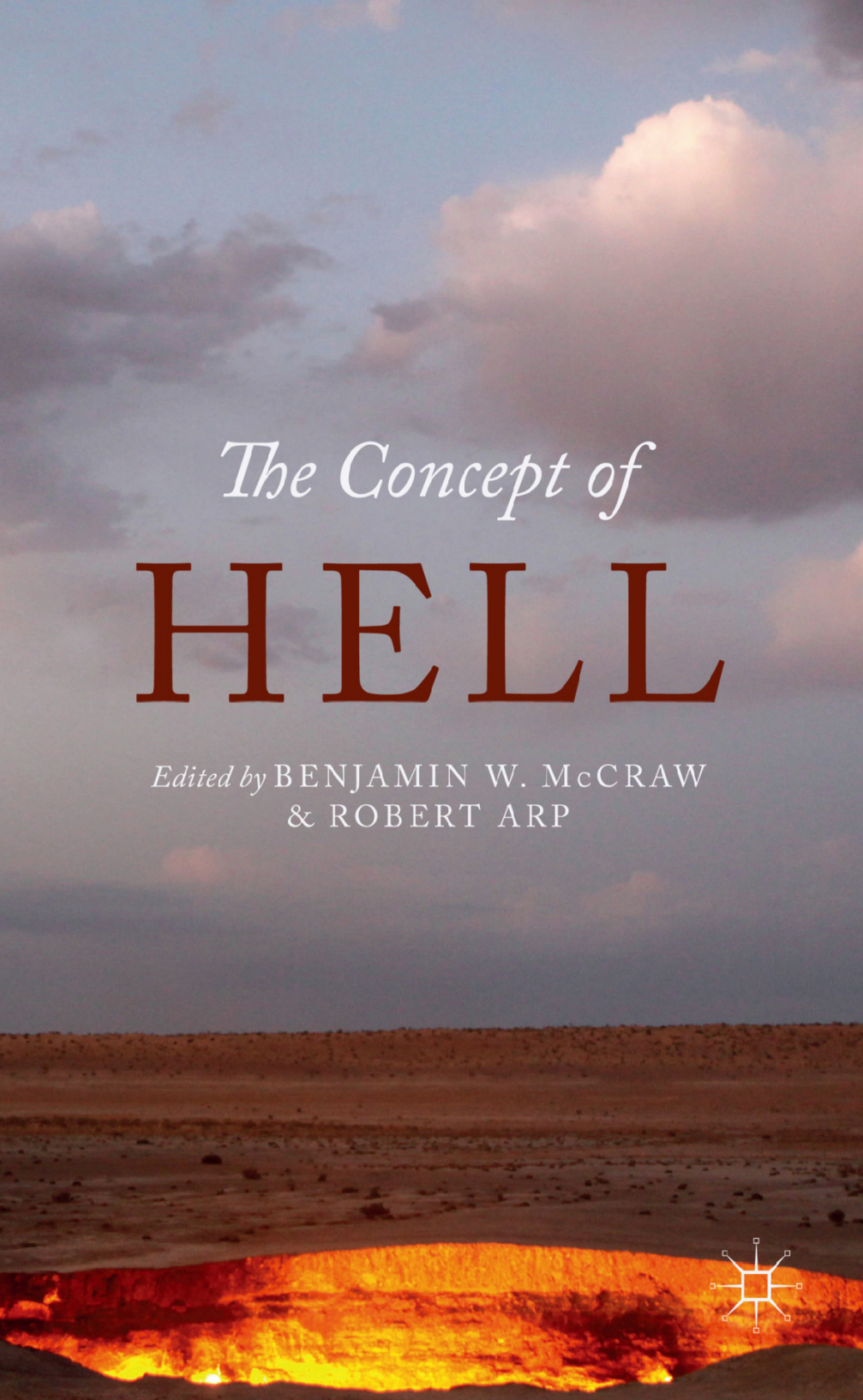
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The Concept of Hell

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The Concept of Hell

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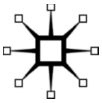

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Introduction

Benjamin W. McCraw and Robert Arp

Eternal flames, pitchforking demons, and suffering cries of those damned have dominated popular conceptions of Hell. Such a picture has varying degrees of reflection in serious philosophical and theological thought running throughout the history of consideration of the topic. The concept of Hell combines a number of notions of perennial investigation: the nature of the afterlife, Divine judgment, the ultimate ends of human existence, our place in the grand scheme of the cosmos, and a host of others. Accordingly, philosophers and theologians have found the topic ripe for many different kinds of discussions, positions, and approaches from a wide variety of traditions, methodologies, and interests.

1 Hell in ancient traditions

The English word *Hell* comes from the Old English – via Anglo-Saxon – term *helan* meaning "to hide" or "to conceal" (Tober & Lusby, 1987). The Norse mythos names their underworld and its princess *Hel*, and we see related ideas in the German term *hölle*. Similar concepts turn in many religious traditions with different terms.

Famously, the Greco-Roman underworld *Hades* is an obvious example. Yet, not all parts of Hades house the same sort of dead with the same sort of undead existence. The Elysian Fields mark out the abode of the blessed souls with Tartarus hosting the infamous scoundrels of Greek myth with their enduring styles of punishment. Those fit neither for Elysium nor Tartarus have a drab, shadowy existence as lifeless shades lacking their life's blood. They are mere empty likenesses (*eidolon*) of their previous, lively selves. In more specific versions of Hades, we find a judge – Minos or Rhadamanthys – sentencing each shade to a respective place based on the deeds of one's life.

The ancient Egyptians have a similar mythology, incorporating the notions of judgment: punishment for the wicked and blessedness for the good. After death, the heart of the deceased is weighed to judge merits and, thus, one's potential residence. Again, the lands of the blessed stand in stark contrast to the punishments of those judged guilty and the bleak existence of the rest.

Another important and influential tradition of Hell in the ancient world comes from the Mesopotamian (specifically, Babylonian and Assyrian) culture. For these people, the underworld was a place of silence and darkness. Like Hades, the souls there live a shadowy existence only vaguely reminiscent of their previous lives – eating only dust and clay.

In the Greco-Roman, Egyptian, and Mesopotamian traditions, we find the underworld as a place of darkness and silence, filled with the dim shades of once-vibrant lives. It is this darkened, muted sort of existence that all three traditions share as a common element of the afterlife. All three also emphasize the underworld as a place of judgment, where those living evil lives find their fitting penalty after death. Indeed, it is easy to see how any concept of Hell includes the notion of postmortem punishment meant to even out the misdeeds of the wicked when living. A third theme that is common to these cultures concerns the very meaning of Hell – something concealed or hidden *within* the Earth. Hades is a cavernous abyss, and the shadowy realm of the dead for the Mesopotamians lies beneath the brightly lit world of the living. We find these themes present in the Western theistic tradition: Hell is a pit of darkness and punishment that is the polar opposite of the bright world of the living and the Heavenly realm of God.

2 Hell and the Abrahamic religions

We see significant overlap with, and development of, these themes in the Abrahamic religious traditions. In Judaism, the term often translated as "Hell" is *she'ol*. This can mean either the grave itself or the land of the dead/shadows. The Greek Septuagint simply translates some instances of *she'ol* as *thanatos*, or death (Long, 1987). Indeed, prior to the Babylonian exile, the residents of *she'ol* lacked personal identity, a "faceless collective existing in a joyless realm" (Tober & Lusby, 1987). In this respect, *she'ol* bears a striking resemblance to the dim Hades of the Greco-Roman tradition or the silent land of dust for the Mesopotamians. Like the shades of Hades, the dead of *she'ol* live a muted existence given that they have lost the breath of life. This original, earlier concept of the afterlife

is remarkably like the others: shadowy, dark, silent, and filled with the sapless vestiges of the living.

The location of *she'ol* is reminiscent of these aforementioned traditions as well. The connotation of the grave recalls the cave-like Hades and the Mesopotamian subterranean realm. In all traditions, we find the location of Hell as well as its nature to be a direct opposite to the world of living and, in particular, the Heavenly realm of light and life. So, in both senses – as "grave" or "land of the dead/shadows" – this conception of *she'ol* finds parallels to the themes we see in the surrounding religious traditions: for example, the Old English hidden *helan* that is supposed to be deep in the Earth. Yet, while this older notion of *she'ol* lacked distinction or areas corresponding to different kinds of dead, the tradition developed over time. A notion of paradise through the resurrection of the dead and a developing concept of post-mortem punishment grew out of the original shadow land *she'ol*.

Interestingly enough, the postbiblical "Apocalypse of Enoch" divides *she'ol* into three sections: that for the righteous, that for the wicked, and that for the remainder (presumably neither wicked nor righteous). As the concept of *she'ol* develops over time, another term important for the concept of Hell gets paired and merged with it: *gehenna*. *Gehenna* names the Hinnom Valley south of Jerusalem. Reputedly, those worshipping Moloch used this valley as the location of child sacrifice that involved casting a child into a furnace located in a hollowed-out version of the idol itself, burning them alive. Thus, the location's other name: the Valley of Slaughter. Additionally, the area was used as a place to burn rubbish. The imagery of smoke and burning and destruction certainly had a formative influence on the Jewish development of *gehenna* as akin to the burning bit of Hell we see clearly in the later Christian tradition. As *she'ol* and *gehenna* merge, we find the place of punishment and perdition for the later Jewish tradition. As *gehenna* develops in addition to and, perhaps, along with *she'ol*, we find the place of punishment and retribution for those dead deserving it. And again, like the other traditions above, we see how crucial a role that suffering punishment plays in the concept of Hell in the merging of *she'ol* and *gehenna*.

The Christian tradition of Hell includes and springs from much of this Jewish background. The New Testament uses three terms that are often translated as Hell: Hades, Gehenna, and Tartarus. Generally, the usage of "Hades" picks up the general underworld or original *she'ol* usage. Of the remaining two, both refer to the place of punishment, suffering, and torture of the wicked – with "Gehenna" occurring more often than "Tartarus." The writers of the New Testament, clearly familiar with the

imagery and usage of *gehenna* in the later development of Judaism, want to co-opt these images as a way to convey their message of the result of rejecting God. According to one commentator, a primary use of the term sets it up as a foil to the central image of the Kingdom of God (Gorski, 2003). Those accepting God and receiving salvation belong in the Kingdom of God, while those rejecting God received damnation in Hell. Jesus often speaks of Gehenna as "the unquenchable fire" reserved for those who refuse to believe and be converted (Mt 5:22, 29; 10:28; 13:41–42, 50; 25:41; Mk 9:43–48). In line with the ancient conceptions of Hell, the term/concept serves as an antithesis to the positive pole of human destiny: to make sense of salvation, we have to have something *from which we are saved*. Hell serves as this necessary compliment. Just as the physical location of Hell is a pit in the Earth set against the Heavens/sky, the destination of those damned to Hell is set exactly opposite those members of the Kingdom of God.

The imagery, though, and its emphasis on being *against* God and the punishment suffered thereby, gets lifted from the *she'ol/gehenna* merger. Thus, like a literal burning pit in the Earth (the Hinnom Valley's use for Jerusalem's rubbish) and like a historical place used by apostates and idolaters setting themselves against God (the Valley of Slaughter and sacrifice to Moloch), the use of *gehenna* reinforces both the soteriological and eschatological messages in the New Testament.

Islam explicitly picks up on the term *gehenna*, using it for "Hell" just as Christianity adopted the Jewish term for its purposes. And like both traditions, Islam views Hell as a pit of fire. The Islamic *gehenna* is composed of seven layers representing different sorts of evils for which a person merits punishment. And, again, in keeping with many of the traditions discussed so far, the suffering of those in Hell/*gehenna* serves as an explicit, opposite refection of the beatitude of those in Paradise.

While there are key differences here – especially on the details of how those in Hell exist – there seems to be some common themes. Hell is generally viewed (either literally or metaphorically) as a sort of pit, cave or cavern in the Earth set against the sky/Heavens. This sort of opposition clearly serves as a foil: we see throughout these traditions a story that human destiny lies only in two possible places (at least, eventually). This reinforces each religious tradition's salvific aim and underscores the importance of correctly aligning oneself to the model each belief system provides. These themes of Hell being the anti-Heaven(s), anti-salvation, and anti-blessedness reinforce the common conception we often find today: Hell is a place into which one *falls*, it is a place of *punishment*, and

it is a place of *suffering* (where the major Abrahamic religions see this suffering as based in fire).

3 Hell and philosophical approaches

There are many ways that philosophers can and have approached Hell and the various topics related to it. We will limit our introduction to only three: the nature of Hell, the problem(s) of evil, and justifications for Hell. But we should not see the first philosophical task – clarifying the nature of Hell – as distinct from our previous discussion of the various religious traditions' views of Hell. Indeed, what becomes fodder for the standard analyses of Hell by philosophers comes from the Abrahamic traditions above and, accordingly, bears more than a passing resemblance to many of the historical European and Middle Eastern conceptions of Hell. Yet, this task is primary: it is possible to give a decent analysis of problems or justifications of something only if you have a good understanding of what you're analyzing. So, our first task here, in clarifying the nature of Hell, follows our previous section and leads to the other philosophical discussions arising from it.

We begin with what many philosophers analyze as the "traditional" model, view, or conception of Hell. Jonathan Kvanvig (1993, p. 19) terms this the "strong" model of Hell and gives four necessary and sufficient conditions:

1. The Anti-Universalism Thesis: some persons are consigned to Hell;
2. The Existence Thesis: Hell is a place where people exist, if they are consigned there;
3. The No Escape Thesis: there is no possibility of leaving Hell, and nothing one can do, change, or become in order to get out of Hell, once one is consigned there; and
4. The Retribution Thesis: the justification for and purpose of Hell is retributive in nature, Hell being constituted so as to mete out punishment to those whose earthly lives and behavior warrant it.

This strikes us a neat analysis and clarification of what many theists from the traditional Western (Abrahamic) religions would find typical of those belief systems. Indeed, in another important overview of Hell, Jerry Walls gives precisely the same traditional model minus the Existence Thesis (Walls 2010, pp. 239–40). So we shall take this as the working traditional model or conception of Hell.

Some brief points of clarity and examination are in order. Let us begin with (1). As Walls (2010) notes, we can take (1) to be true (or false, for those universalists denying it) as either contingently or necessarily true. That is, one may take the claim that Hell remains eternally occupied by at least *some* people as a fact that, while true, *could have been false*, or one may take the truth of (1) to hold necessarily. In modern parlance, one may state (1) contingently to describe only certain possible worlds (including ours) or as a truth holding for all possible worlds.

Next, (2) remains vague on what sort of existence. For instance, philosophers disagree about whether the post mortem existence in Hell involves a corporeal or non-corporeal existence. Either view is consistent with (2) as stated following Kvanvig. Additionally, how we consider (2) may hinge on views regarding God's causal activity. It's possible to view the cessation of existence as a direct, positive action taken by God to the damned or simply God's removal of the general conservation of the world; thereby simply allowing the damned to cease to exist (as a consequences of God's suspending divine conservation).

(3) is fairly strict in claiming that there is no *possible* escape from Hell if one ends up there, so one could reject in one of two ways: (a) arguing that it is *possible* to escape, where this is consistent with no one actually performing the feat, and (b) claiming that it is *possible* to escape and *actually occurs*.

We also see a specific notion of the aim and purpose of Hell in (4). In particular, it states the primary reason for Hell as retributive punishment. One might view Hell as involving punishment but not as the *primary* reason for Hell or damnation. Such a view would reject (4). Thus, we should clarify that (4) is quite strong: it details not only the nature but also the *aim* or *intention* of Hell. It is not enough simply to accept *that* punishment occurs in Hell but one must, to accept the traditional view here, accept punishment as *the* primary reason for Hell. Thus, like the rest a plurality of views rejecting (4) are possible.

It is also informative to note some ways that one might accept (1)–(4) in ways that may not fit popular conception of Hell. For instance, (4) is silent on whether all punishment in Hell is equivalent. A popular view of Hell adopts the law of *contrapasso* from Dante whereby the damned suffer unequally based on the specific sin(s) responsible for damnation. Yet accepting (4) commits one neither way: it's possible to accept the Retributive Thesis and think that the damned suffer exactly the same punishment (or not). Also, a component of a popular conception of Hell features the damned immediately falling into perdition upon death. But

nothing in (1)–(4) states *when* the final judgment and resulting damnation occurs. It *could* be immediately after death or at some indefinite point in the future. Sketched here is a plurality of potential theological options regarding the time and nature of the final damnation, consistent with the standard model.

Alternative views of Hell diverging from the standard/traditional model above deny at least one of the four theses above. Examining how philosophers deny them uncovers the nature of these non-traditional models of Hell. Obviously, we can't catalog all of the possible ways one might reject (1)–(4) or all possible combinations involved in those rejects. Instead, we'll focus on the more popular or influential ways of rejecting generally just one of the four theses above.

Models that reject (1) are, unsurprisingly, universalist views on Hell. By rejecting (1), universalists claim that it is false that, eventually, there are persons in Hell. But, as with those accepting (1), universalists can take the eventual emptiness of Hell as contingently – John Hick (1978, p. 344) calls universalism a "*practical* certainty" – or necessarily true (e.g. Talbot 1990). A "traditional" universalist, then, may reject *only* (1): maintaining the rest of the standard model by accepting that, if Hell exists without its denizens it is/would be punitive, involve the persistence of the damned, and be the sort of place that one could not escape (counterfactually). But, clearly, the rejection of (1) by itself leads a wide variety of how to detail the specifics of universalism.

Similarly, one might reject only (2): claiming that people do not existence in Hell – at least *eventually*. This is Kvanvig's (1993) own position: he argues that Hell might exist for the duration that people need to make a settled, informed choice on whether to accept or deny God. But, for those making such a denial God ceases to conserve their being, leading to their total non-existence. Such views are annihilationist views: they accept that God's activity in damning some to Hell is tantamount to annihilating them.

Rejecting (3) accepts at least the mere possibility of escape from Hell. Unsurprisingly again, such views have fallen under the name "escapism" following Andrei Buckareff and Allen Plug (2005). Once in Hell, on these views, the damned individual may/does exit if s/he changes in a certain way (e.g., by accepting God, receiving grace, etc.). Yet the escapist can affirm (1): even though one may escape Hell, it doesn't follow that Hell will empty. Maybe people never do, in fact, leave Hell; or maybe some will always remain in eternal rejection of God (even if others do escape). And, similarly, (2) is no problem: saying that you can (in principle) escape X is perfectly consistent with non-escapees actually existing in X.

Finally, escapism makes no claims about the nature or aims of Hell – it certainly could be punitive.

If anything is obvious about Hell's nature, it seems to be (4). Much of the ancient and modern focus on the afterlife features a punitive role: the point of a place of damnation is for justice to enact from the wicked what they didn't suffer in life. This core of retributivist punishment occurs over and over again in the religious concepts of the afterlife. But this view, while popular and influential throughout the history of religious thought, may be rejected. Michael Murray (1999) contrasts what he calls the "Penalty Model" of Hell with the "Natural Consequence Model." Ultimately, he suggests that we accept *both* as a conception of Hell but what's important is an alternative to the retribution in (4).

On the Natural Consequence Model, we see Hell not as issuing from God's desire for punishment – or, better, the requirements of Divine Justice – but simply as a natural consequence of one's sin, life, choices, commitments, etc. Murray follows Richard Swinburne (1989) in seeing damnation as God respecting each agent's free choice in turning away from God (towards self-directedness). In turning away from God, the agent has set him/herself against God in life and, thus, this free choice should be respected by God's love for significantly free moral agents. To place this agent in communion with God – the very thing s/he sets him/herself against – would be to negate one's freedom in choosing one's own life. Thus, while Hell is bad and is a *de facto* punishment for rejecting God, this punishment isn't the primary reason why Hell exists on the Natural Consequence Model. Rather, the reason Hell exists is to preserve human autonomy for those freely (and definitively) rejecting God. Hell simply follows as a "natural consequence" of free agents freely rejecting their own good in turning away from God (eternally). Nothing in the Natural Consequence Model itself would require rejecting (1)–(3).

With the traditional/standard/strong model of Hell in mind with the various alternatives that have been proposed in rejecting it, one might ask for the motivations given for the rejections. How can one object to any of the four essential theses of the traditional model in the first place? And how might the adherent to the traditional doctrine of Hell respond to these objections? This brings us to some important philosophical problems the traditional doctrine of Hell is thought to generate and their responses. There is a massive interest and literature in philosophy detailing a family of problems here paralleling the standard problem of evil in general. Indeed, Kvanvig (1993, p. 3) argues that the problem of Hell demarcates a "special kind of evil." Even J.S. Mill in "The Utility of Religion" (1858) and Bertrand Russell in *Why I Am Not a Christian*

(1957) explicitly reject the plausibility of the traditional doctrine of Hell on grounds that it generates an insuperable problem of evil for theism.

4 Hell and evil

A bit on the problem of evil is called for at this point. In general, we can see the problem of evil as urging that the existence and extent of evil presents a serious problem for the truth or rational acceptability of theism: where theism is the view that an omni-perfect Deity exists. The problem at issue for theism may be taken as a logically inconsistent set of propositions as with the "logical problem of evil or as contributing to the evidence against or probably that theism is false with the "evidential" problem of evil. Now, insofar as "evil" in the problem at root generally means only "bad stuff that happens," it is easy to see the problem of Hell as a potential instance of the wider problem of evil, given that damnation in Hell is, on any conception thereof, a bad thing (to put it as mildly as possible). Talbot (1990), for instance, construes his version of the problem of Hell as a *logical* problem for non-universalists, arguing that the tradition model of Hell, in combination with viewing God as omnipotent, omniscient, and perfectly loving, generates a contradiction in an exactly similar way as the traditional logical problem of evil. But, much like the general problem of evil, the problems motivated by Hell work differently, by picking out different divine attributes targeted and the specific sort of "bad thing" threatened by Hell.

One of the more popular versions of the problem of Hell takes issue with God's justice in damning people to an eternity of dire, unrelenting punishment. For instance, McCord Adams argues that "so far from being entailed by God's perfect justice, the doctrine of Hell… is incompatible with it" (Adams 1975, p. 434). Her argument is, like Talbot's, structurally identical to a standard logical problem of evil: there's some perfection, φ, such that the conjunction of existence of Hell (conceived traditionally) with φ generates some contradiction. Her focus is the perfection of divine justice. Part of her argument, and may others detailing a problem of Hell based on divine justice, works out what's often called the "proportionality objection." According to this line of reasoning, the badness of eternal punitive suffering in Hell tremendously overwhelms any kind or amount of evils done by a person in life. Punishment in Hell, it is argued, meets a *finite* (though potentially vast) amount/kind of evil with a necessarily *infinite* duration/extent punishment through eternity. Certainly, the objection goes, it's unjust to give an infinite

punishment to a merely finite crime. Thus, a perfectly just God couldn't damn anyone eternally.

In response, the traditionalist has a historically influential argument (going back to Anselm and Augustine): punishment in Hell is not, and even cannot, be a response to the amount or depth of sins committed in life. Instead, the punishment is a response to the victim of the sin – i.e., God. Since God is infinitely good, just, etc. *any* sin (being a sin against an infinitely perfect Being) would be tantamount to an infinitely bad act. Thus, divine justice is perfectly consistent with, or maybe even requires, an infinite punishment to balance the scales. Some contemporary philosophers see this response as plausible: Murray claims that this response is not "especially problematic" (1999, p. 293). Others, however, find it unconvincing. Clark Pinnock (1996, p. 152), for instance, suggests that "[t]his may have worked in the Middle Ages, but it will not work as an argument today."

But other problems of Hell focus on other divine attributes. Notably, both John Hick (1978) and Jonathan Kvanvig (1993) argue that the traditional model of Hell conflicts with God's *love.* This leads to Hick's famous acceptance of reincarnation: the aim being to transform one's soul through many lives to make it fit for communion with God. Hence, he adopts the (contingent but probabilistic) universalism above – as we develop our souls through reincarnation, there will (almost certainly) be no one left in Hell. Similarly, God's love inclines Kvanvig to his "conditional immorality" or annihilationist view: God's love for free agents requires that God respect our informed and definite choices. But, in turning away from God one turns away from the Ground of all being. Thus, the choice to definitely reject God is to reject existence. God's love, therefore, means that God accepts that agent's choice; even if that choice is, effectively, non-existence. In considering God's love, Hick rejects (1) and Kvanvig rejects (2).

As with the generic problem of evil, Adams, Hick, and Kvanvig all see some divine attribute as inconsistent, or minimally problematic, with the traditional doctrine; thus, they are led to deny some element of the traditional model. And, as with the problem of evil generally, one can see various philosophical responses rejecting the tradition doctrine in response as well as traditional responses to those responses. Accordingly, we find the motives for annihilationism, universalism, escapism, and whatever other alternative models philosophers may support: motivated by the problem of Hell.

* * *

Given what has been communicated in this Introduction thus far, the reader can already see the philosophical nature and approach of this book. This collection is divided into three broad groups of papers: Part I focuses on metaphysical considerations such as the existence and nature of Hell; Part II deals with the rationale and justification for belief in Hell; and Part III discusses how the belief in Hell impacts views of the self, as well as our values, moralities, and social norms and laws. Each chapter, at root, considers the concept of Hell and surrounding ideas with a critical eye, analyzing evidence, scrutinizing claims, and evaluating arguments for their rational worth. The diversity of parts and variety of individual chapters within those parts shows just how philosophical thinking may be applied in a tremendously amount of different ways, from different perspectives, and to different ends.

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Part I
The Nature of Hell

1
Choosing Hell

Randall M. Jensen

How can the world be filled with evil and suffering if there is a God who is all-powerful and perfectly good? The *problem of evil*, as it is usually called, is one of the biggest philosophical problems there is, leading some to abandon belief in God altogether and provoking others to reflect on and to rethink their faith. It is a very old problem, aptly posed by Epicurus and fiercely discussed ever since; and a highly complex problem as well, one that takes many shapes.[1] Defeat one version and – like a hydra – two more spring up in its place. In this essay I will wrangle with one of the particularly nasty heads of this monster of a problem. Our world offers plenty of examples of evil and suffering, but arguably none that compare with the plight of the damned in Hell. The problem of Hell is the problem of evil at its very worst.

Any problem of evil, including the problem of Hell, is created by the tension between a set of beliefs about God and a set of beliefs about evil in general or Hell in particular. For example, consider the following propositions:

G: God exists and is omnipotent, omniscient, and omnibenevolent.
E: Evil exists.
H: Hell exists.

The *logical* problem of evil (or Hell) asserts that G and E (or H) are logically inconsistent, due to the initially plausible implicit assumption that no omnipotent, omniscient, and omnibenevolent being would cause or allow any evil (or Hell) to exist. The *evidential* problem of evil grants that there may be some clever way to argue that G and E (or H) are logically consistent, but maintains that E (or H) is nonetheless very compelling evidence against G, just as a certain piece of evidence might make

it unlikely that a defendant in a court case is innocent, so that a jury might decide that guilt is beyond any reasonable doubt, even though some farfetched story might be concocted to explain how innocence is logically possible.

Most of the many attempts to solve these problems (*theodicies*, as they are often called) involve rethinking our beliefs about God (thus revising G) or about evil and Hell (thus revising E and/or H) or both. After a quick survey of several such proposed revisions, I will explore in more depth the paradoxical theodicy that Hell is something the damned choose for themselves, inspired in part by the work of Christian writers C.S. Lewis and Charles Williams.

1 The divine attributes

One obvious opening move a theist could make in constructing a theodicy of evil or Hell would be to give up on one of the divine attributes, thus rejecting G. Perhaps God is not omnipotent, and thus cannot prevent all damnation and evil. Some even speak here of the weakness of God. Or perhaps we should not think of God as perfectly good. Perhaps God transcends such evaluative categories and we should refrain from conceiving of God in our own moral terms. If we abandon the idea that God has all power and/or all goodness, the problem of evil (or Hell), as it is traditionally understood, will simply not arise.

However, most Christian theists are not tempted by such radically revisionary theodicies, for these divine attributes are traditionally seen as part of the very nature of God, so that any being who lacks one of these attributes would not be God at all and would also perhaps not be worthy of worship. From this point of view, to give up the claim that God is omnipotent or perfectly good is tantamount to rejecting traditional Christian belief altogether. In the following discussion, then, I mean to stay within the bounds of what C.S. Lewis (2007, pp. 5–11) calls "mere Christianity," although of course opinions will vary on what counts as "mere."

The move a Christian theist is more likely to make would be to analyze and clarify the three divine attributes included in G instead of rejecting any of them. For example, rather than being the power to do anything whatsoever, *omnipotence* is typically defined as the power to do anything that is logically possible. If X is logically necessary for Y, then not even God can bring about Y without X. This clarification reveals no lack of power in God; it rather shows that in our confusion we might expect God to do a thing that is not really a thing, such as to create a round square or to produce a married bachelor.[2]

To see an example of this initial clarificatory move in action, consider one of the most familiar attempts to show how G and E or H are compatible and thus to (try to) solve the problem of evil: the free will theodicy. Why is there evil in the world? Because God chose to create free creatures and it is not logically possible for God to create a world with free creatures and no evil. Although God is omnipotent, God cannot provide a creature a genuine choice between good and evil and yet guarantee that the creature will not choose evil. Further, some argue, creatures cannot really be free without the possibility of Hell. Without this clarification of omnipotence, the free will theodicy cannot get off the ground, for we will simply ask why an omnipotent God did not create a world full of free creatures and with no evil or why God does not simply do away with Hell. For God can do anything, right?

To say that this free will theodicy can get off the ground is not to say that it will succeed. For it must be established, and not merely suggested, that it is after all not logically possible for God to create free creatures and yet to ensure that there will be no evil. The usual tack to take here is to adopt a *libertarian* definition of human free will, on which human freedom is incompatible with divine determination of human action. At the core of the libertarian notion of freedom is the idea that freedom requires "the power to do otherwise." Although unpacking what exactly this might mean is a tricky business, it is not too difficult to see why it is often held that it is logically impossible for God to give a creature this power and yet to determine the outcome of that creature's choices. Thus, those who defend a libertarian conception of human freedom as the power to do otherwise and accept the clarification of omnipotence as the power to do whatever is logically possible are poised to begin work on a free will theodicy.[3]

Yes, our world contains evil. But this evil may now potentially be seen as logically required for our presence in the world (and for the presence of whatever other free creatures there may be). God could have created a world with no evil, but such a world would have had no free creatures, either. Arguably, this explains why even an omnipotent and perfectly good God might create a world with some evil in it. Can it also explain why there is a Hell? We will return to that question soon.

Why would God choose to create such a world? Well, perhaps as Leibniz believes God must create the best of all possible worlds and this is it. Or perhaps God has no interest in creating the best world and this is one among a wide variety of good worlds God could have created. Why this one, then? Perhaps simply because God chose it as a matter of

divine freedom. Or perhaps the answer to this question might be found by reflecting further on the third divine attribute.

G speaks of the omnibenevolence of God. Those who are less enamored of continuing the trend of "omni" attributes might instead speak of God's perfect goodness. Just as God is maximally powerful and maximally knowledgeable, where what is maximal is understood as outlined above, God is maximally good. What does this mean? I suppose one could say that it simply means that God is as good as it is logically possible to be. Does this clarification help in the way the others have? Perhaps, not. Here our issue is not so much with the contours of the divine attribute but with its content. In what way is God good? What is goodness, anyway?

God is good, to be sure. In fact, following in the Platonically steeped medieval tradition, God is the Good itself. God is the beginning and the end. God is the Creator of all things other than Godself and the goal toward which all things tend. This puts God right at the center of our metaphysics of value. But it does not seem to tell us as much about God's character. How is God's metaphysical role connected to God's moral attributes and to how God views and treats those God has created? This is no easy question to answer. I will succumb to one observation, however. If God simply is the Good, then God need do nothing to preserve this status. It is not as if God could lose it in the way a human being might lose her good reputation. God is free to behave as we think no divine being ought to behave – cue the Incarnation! – and yet remain God.

In any case, let us turn from metaphysics to moral theory as our guide. Should we understand the goodness of God in *utilitarian* terms, so that God's concern is to maximize the utility of all the creatures God has created? This would perhaps help us to explain why some evils exist, since God might sacrifice some creatures for the greater good (although such measures would be needed by God far less than by us). Or is divine goodness to be understood in strictly *deontological* terms, in which case divine goodness would be a matter of fulfilling divine obligations, including meeting the demands of justice? This account too might assist us in showing how some evils exist, as deserved punishment for human sins. Even Hell might possibly be justified as a matter of justice.

I want to recommend another path, beginning with the robust Christian doctrine that God is love. Within Christian traditions, God is a Trinity of persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, eternally united in mutual loving relationship to one another. God loves us too. God created human beings, male and female, in God's own image. Remarkably, God even became a human being, a man named Jesus of Nazareth, and lived

among us. Jesus tells us stories about God's love, about how God loves those who seem least deserving of love and about the extraordinary lengths to which God will go to find and save each of those who are lost. Jesus' love for us is most dramatically exemplified in his horrific and humiliating execution on the cross, a sacrifice that according to Christian doctrine is how God saves us from sin and death. God loves us even though we killed the Son of God.

Crucial to Christian theology is the idea that God's love is not a response to anything we do. God loves us not at our best but even in our darkest moments (Romans 5:8). If we manage to love someone in our own feeble way, it is because of God's love (1 John 4:19). The love of God is unconditional. Sometimes we say that our love for another person is unconditional, meaning that we strive to love that person come what may, but God's love is unconditional in a more radical way. While our love can tragically fall short, God can no more stop loving than a fire can cease to be hot. Love is who God is and what God does.

I also propose that although many images can be helpful in depicting the relationship between God and humanity, the relationship of a parent to a child ought to be placed foremost among them. One way to put it is that the claim that God loves us as a parent loves a child will function here as what Nicholas Wolterstorff (1988) long ago called a "control belief." Think of how a loving parent regards her several children. She loves and wants to be good to each of them. She does not impersonally aggregate their welfare. In the spirit of John Rawls, she regards her children as separate persons. If she is forced to choose among them, or to sacrifice one for another in some kind of *Sophie's Choice* predicament, it is a horror to her and such a decision cannot fulfill her love for her children but can only defeat it. She also does not see her efforts to know and help her children as a matter of obligation. Love rather than utility or obligation is what drives her.[4]

God's goodness is thus to be understood as God's love for God's creatures and God's desire to be good to each of them rather than as God's ambition to actualize the best possible world or to satisfy the demands of justice.[5] God is just, but divine justice is more a matter of God's faithfulness to creatures than of balancing the cosmic scales. In the end, God is a parent more than a world-builder or a judge.

2 Hell

How can we reconcile this beautiful story of a God who loves us as a parent loves her children with the horrors of Hell? For in addition to its

beatific vision of a life in Heaven for the saved, Christian tradition also includes a place of eternal conscious torment for the damned. How is it that the God who goes out into the dark to find that one lost sheep, who is willing to put on flesh and die on a cross to save us, will consign so many people to so awful a fate?

Damnation is a damnably difficult doctrine. H says very simply that Hell exists. This general idea can be articulated in many different ways. On a traditional rendition of H, Hell is a place where many people consciously experience horrible torment for all eternity. And it is this rendition that is most obviously difficult to square with G. If God is good and loves the people God has created, then surely God does not want any of them to be subjected to everlasting torture. If God is omnipotent and omniscient, especially if God is seen as sovereign over all of creation, then it seems hard to see how God would be unable to prevent this. And yet Hell is a well-entrenched part of Christian tradition.

Once again, the project of theodicy is fueled by careful and creative reflection on theological doctrine. Keeping in mind our earlier discussion of how to understand G and its divine attributes, I will quickly canvass several other theodicies of Hell before considering the theodicy that Hell is something its denizens choose for themselves.

Encouraged by certain passages of Scripture, some might claim that God loves only the righteous. God does save each of those whom God loves, then. But since God hates the wicked, and thus desires to punish them, his wrath is satisfied only by their horrible eternal suffering. Hell can thus be seen as the place into which God casts his enemies. If God loves some and hates others, then a traditional theology of Heaven and Hell is no surprise at all. However, as we discussed above, a God who hates anyone is not a God whose very nature is love and whose desire is to rescue the lost rather than see them suffer.

Next, consider the traditional idea that Hell is a place of punishment for those who deserve it. It seems possible to think that God loves a person but nonetheless must see her punished. God does not hate the wicked; they are not enemies of God. But like a judge God must mete out punishment to those who deserve it. The damned have sinned. As Anselm reminds us, any sin against an infinite God demands an infinite punishment. Thus, Hell must exist as a place of judgment. Human beings choose to sin and the wages of such sin is Hell. Notice here the frequent use of the word "must." This will require elaboration. Perhaps there is something logically incoherent about a free creature who sins against God but escapes punishment altogether? Or perhaps damnation is what divine justice requires?

A complementary maneuver would be to draw a distinction in the divine will between God's antecedent will and God's consequent will. When speaking of God's antecedent will, we can say that God loves all creatures and does not want any of them to be damned, thereby trying to uphold the idea that God is love. But while God may antecedently will that no one loved by God ought to be damned, His consequent will is that, given the circumstances, some must be damned as a matter of justice. Can we make sense of such a distinction without seeing God as a schizophrenic?

I have already laid my cards on the table in choosing to emphasize divine love rather than divine justice and in seeing God more as a parent than a judge. Here I will just add that while one can make sense of the idea that God must be just at all costs, it becomes more difficult to hang on to that idea if one is deeply committed to the Gospel proclamation that our sins are forgiven or when reading some of the parables of Jesus, such as the laborers in the vineyard (Matthew 20:1–16). In any case, many Christian theists will want to lean more in the direction of love, forgiveness, and mercy.

These first attempts at theodicy adhere to a fairly traditional understanding of H. Hell remains a place of eternal conscious torment. We now consider some theodicies that are more revisionary. These revisions are largely driven by the desire to deal with the following set of all too familiar problems:

- *Hell is a horrible blight on God's creation.* Maybe it is not really a lake of fire. But it is a place of horrors, a place that is difficult to see as part of a universe created and ruled by a loving God. Christians often preach the narrative of Creation, fall, and Redemption. The world was good, then we brought bad things into the world, but God will make all things good again. Except … Hell?
- Hell lasts forever. There is no escape, no end, no hope of rescue or redemption.
- Hell is for so many people. If only those who identify themselves as Christians escape Hell (a view sometimes called exclusivism), then a tragically vast number of human beings will find themselves in Hell. Maybe the majority of us.
- Hell is for children (and for others who do not seem to deserve it). Some Christians believe unbaptized infants go to Hell. Many do not. But in addition to the human villains who may make some people glad there is a Hell, Christianity seems to teach that many of the damned will be perfectly ordinary folk who seem not to have had a chance at Heaven.

Because of these and other problems, some would reject H outright and argue that there is no Hell. It is not hard to see why. As C.S. Lewis (2007, p. 620) puts it, "There is no doctrine which I would more willingly remove from Christianity than this, if it lay in my power." And yet Lewis points out that this is a difficult move to make within a Christian perspective, since Hell is a longstanding part of the Christian story and Jesus speaks of it fairly frequently in the gospels. As we proceed, then, I will focus on theodicies that make room for a doctrine of Hell in their attempts to grapple with these problems.

A fairly popular and promising revision of the traditional view of Hell is that Hell is a *temporary* sentence for the damned rather than an eternal imprisonment. Problems stemming from the eternality of Hell simply fall away, then. A sinner need not pay her debts forever, and so we need not defend the difficult ideas that a finite creature's sin can deserve an infinite punishment and that God must mete it out. While we are still left to explain why the damned must suffer horribly, at least we need not explain why this suffering must last forever. This revision can take (at least) two different shapes.

First, perhaps the damned do not persist in Hell forever but eventually cease to exist. Proponents of *annihilationism* claim that it helps us to believe in Hell but also to believe in a God worth believing in. Hell could remain a destination for God's hated enemies, or for justly sentenced sinners, or for those who are otherwise lost, but the mercy of God is shown in that they will eventually be relieved of their sufferings. Although this move softens the problem of Hell somewhat, it still leaves us with the pressing question of why God's beloved creatures suffer so horribly at all. For what purpose? If their time in Hell ends only with their annihilation, it still seems that the lives of many of God's creatures end tragically. Is this kind of eschatological euthanasia really what God intends?

In a second and more optimistic and (thus?) more controversial version of this revision, the damned do not cease to exist but rather find their way out of Hell and into Heaven, an idea that in effect transforms Hell into a kind of purgatory. On this view, Hell can be seen more as educative and rehabilitative than as punitive. Hell is not a place where there is no hope. Like the evils in this life, the evils of Hell can be used by God for the good of creatures, to instruct them and eventually to save some of those who die while still lost. Something like this picture is suggested in C.S. Lewis's work of theological speculative fiction *The Great Divorce* (1945), although Lewis is not sanguine about the capacity of the damned to leave Hell behind in any great number.

3 Choosing Hell

If we find it very difficult to understand why a loving God would send anyone to Hell, even for a temporary stay, perhaps we should consider the possibility that God does not in fact *send* anyone to Hell. Perhaps, the damned travel into the depths of Hell on their own accord. At first blush, this is hard to fathom. Why on Earth would anyone choose damnation over salvation? Why would a loving God allow them to do so? Perhaps a few stories will help us to see how these questions might be answered.

C.S. Lewis is perhaps the best-known popular Christian representative of both the general free will theodicy and the theodicy of Hell that is driven by the claim that Hell is populated by people who choose to be there. In *The Last Battle*, the final entry in the seven volumes of The Chronicles of Narnia, Lewis depicts a troop of dwarfs who have been hurled through a stable door into Aslan's Country. These dwarfs have done terrible things. Yet they now sit on what is Heaven's doorstep, more or less. However, their eyes are blind to the beauty that surrounds them. One of the children asks Aslan, the great lion, the Narnian Christ figure, if anything can be done for them. He replies as follows:

> "Dearest," said Aslan, "I will show you both what I can, and what I cannot, do…"
>
> Aslan raised his head and shook his mane. Instantly a glorious feast appeared on the Dwarfs' knees: pies and tongues and pigeons and trifles and ices, and each Dwarf had a goblet of good wine in his right hand. But it wasn't of much use. They began eating and drinking greedily enough, but it was clear that they couldn't taste it properly. They thought they were eating and drinking only the sort of things you might find in a Stable. One said he was trying to eat hay and another said he had got a bit of an old turnip and a third said he'd found a raw cabbage leaf. And they raised golden goblets of rich red wine to their lips and said "Ugh! Fancy drinking dirty water out of a trough that a donkey's been at! Never thought we'd come to this…"
> "You see," said Aslan. "They will not let us help them. They have chosen cunning instead of belief. Their prison is only in their own minds, yet they are in that prison; and so afraid of being taken in that they cannot be taken out." (Lewis, 2001, pp. 747–8)

In Lewis's tale, Aslan does all he can for the dwarfs, but they will not believe. They do not see the truth, because they do not choose to see it.

It is worth noting that the dwarfs' refusal to enter Heaven (or to admit that they are already there?) follows from a series of earlier decisions: to care only for themselves ("The Dwarfs are for the Dwarfs," as they often say), to reject king and country and Aslan, and even to kill anyone who might stand in their way. This move of making the choice of Hell continuous with the choices the damned make in this life is an important part of Lewis's picture of Hell.

In the preface to *The Great Divorce*, Lewis also underscores how Heaven and Hell are less separate from this world than we might suppose:

> Earth, I think, will not be found by anyone to be in the end a very distinct place. I think earth, if chosen instead of Heaven, will turn out to have been, all along, only a region in Hell: and earth, if put second to Heaven, to have been from the beginning a part of Heaven itself. (Lewis, 2007, p. 466)

The Dwarfs' fate – their refusal of Heaven and their embrace of Hell – is not a divine punishment for their awful actions. Rather, the choices they made in life have a trajectory and their projected destination is Hell. Lewis would not say that a person chooses Hell after she dies; rather, this choice is being made throughout one's life.

The Great Divorce contains a series of vignettes of characters offered a "vacation" from the dismal grey Hell of a town in which they live to a dangerously beautiful Heavenly cliff top. They are free to stay in that glorious place, but most choose to return down into the gloom. It is up to them. Why would they choose Hell over Heaven? The answer is found in the way they have lived their earthly lives; there is something they refuse to face, or something they will not give up. One man wants to earn his own way in life; he will not accept any "bleeding charity." (Lewis, 2007, pp. 479–82) A mother wants her son, while a wife wants her husband, and both want to grasp at and control the one they "love." And a man who has shrunken in size as well as in his humanity, and who now speaks through a theatrical spokesman he has created for himself, wants his wife to need him and to be miserable without him. Like the others, he wants something that cannot be had in Heaven. He is invited to stay and to rejoice with his wife, but he will have none of it. The narrator tells us, "I do not know that I ever saw anything more terrible than the struggle of that Dwarf ghost against joy." (Lewis, 2007, p. 533) For Lewis, unlike for Sartre, *Heaven* is other people. To be in Heaven is to be drawn up into the love of God and thus to love others as God does.

Sadly, some will have no part of this. They choose self over other, love over hate, illusion over reality.

Lewis flirts with the idea that there is a way out of Hell. But he is committed to the idea that people end up in Hell because of their own choices. Charles Williams, one of his fellow Inklings, makes this idea one of the central themes of his macabre novel *Descent into Hell*. One of the central characters is Lawrence Wentworth, a retired army man who is now a distinguished military historian. Wentworth, as we first encounter him, seems a quite ordinary man with quite ordinary vices. He is petty and vain and altogether too preoccupied both by a professional rivalry and by a young woman to whom he has taken a fancy. However, he lives in a house that is haunted by a tragic suicide victim and he has been having strange dreams about climbing down a white rope into the darkness. Soon we will see his life is not so ordinary after all.

Although Wentworth is obsessed with a young woman, Adela Hunt, he "never had a friend or a lover; he had never, in any possible sense of the word, been 'in love'." (Williams, 2001, p. 36) Further, although he sees himself as a scholar, he "identified scholarship with himself, and asserted himself under the disguise of a defence of scholarship … the exact detail of Edward's march was not, in fact, worth to him the cost of a single cigar." (Williams, 2001, p. 38) Wentworth loves nothing outside of himself, and this will be the cause of his damnation. As the story progresses, he faces a series of choices that are more fateful than he realizes.

He suspects that Adela has lied to him and is carrying on with a younger man. He is driven to sneak out into the night to verify his suspicion.

> A remnant of intelligence cried to him that this was the road of mania, and self-indulgence leading to mania … He must act before it was too late. He would not go to spy; he would go for a walk. He went out of the room, down the soft swift stairs of his mind, into the streets of his mind, to find the phantoms of his mind. He desired Hell. (Williams, 2001, p. 50)

Why does Williams refer to this as a desire for Hell? Because, Wentworth is lying to himself. And for Williams, as for Lewis, Hell is itself a lie, an illusion, a denial of what is real.

Wentworth also discovers that a rival historian, Aston Moffat, "a pure scholar, a holy and beautiful soul who would have sacrificed

reputation, income, and life, if necessary, for the discovery of one fact about the horse-boys of Edward Plantagenet," has been given a knighthood. (Williams, 2001, p. 38) Wentworth must decide how to respond to this news. Once again, he rejects the truth. This time, he does not lie to himself. But instead of loving the truth he decides to hate it.

> There was presented to him at once and clearly an opportunity for joy ... He could enjoy; at least he could refuse not to enjoy. He could refuse and reject damnation. With a perfectly clear, if instantaneous, knowledge of what he did, he rejected joy instead ... He had determined, then and for ever, for ever, for ever, that he would hate the fact, and therefore facts. (Williams, 2001, pp. 80–1)

In one of the strangest events in a very strange novel, Wentworth somehow creates a succubus of Adela. Instead of admitting that the real woman does not care for him, he readily succumbs to the delusion of an illusion of her, "the Adela he kept in himself," and "the she that was he, and all he in the she." (Williams, 2001, pp. 83, 89) Later Williams writes that of Wentworth that "his whole damnation was that he would not choose the trouble to lift the real Adela." (Williams, 2001, pp. 129–30) Here an illusion of Hell is a mockery of the act of creation.

Near the end of the novel, Wentworth's fate is almost sealed. He is almost to the bottom of the rope down which he is climbing in his dreams. But even at this late date he is given a choice. He finds himself at a reception for his hated rival. "If he had ever hated Sir Aston because of a passion for austere truth, he might even then have ... been saved." Instead, he thinks only that "'I've been cheated.' It was his last consecutive thought." (Williams, 2001, p. 219) All Wentworth needs to do to find salvation is to recognize and appreciate something outside himself, even such a trivial fact as the kind of uniform being used in a play. (Williams, 2001, pp.140–5) Wentworth's ultimate fate is described in the novel's closing lines:

> He had now no consciousness of himself as such ... he was out beyond it in the blankness of a living oblivion, tormented by oblivion ... He was sitting at the end, looking up an avenue of nothingness, and the little flames licked his soul, but they did not now come from without, for they were the power, and the only power, his dead past had on him; the life, and the only life, of his soul ... The silence lasted; nothing happened. In that expectancy faded. Presently ... he was

> drawn, steadily, everlastingly, inward and down through the bottomless circles of the void. (Williams, 2001, pp. 221–2)

Wentworth's damnation is horrible, perhaps all the more so since it is his own doing. There is indeed a Hell in Williams's world, as in Lewis's, and it is one in which in the end there will be no way out, although the possibilities of annihilation or post-mortem salvation are still in play.[6]

For Lewis and Williams, people choose their own damnation, then, for the same reasons they make foolish or immoral choices in this life. We are selfish and short-sighted. And once we start down that road, it is difficult to turn back. Perhaps we can recognize ourselves and others we know in the portraits of such awful self-destructiveness painted in these stories? And perhaps we find the figure of a God who sadly allows beloved children to destroy their lives as well as their afterlives more palatable than that of a God who casts creatures into outer darkness while they plead for mercy.

4 No choice after all?

The idea that Hell is something the damned choose for themselves is attractive because it helps to salvage the crucial and cruciform claim that God loves the world and each creature within it. God is not Hell-bent on justice. God does not wish for any creature to endure eternal conscious torment. But God does allow much-beloved creatures to choose their own fate. Although, as C.S. Lewis puts it, God uses all God's wiles to woo us: God will not ravish us (Lewis, 2007, p. 207). Hell is of our own making and God allows us to make it.[7]

While this initial sketch of a theodicy shows some promise, it also faces problems. Some with a high view of God's sovereignty will balk at the idea that God leaves something like this up to us. In a way, the question is whether one would rather live with a God who is in control of our destiny and try to explain how it is that this God loves all of us, even those who are damned by God, or whether one would rather live with a God who desires to save everyone but whose desires are not always satisfied. Such a disagreement about the divine nature seems too basic to adjudicate in any clear way.

This theodicy also faces at least three serious interrelated specific problems. First, we must be careful not to underestimate God's capacity to woo us. Perhaps God is such an attractive and persuasive suitor that all will succumb to God in the end. Second, in spite of the convincing narrative examples we have seen, on further reflection the idea of a

creature choosing its own damnation may prove too hard to swallow. Third, why would God respect our freedom so much that we are allowed to choose even our own ultimate destruction?

If, like many philosophers, we accept some form of *compatibilism*, on which the claim that human beings are free is compatible with the claim that God determines what happens in the world, then this free-will-driven theodicy of Hell looks like it is in a heap of trouble. So, keeping in mind that this is controversial, let us assume incompatibilism instead and adopt a libertarian account of free will, as earlier discussed. Can we now argue that the existence of free creatures requires the existence of Hell? Not so fast. As part of his case for universal salvation, Thomas Talbott argues that it is conceivable that God will convince everyone not to choose Hell even if they have the power to do otherwise.[8] Talbott poses a dilemma. A creature's choice of Hell might be rational and fully informed or it might not. Either way, Talbott argues against the idea of free creatures choosing Hell. He first argues that the idea of a creature making a rational and fully informed choice of Hell is incoherent. Consider the prospect of a person choosing Hell with her eyes wide open, knowing what she is refusing and what she is accepting. She is rejecting the God who is love and the fulfilled and flourishing life that union with God brings. She is instead embracing emptiness and sorrow and suffering. She has the power to choose the latter, but why would she? Can we imagine such a choice? Lewis and Williams helps us to do just this in their stories. However, do any of the characters depicted by Lewis or Williams seem like their decisions are rational and fully informed? It is difficult to miss how thoroughly deceived and self-deceived they are. Some of them are even on the verge of losing their agency, such as the woman from *The Great Divorce* who may no longer be a grumbler and merely a grumble. And this is Talbott's point. It is difficult to conceive of a person in her right mind choosing Hell.

Suppose then that a person's choice of Hell is not rational and fully informed. This kind of choice we can envision. Why would a loving God allow a beloved creature to make and be bound by such a choice? Out of respect for our freedom? Parents do want their children to make their own way in life as they mature. A loving parent will often allow a child to make foolish choices. But it is also not uncommon for a parent to try to convince her child that a choice is indeed foolish – to inform and thus hope to alter her uninformed or irrational decision. Love even seems to require some attempt to do so, especially if the choice is a momentous one. If the choice is going to mean serious harm to her

child, or even death, a loving parent will want to interfere, even forcibly, on the grounds that her child is only making this choice because she is missing something or not thinking clearly. Might we not do the same for anyone we love, even if they are adults rather than children? And would not God do the same for us?

These are serious questions and not rhetorical ones. Parenting, like theology, is a difficult business. Talbott and his critics discuss the fraught question of what we ought to do if someone we love is contemplating suicide. Sometimes we are convinced suicide is a tragically mistaken decision and we will do all we can to persuade a loved one not to go through with it. We may even intervene. But we will no doubt wrestle with the clash between our desire to help her and our desire to respect her right to make her own decision. And this wrestling will become all the more agonizing if we are tempted to think suicide might even be a rational choice, as in the case of terminal illness, for example. Might we with great sadness allow someone to do what she wants? And might we think of God doing the same for us in allowing us to choose Hell? People will argue over all this.

Of course, this analogy has its limitations. God is surely far more effective at persuasion than we are. And a God who intervenes in the world would seem able to work against a person's damnation in more subtle and less coercive ways than are available to us. God is also aware of what is good and bad for human beings when such matters are often difficult for us to discern. Finally, it is not easy to see how Hell could be good for someone in the way that death might be good for a person suffering through the end of a battle with cancer. All this makes it even more difficult to buy the idea that many people will choose Hell despite God's best efforts.

So the theodicy built on choosing Hell confronts some real problems. Of course, so do its rivals! It would be rash to expect any unproblematic solution to a problem that has plagued so many for so long. For those who are committed to the existence of a loving God, then, the problem of Hell persists, whether or not Hell is something we choose. The choice we face at present is which of all these various difficult questions theists want to live with.

Notes

1. As expected, much ink has been spilled about the problem of evil. See, for example, McBrayer and Howard-Snyder (2013), Evans (2013), Frances (2013), Stump (2010, 1986), van Inwagen (2008), and Adams and Adams (1990).

2. Likewise, divine *omniscience* might be understood, not as the knowledge of every true proposition but rather as the knowledge of every proposition it is logically possible to know. If it can be argued that there is some proposition it is logically impossible to know, such a claim about the outcome of a truly indeterministic process or a claim about what it is like for an immaterial being to taste a cheeseburger, then perhaps God cannot know this proposition. Once again, this is seen by its advocates, not as a denial of God's omniscience but rather as a clarification of its real meaning.
3. A somewhat less familiar and more controversial extension of this free will theodicy insists that God cannot create free creatures and at the same time foreknow the outcomes of their free decisions. On this view, often known as *open theism*, God deliberately creates a world full of creatures the future lives of which he neither predetermines nor foreknows. For the open theist, this leaves God free to communicate and interact with us in a way not feasible if he were to foreknow all our actions.
4. This shift toward thinking of God's goodness in terms of love is connected to several familiar objections to impersonal moral theories.
5. See chapter 2 of Marilyn McCord Adams (1999) for a more sophisticated discussion of these issues.
6. Although in *The Great Divorce* (1945) we find Lewis exploring the idea of a way out of Hell, he makes it clear in chapter 8 of *The Problem of Pain* (1940) that at some point the fate of the damned is final.
7. Jerry Walls (1992, chapter 5) offers a philosophical defense of this idea that the damned choose their own fate. More precisely, he argues that some people will make what he calls a decisive choice for evil.
8. Talbott lays out this position in several works. Among them are Thomas Talbott (2014; 2003, chapters 1–3 and 12).

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2

Hell Is Others and Paradise Is Others: Hell in the Existential Paris of Sartre and Berdyaev

James M. McLachlan

In his afterword to Zvi Kolitz's *Yosl Rakover Talks to God*, "Loving the Torah More than God," Emmanuel Levinas claimed that the Holocaust exposed the refusal of God to intervene in history. It obliterated the magician God, the God of imperial power (Kolitz, 1999, pp. 79–87). In *Otherwise than Being* Levinas tells us God's silence in times of crisis has led to "...strange rumors about the death of God or the emptiness of the heavens. No one will believe in their silence" (Levinas. 1998, p. 5). Levinas's "Religion for Adults" does away such a search for the ground of being, we encounter transcendence in the alterity of the Other. In short for Levinas's "Religion for Adults," after claiming we encounter real transcendence in the alterity of the Other, demands immanent action in this world and not so much the hope of the world to come; hence the rumors of God's death. The projected ideal deity of perfect being theology called transcendent and wholly other by the tradition is really only a projection of the will to power. In a "Religion for Adults" it is this projection of the transcendent that is dead (Levinas, 1997, pp. 14–17). But the God of imperial power dies hard.

Levinas's thought about the Other emerges against the background of the intellectual ferment of the 1930s and post-war France. In 1943 Jean-Paul Sartre launched his famous attack on traditional theism's origin in will to power. We humans are "a useless passion" because we want contradictory things: real freedom and an open future. But we also desire a future where everything happens for a reason and God guarantees that everything is taken care of and the movie will end in the proper way with evil defeated. Sartre even said this "should" happen that consciousness is constructed such we see the world in eschatological terms we believe

there should be fullness and completion, an in-itself-for-itself. But for Sartre, to be conscious is to lack completion, to be very vulnerably open to the future. Yet we desire completion and this is the source of our Desire to be God and of our Bad faith. The eschatology of completeness leads to violence as the separate projects each doomed to failure blame each other for that failure (Sartre, 1956, p. 756). The violence is born in the bad faith effort to stop history, to roll up the freedom of the other person in my created total vision of the meaning of the world. But the Other constantly reminds me of my inability to accomplish this impossible task; hence, as Garcin says in Sartre's famous play of 1944, "Hell is others."

Before Sartre's famous existentialist critique of theism, relational explanation of time and theism had emerged in France. Bergson and Berdyaev, for example, produced eschatologies that short-circuit the will to power. These were large metaphysical systems. In them transcendence becomes, not the world-transcending otherness of the supernatural, but rather the invention of the new: time is real; it is, says Bergson, "invention or nothing at all" (Bergson, 1959, p. 734). God's Omnipotence is to possess all possible power. But God cannot coerce freedom, which is inherent, perhaps uncreated, in the person. As Berdyaev wrote, as far as coercive power goes "God has less power than a policeman" (Berdyaev, 1936). Sartre and Berdyaev were two of the few philosophers who we now think of as existentialists and embraced the title. In 1931 Berdyaev devoted a chapter to Hell in his *The Destiny of Man*. Like Sartre, Berdyaev claimed we create Hell and carry it in ourselves, largely due to our rivalry with others. But Berdyaev also claimed that Paradise is sociality and only to be had with others.

1 Sartre's atheology and "Hell is others"

At the end of "No Exit" (Sartre 1989) Garcin claims "Hell is others." This idea is founded in the description of the human condition in which we desire to be God: we desire to be complete beings, to be "what we are." We want to say, with Popeye and Jehovah, "I am that I am." The problem is that Others always remind us that we are not the foundations of our own being, that we are related to them and so many others. Hence "Hell is others."

Sartre wrote the most famous theatrical description of Hell in the 20th century:

> Garcin:
> "...So this is Hell. I'd never have believed it. You remember all we were told about the torture-chambers. The fire and brimstone, the

> 'burning marl.' Old wives tales! There's no need for red hot pokers. Hell is–other people." (Sartre, 1989, p. 45)

Sartre's ontology is made in the image, albeit the negative image, of a theological tradition that posits God as an ontological reality, separate from the world which He creates/emanates. Consciousness, like human creatures, is completely dependent on a transcendent being that it cannot affect. In *Being and Nothingness* he describes two types of being: being-in-itself (that is what it is; brute being) and being-for-itself, (consciousness that is and is not) through which negation and diversity of things enters being through negation of the pure positivity of the in-itself. This distinction resembles the Western theological tradition's description of the divine as pure positive being that is what it is and created being that lacks this completeness. Sartre even steps outside phenomenology and uses an "ontological proof" to show the ontological necessity of Being-in-Itself. He seems to play out the implications of the theological tradition. If God is pure, positive being how can God be conscious? Doesn't consciousness require a negative: the this is not that; this is Other than the subject? God can have no other, no mirror that reflects back on God: from eternity, God, being-in-itself, is complete. Sartre's being-in-itself is nothing other than what it is, but devoid of diversity and difference. Sartre sees the human being as a project of becoming. Human consciousness (the for-itself) is described as an emanation from perfect, changeless being. There is no reason for its existence. Any purpose it might have it must create, and these purposes die with it. But we want more. We project completion: we desire to be both perfect being and have the spontaneity and ability to change given by consciousness. Sartre describes this as the desire to be God.

2 God, human projects, and the desire to be God

Sartre appeals to Descartes' argument for the existence of God in the third meditation to show the nature of the human desire for totality and the impossibility of the existence of God. According to Descartes, I sense the existence of God because of the lacks in myself: I am imperfect, but I still have an idea of perfection, of totality, that must have been instilled in me by God. This sense of perfection is the idea of God.

The idea of perfection requires the complementary idea of absence. The imperfect being lacks the fullness necessary to bring about perfection. A lack involves three ingredients: the lacking (or what is missing), the existing thing (or what is and is missing something), and the lacked

(or what there would be if the existing were perfect and had what it is missing). Sartre uses the example of the crescent moon. We see it as not whole in itself but as a part of a growing whole. To view it in this way is to give it the structure of a lack. Sartre applies this structure to consciousness. Consciousness is the existing that is aware of its lack of foundation. What is lacking is itself, its totality. Human beings, by their nature, project both the totality and the possibility of consciousness's fulfillment. Human beings become involved in acts of bad faith because, as a negation, they are not and cannot be fully what they are. Still, to avoid the anguish that is created by the lack of any lasting essence, human beings engage in projects that aim toward the creation of an essence. Sartre uses the example of a waiter who attempts to become perfect, changeless, by reducing himself to the essence of a waiter. He would be no more or less than a waiter because as a waiter he is, at least, something. The attempt to give himself an essence, no more or less, is doomed to failure because it is the nature of consciousness always to go beyond what it is, so it is never what it is. As with Heraclitus' stream, consciousness is never the same twice. Indeed Cratylus' (quoted in Aristotle 1975, p. 67) modification may even be a more accurate characterization: consciousness is never the same once. There is a fissure in the for-itself; as its own negation, it is separated from itself. If consciousness could ever be fully itself it would be as God, completely self-sufficient, it would be both in-and-for-itself. But mankind can never ground itself because the idea of God is the idea of a magical entity. This is the meaning of Sartre's famous statement "man is a useless passion." The most basic desire of consciousness is guaranteed to be frustrated.

Consciousness is always colored by its facticity. It is always striving for the abstract structure, which is God, but is itself always a particular structure, a transcending of a facticity. God and the values that are associated with any Godlike magical entity, the Absolute, Being, etc., are human creations and as such they can function to give human beings what they desire, an essence. The religious experience of vocation is an attempt, repeated in many of Sartre's literary pieces, to attain this essence. In *The Reprieve*, the character Daniel gladly accepts his vocation and new essence:

> I can easily describe that look: it is nothing; it is a purely negative entity: imagine a pitch-dark night. It's the night that looks at you, but it's a dazzling night, in fullest splendor; the night behind the day. I am flooded with black light; it is all over my hands and eyes and heart, and I can't see it. ... What anguish to discover that look as a

> universal medium from which I can't escape but what a relief as well! I know at last that I am. ... I need no longer bear the responsibility of my turbid and disintegrating self: he who sees me causes me to be; I am as he sees me. I turn my eternal, shadowed face towards the night, I stand up like a challenge, and I say to God: Here am I. Here am I as you see me, as I am. What can I do now? – you know me, and I do not know myself. What can I do except put up with myself? and You, whose look eternally follows me – please put up with me. Mathieu, what joy, what torment! At last I am transmuted into myself. Hated, despised, sustained, a presence supports me to continue thus forever. I am infinite and infinitely guilty. But I am, Mathieu, I am. Before God and before men. I am. Ecce homo. (Sartre, 1973, p. 407)

Even though this confession of guilt before God may seem a long way from the desire to be the almighty, Sartre's assertion that all human beings desire to be God is still applicable here. Daniel is what he is, like God he is unchanging. Though his vocation is given to him by God, Daniel has freely accepted it. He wills to be guilty before God. He accepts this as the ground of his being: through the "look" of the Other Daniel has being, weight, an essence. Daniel modifies Descartes' "I think, therefore I am" to "I am seen, therefore I am" (Sartre, 1973, pp. 406–7). Daniel is still in bad faith because he cannot face the pure negativity of his freedom. For him it seems better to be infinitely guilty than nothing in particular, a human being.

In *Saint Genet* Sartre argues that the Other, or Others, often takes the position of God for us. Genet is told by the Others that he is a thief. He accepts the title and is free from the mental anguish of trying constantly to deal with the ambiguity of his existence (Sartre, 1963). The Other assigns us the meaning that we are so desperately seeking. The Other creates for us a substantial ego, which is a denial of the freedom and transcendence of consciousness and thus an act of bad faith. In my effort to be at one with the Other, and avoid my own freedom and transcendence, I create myself or accept an essence given me by the Other by "becoming" exactly what the Other wants me to be. Sartre illustrates this with the example of a woman who accepts the label of irascible from her husband:

> ... if she accuses herself of having an irascible nature, if she projects behind her, in the darkness of the unconscious, a permanent predisposition to anger of which each particular outburst is an emanation, then she subordinates her reality as a conscious subject to the Other

> that she is for Others, and she grants to the Other a superiority to herself and confers upon what is probable a superiority to what is certain. She endows that which had no meaning other than social with a metaphysical meaning, a meaning prior to any relationship with society. (Sartre, 1963, pp. 33–4)

God, as the projected Other, represents the ultimate form of the reification of consciousness into a magical form or bad faith. Before the all-seeing eye of God I am eternally created as what I am, I am always guilty. God grants me a permanent essence, this fulfils my project because the for-itself escapes its transcendence and "in God" becomes what it is.

The position of God is accompanied by a reification of my object-ness. Or better yet, I posit my being-an-object-for-God as more real that my For-myself; I exist alienated and I cause myself to learn from outside what I must be. This is the origin of fear before God (Sartre, 1956, p. 355).

God and the Other are linked in Sartre's philosophy because the Other, who is beyond me (whether he is a projection of my desire to be like God or really another consciousness) is capable of objectifying my existence for me. This I both fear and want. I fear it because it is and is not what I am; it attempts to arrest the flow of consciousness; it robs me of my freedom. I want it for the same reasons: my objectification eliminates the anguish that I feel from my freedom.

Sartre follows Augustine's explanation for the existence of evil and the negative. Augustine has it that God has put into me all that is. He is the author and bears responsibility for all that "is." For Sartre my "isness" ultimately comes from the brute Being-in-itself. I receive an image of myself in any instant from Others. But God and the Other are not responsible for that which is not. It is because of my limits that I am free; I can turn from God and the calling given me by the Other. According to Sartre, that which makes me autonomous is not creative invention but refusal; my freedom is a negative activity. Thus, Descartes' method of doubt, of refusal to accept anything to the point where he finds he cannot refuse any further and there discovers the cogito, complete autonomy, is the primal act of freedom. Doubt is a rupture, a hole, a lack, an end of contact with Being. Through doubt consciousness has disassociated itself from the universe. We stand out from the in-itself.

Under Sartre's interpretation of the relationship of consciousness and doubt, which is based in part on the idea of the cogito that emerges in the *Meditations*, God cannot be conscious because consciousness implies doubt and lack. Consciousness, like thought, is based on the ability to doubt, to experience the imperfection and finitude of human being that

creates the ideal of perfection and infinitude Descartes sees as being "in the mind." For Descartes, God's consciousness must be radically unlike human consciousness; it is immediately one with its objects. But in Sartre's interpretation of consciousness this cannot be consciousness at all but only pure, positive, brute being-in-itself. Consciousness is negation and imperfection (Sartre, 1955, pp. 190–1).

The desire to be God is the basic form of the human condition. In a famous passage from the conclusion of *Being and Nothingness* Sartre asserts that human reality is an effort to create the *Being in-itself-for-itself*, to become God: a contradiction that asserts that consciousness, which is the negation of positive being, is the foundation of its own positive being:

> Each human reality is at the same time a direct project to metamorphose its own For-itself into an In-itself-For-itself and a project of the appropriation of the world as a totality of being-in-itself, in the form of a fundamental quality. Every human reality is a passion in that it projects losing itself so as to found being and by the same stroke to constitute the In-itself which escapes contingency by being its own foundation, the *ens causa sui*, which religions call God. Thus the passion of man is the reverse of that of Christ, for man loses himself as man in order that God may be born. But the idea of God is contradictory and we lose ourselves in vain. Man is a useless passion. (Sartre, 1956, p. 754)

For Sartre Godness, or Totality, haunts human consciousness: we desire to be complete beings. But these intentions are doomed to frustration. Perfect, complete, being "what it is" is not conscious. It is what it is, and is unaffected by the world around it. To be conscious is to think about something, something that one is not. Thought, perception, consciousness implies another – a "not us." Its efforts to create a basis for its own existence are all doomed to failure. As consciousness we depend, in part, on Others; we are never the foundation of our own existence. Human beings change, age, lack – but completeness never happens. God is the projection of our desire to be a complete, and independent, being. But notice the problem: to be complete would be to be what one is, but consciousness is always about what one is not as well. To think is to think about, to transcend what is. Thus, hoping to be both a conscious and a perfect being is "a useless passion." But this desire is also the source of Hell. Others, simply by their otherness, constantly remind me of my lack of Godness: my lack of totality, of completeness, of my partial

dependence on them. God is thus only a projection of my contradictory desires, of my will to power. Hell is other people.

Sartre may never have read the 17th century German mystic Jacob Boehme. Both Schelling and Hegel had read Boehme. Boehme's presence, especially his notion of the *Ungrund* as the primal source of being, is important in Schelling's work: from the *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom* (1809) to various versions of *The Ages of the World* (1815). In his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* Hegel credits Boehme with initiating German Philosophy.[1] Boehme's description of Hell sounds remarkably like Sartre's. Essentially, Hell is the place where I blame everyone else for my being there. They are my Hell. Boehme describes Hell in his *Six Theosophical Points*:

> In the Darkness there is in the essence only a perpetual stinging and breaking, each form being enemy to the Other – a contrarious essence. Each form is a liar to itself, and one says to the Other, that it is evil and adverse to it, that it is a cause of its restlessness and fierceness. Each thinks in itself: If only the Other form were not, thou wouldst have rest; and yet each of them is evil and false. Hence it is, that all that is born of the dark property of wrath is lying, and is always lying against the Other forms, saying they are evil; and yet it is itself a cause thereof, it makest them evil by its poisonous infection. (Boehme, 1958, 9:2)

For Boehme, we create our own Hell and carry it with us. It is our hatred of others that is based on our desire to be God. Boehme found disciples in Russia. Vladimir Soloviev and Sergei Bulgakov both appropriate Boehmian sophiology and theosophy. But the Russian émigré Nicolas Berdyaev, Sartre's contemporary existentialist in the Paris of the 1930s and 40s, became Boehme's most ardent advocate among the existentialist movement in Paris.

3 Berdyaev: the wicked create Hell for themselves, the "good" create Hell for others

The Russian émigré philosopher and theologian Nicolas Berdyaev arrived in Paris in 1923. In 1931, 13 years before Sartre would wow the world with "No Exit," Berdyaev published a meditation on Hell in *The Destiny of Man*. In the same book Berdyaev continued his attack on traditional theological notions of God "Self-satisfaction, self sufficiency, stony immobility, pride, the demand for continual submission

are qualities which the Christian religion considers vicious and sinful though it calmly ascribes them to God" (Berdyaev, 1937, p. 28). The deity of classical theism resembles the master of Hell because it denied the affective relation between God and others. He paired this with the claim that human beings create Hell. For Berdyaev, Hell was a condition the individual carried in her. It is the lie that any personal being is self-sufficient. The problem with traditional notions of God was that they imposed a kind of self-centered transcendence as perfection, as the ideal. For Berdyaev, on the other hand, it is precisely through our relations to others, including God, that we exist as persons.

In order to create an alternative view of Hell Berdyaev stepped almost completely out of the mainstream of the Western philosophical and theological tradition. He embraced the heterodox tradition that extends from the 17th century German mystic Jacob Boehme to the romantics and idealists Schelling and Hegel (Berdyaev also placed Kant in this company). Berdyaev put forward a relational view of God: both God and humanity only exist, as persons, in relation to each other. God as a person is not the absolute. Boehme's impersonal *Ungrund* or primal freedom logically, though not temporally, precedes God, humanity, and Nature: they arise from it. The *Ungrund* is the mythic characterization of the priority of indeterminate possibility over Being. But the idea of this indeterminate beginning is also the affirmation of the basic equality and unity of all individuals. All of them have the same source: meonic freedom. Meonic freedom is logically prior to being. Berdyaev, like Levinas after him, challenges the priority of ontology. Being and Time emerge from the pure possibility of non-being. This is not the nothingness of Augustine's *creatio ex nihilo* but the no-thingness of pure possibility found in Schelling's *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom and Related Matters*.

In the following passage Berdyaev explains that the *Ungrund*, as will or freedom, is the basis of both God and creation. God is in process and develops in relation to others. Indeed, this is the only way to imagine that God is love. God can only love another:

> It appears, therefore, that there is in eternity a theogonic process, a Divine genesis. And that is the inner, esoteric life of the Deity. The act of Creation, the relationship between God and man, is the revelation of the Divine drama, of which time and history are an inner content. This conception, which can hardly be called pantheistic, is best of all expressed in Boehme. (Berdyaev, 1939, p. 141)

The *Ungrund*, freedom, is the Absolute, the primary basis of the existence of God, but this freedom is also the basis of all that is. Thus, in response to the possible charge that Berdyaev's God is not wholly good, Berdyaev argued that God, as a person, is wholly good but the possibility of evil is present in the absolute and thus present in God as well as the world. The "absolute" itself is neither a person, God, Being – nor even a perfection. Berdyaev sees this as the great advance of Boehme's mysticism over Greek Ontology and Neo-Platonic mysticism:

> God-the-Creator comes and goes with the creature. I should state this as follows: God is not Absolute, for the notion of God-the-Creator, God-the-Person, God in relation to the world and man lacks the complete abstraction which is necessary for a definitive concept of the Absolute. The concrete, revealed God is correlative to the world and man. He is the biblical God, the revealed God. (Berdyaev, 1939, p. 141)

This is not a simple notion of Divine self-limitation in order to allow for human freedom. God as person only exists with the arrival on the scene of other persons. The Other is the mirror of God. As Schelling had written "God speaks and they are there:" to speak is to speak to another (Schelling, 2007, p. 68). God also comes into being by speaking, but one must speak to another. But the Other, as a free being, decides whether and how to respond. Note also that, in a way similar to Sartre, one exists as a person in relation to others. The Other grants me my being, in that she arrests my flight into possibility.

Sartre accepted a traditional ideal of God as a changeless eternal perfection and argued that such a being was impossible. It was only the projection of a human ideal toward completion that reflected the desire to be God. This is a fantasy of the will to power. Hell is others because they serve as the reminder of the impossibility of all such projects. Berdyaev argues for another ideal of God: one that makes Hell the rejection of the vulnerability that comes with sociality. In *The Destiny of Man* Berdyaev devotes the penultimate chapter to his theory of Hell. The idea of Hell is paradoxical, because it is both morally reprehensible yet also necessary for a robust ideal of the person. "Modern rejection of Hell makes life too easy, superficial and irresponsible. But a belief in Hell makes moral and spiritual life meaningless, for then the whole of it is lived under torture" (Berdyaev, 1937, p. 266). Hell damages the person because it damages his relation with God. Hell promotes a hedonistic fear and reduces the relation to God to a

utilitarian transaction. Each are reduced to objects (Berdyaev, 1937, p. 266). The idea of Hell is torture and under torture we will say or do anything; so, all things done under torture, including correct actions, have no value. We are only acting through fear of punishment, not motivated by any love of the good.

On the other hand, if we reject Hell we also sacrifice unquestionable values. But the idea of Hell is also connected to freedom and personality: it grants us responsibility for what we do, in a way that Origen's universalism does not. "It is the idea of freedom and not of justice that dialectically presupposes Hell. Hell is admissible in the sense that a man may want it and prefer it to paradise; he may feel better there than in heaven" (Berdyaev, 1937, p. 267). Origen, the third-century Christian theologian, had proposed that all, even Satan, would eventually be saved from Hell: otherwise, God's purposes, God's love, would be foiled. For Berdyaev, such a position still emphasizes the power of the *ex nihilo* creator but not the freedom of the human person. Freedom presupposes the possibility of turning away from the Other, of creating Hell. The possibility of Hell allows my freedom to create it and rebel against God and the Other. It is a postulate of human spiritual freedom. Berdyaev emphasizes that the relation between God and creation makes the existence of both possible. He sees Hell as a postulate of human spiritual freedom. We have a right to Hell:

> It is easy enough to end Hell if one denies freedom and personality. There is no Hell if personality is not eternal and if man is not free, but can be forced to be good and to enter paradise. The idea of Hell is ontologically connected with freedom and personality, and not with justice and retribution. Paradoxical as it sounds, Hell is the moral postulate of man's spiritual freedom. Hell is necessary not to ensure the triumph of justice and retribution to the wicked, but to save man from being forced to be good and compulsorily installed in heaven. In a certain sense man has a moral right to Hell – the right freely to prefer Hell to heaven. This sums up the moral dialectic of Hell. (Berdyaev, 1937, p. 267)

Berdyaev claims that our idea of Hell is actually an expression of our belief in the indestructible nature of personality. Even in Hell the personality remains intact, though absolutely isolated. Becoming one with God, as in some versions of the beatific vision, cancels the personality. The irony of a belief in Hell is that it preserves the person. "Hell consists precisely in the fact that the self does not want to give it up. The pantheistic

mergence of personality in God cancels, of course, the idea of Hell, but it also cancels the idea of personality" (Berdyaev 1937, p. 267).

When Berdyaev claims that our moral consciousness rebels against the idea of Hell he means that to claim that beings suffer eternally for mistakes made during the few years of our mortal existence is horrible. This makes God a torturer and tyrant. Conceptions of God's absolute transcendence, omniscience, omnipotence, and eternity that terminate in Calvin's horrible doctrine of double predestination are a *reductio ad absurdum* of such ideas of divine perfection. That God creates a world in which he damns even one being to eternal torment from the moment of his creation is morally repugnant. Ideas that creatures should be thankful merely for their existence, or that this is the best of all possible worlds, don't help since God's perfection did not demand that God even create a world. God so utterly transcends His creation that the world adds nothing to the divine changeless perfection.

The struggle against Hell does not mean giving up the struggle against evil. What is terrible is that the "good" invent Hell for others (Berdyaev, 1937, p. 268). Like Sartre and Boehme, under this view Hell exists as a place to which I would exile other persons. Berdyaev claims that, from the divine point of view, Hell makes creation a failure, and the idea of an objectified Hell as a place where God places the damned is intolerable. A God who not only allows but creates eternal torments is more like the Devil. "Hell as a place of retribution for the wicked, which is a comfort for the good, is a fairy tale; ... it is borrowed from our everyday existence with its rewards and punishments" (Berdyaev, 1937, p. 268). We want them exiled to a place beyond our experience. Or, in the more grisly versions that appear in Tertullian and Dante, part of the blessedness of the blessed is to watch the torments of their enemies, the damned. Berdyaev calls this one of the most reprehensible products of the herd mind (Berdyaev, 1937, p. 268).

Berdyaev describes the above as an objective view of Hell. This is the ontological picture we humans create and frame for the Other. In essence, the Other becomes our object. But, Berdyaev claims, from God's perspective the objective point of view would have to be different. "From the objective point of view, from the point of view of God, there cannot be any Hell. To admit Hell would be to deny God" (Berdyaev, 1937, p. 268). If we conceive of God as love, an eternal Hell means God has failed.

But everything changes when we move to the subjective point of view, the view of humanity. Hell exists in us: it is not a place; it does not exist for God. Hell exists because we continue to will its existence.

We understand Hell because we experience it. "Another voice beings to speak then, and Hell becomes comprehensible, for it is given in human experience… Hell belongs entirely to the subjective and not to the objective sphere; it exists in the subject and not in the object, in man and not in God" (Berdyaev, 1937, p. 268). There is no Hell if we think of it as a place, as an objective realm of being. Hell is created by us in our competition for power. It is the offspring of our self-centeredness:

> The experience of Hell means complete self-centeredness, inability to enter into objective being, self-absorption to which eternity is closed and nothing but bad infinity left. Eternal Hell is a vicious and self-contradictory combination of words. Hell is a denial of eternity, impossibility to have a part in it and to enter eternal life. There can be no diabolical eternity – the only eternity is that of the Kingdom of God and there is no other reality on a level with it. (Berdyaev, 1937, pp. 268–9)

The bad infinity of Hell has nothing to do with eternity. It is more or less the Hell of *Groundhog Day*, the same thing again and again. This is the self-centered everlasting Hell: where the individual has turned into him or herself and denied relations with others. But, since the Other grants me my being this is also a denial of reality. "There is no Hell anywhere except in the illusory and utterly unreal sphere of egocentric subjectivity powerless to enter eternity" (Berdyaev, 1937, p. 269). In itself Hell is illusory, even if it has the greatest subjective reality for the individual. Berdyaev speaks of the "image of God" in humanity. Humanity's image of God is of this relational being that sees Her/Himself in the face of the Other person. This image is dimmed in Hell where I seek to turn into myself and cut myself off from others; but, the fact that I still exist means, even in this negative relation where "Hell is others," my recognition of others' existence holds me in existence. But, if even this could be lost then final perdition would be a return to the *Ungrund*. The depths of Hell would be the loss of personality, as the person turns in on himself and denies the reality of relations with others (Berdyaev, 1937, pp. 269–70).

Hell is self-centeredness and isolation from the Other. We lose our ability to love: as Boehme and Sartre saw it, Hell is the place where I blame others for my being there.

> Hell is the state of the soul powerless to come out of itself, absolute self-centeredness, dark and evil isolation, i.e. final inability to love. It

> means being engulfed in an agonizing moment which opens upon a yawning abyss of infinity, so that the moment becomes endless time. Hell creates and organizes the separation of the soul form God, from God's world and from other men. In Hell the soul is separated from everyone and from everything, completely isolated and at the same time enslaved by everything and everyone. (Berdyaev, 1937, p. 277)

Berdyaev thought the final separation of the "good" from the fate of the "wicked" was the "greatest perversion of a morality. It was the invention of those who consider themselves 'good'." (p. 275). It objectifies the wretched. True believers like to send "heretics" to Hell.[2] Irenaeus called them the soldiers of the Devil. If this image of God truly rested in us "Paradise is impossible for me if the people I love, my friends or relatives or mere acquaintances, will be in Hell – if Boehme is in Hell as a 'heretic', Nietzsche as 'an anti-Christ', Goethe as a 'pagan' and Pushkin as a 'sinner'." (p. 276). The way one should imagine paradise is as the kingdom of ends, where persons attempt to rescue others from their subjective Hells. "Moral consciousness began with God's question, 'Cain, where is thy brother Abel?' It will end with another question on the part of God: 'Abel, where is thy brother Cain'" (Berdyaev, 1937, pp. 276–7)?

The 19th century Russian philosopher Nicolai Feodorov saw the task of humanity as the raising of the dead. Berdyaev, the theologian, sees the great ethical ideal of freeing all from Hell. "This is the final demand of ethics" (Berdyaev, 1937, p. 281). This should be the goal of all our actions. We should seek to destroy, not to build, Hell through our actions. We should not seek to create Hell for others and in this sense the Kingdom of God lies beyond our notions of good and evil. We must not seek to increase the "nightmare" of our sinful lives on this side of the distinction. "The "good" must take upon themselves the rate of the "wicked," share their destiny and thus further their liberation" (Berdyaev, 1937, pp. 281–2).

Conclusion: Levinas, the there is, and the other

Rachel Falconer claims one of the unique aspects of twentieth-century Hell narratives is that Hell is not so much a place one enters but is the very context in which one lives and moves (2005, p. 205). It is a subjective experience. Levinas never speaks explicitly of Hell but he does describe the *Il y a*, the "there is," and speaks of it in terms similar to Berdyaev's characterization of the *Ungrund*. It is impersonal. The following passage, from Levinas's 1948 *Existence and Existents* on the

"there is," is representative. His allusion to Sartre makes the Hellish implication unmistakable:

> Horror is nowise an anxiety about death. According to Levy-Bruhl, primitive peoples show only indifference to death, which they take as a natural fact. In horror subject is stripped of his subjectivity, of his power to have private existence. The subject is depersonalized. "Nausea," as a feeling for existence, is not yet a depersonalization; but horror turns the subjectivity of the subject, his particularity qua *entity,* inside out. It is participation in the *There is,* in the *there is* which returns in the heart of every negation, in the *there is* which has "no exits." It is, if we may say so, the impossibility of death, the universality of existence even in its annihilation. (Levinas, 2001, p. 57)

Here the absolute being, the *Il y a* resembles Berdyaev's characterization of the *Ungrund* as Hell as the final dissolution of the person. Levinas's famous characterization of totality as metaphysical violence against the Other resembles Sartre's characterization of all notions, all human projects, as the desire to be God: as the desire to transcend the human condition, to fix it in a final stasis, along with Berdyaev's contention that we create Hell for others through our desire to create on ontology that fixes the Other in the chain of being. Levinas's "Prophetic eschatology" doesn't provide a goal or orientation within ontology and history; rather, it insists on the horizon. Prophetic eschatology, a "Religion for Adults," provides – through the encounter with the infinite, with the Other – a significance for our lives, and thus also for history. Our lives are invested with goodness if they are ruled by a sense of compassion for others. "The eschatological, is the 'beyond' of history, draws beings out of the jurisdiction of history and the future; it arouses them in and calls them forth to their full responsibility" (Levinas, 1969, p. 23).

Notes

1. Though opinions vary on Boehme's importance and place in the history of Western thought, he has earned the acclaim of some of his most important successors. He was hailed by Hegel (1955, p. 188) as the founder of German Idealism. See also Cyril O'Regan (1994) and Glenn Alexander MaGee (2001). For Boehme's influence on Schelling see Robert Brown (1977) and S.J. McGrath (2012). In his study on Boehme, Alexandre Koyré (1968, pp. 506–8) also calls attention to his influence on Fichte and Hegel, as well as the second philosophy of Schelling and Boehme's disciple Franz von Baader. Koyré also points out that Boehme was read by such divergent minds as Newton, Comenius,

Milton, Leibniz, Oetinger and Blake. Nicholas Berdyaev points to the importance of Boehme's influence (via Schelling) on the Slavophiles and says that the metaphor of sophia is found in the second generation of Russian philosophers, beginning with Soloviev and including Bulgakov, Frank, the Symbolist poets Blok, Beyli and Ivanov. He also acknowledges his own debt to Boehme (Berdyaev, 1945, p. 39):

> Boehme is a figure whose life is obscured by legend. It is true that he was a shoemaker by profession in the Silesian village of Gorlitz, but his doctrine was not created completely ex-nihilo; although he was unacquainted with Platonic and Neo-Platonic thought, the ideas of many of the mystics and alchemists of his time were familiar to him. Another source of Boehme's doctrine may have been the Kabbalah.

2. Berdyaev, who was accused of being a Gnostic and Manichean, accused traditional theists of the same. He claimed traditional Christian eschatological ideas were framed under Persian influence and that Christian thought has never completely freed itself from the Manichean influence. This is evident in his notions of Heaven and Hell. Hell is the place where we place the evil ones, who are those opposed to us (Berdyaev 1937, p. 272).

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3

A New Defense of the Strong View of Hell

Andrew Rogers and Nathan Conroy

Introduction

In his paper "Punishment, Forgiveness, and Divine Justice," Thomas Talbott makes a compelling case against the Strong View of Hell (SVoH). Talbott provides many arguments, but in this chapter we will focus primarily on his argument that retributive justice is inconsistent with Hell as a place of infinite punishment. Following Talbott, we will discuss Hell in the Christian context. Talbott argues that infinite punishment can only be a just punishment for a crime that caused infinite harm. He bases this on the idea that proportionality of punishment to crime is at the heart of the principle of retributive justice and that retribution without any concern for proportionality is not justice. He then argues that it would, therefore, be unjust for God to punish anyone with infinite harm since nobody actually causes infinite harm when they sin. Oliver Crisp has defended the SVoH against Talbott by invoking the Status Principle (SP), which implies that sin against God merits infinite punishment because God has infinite status.

In this essay, we will defend the SVoH against Talbott's argument. First we will argue that there are responses to the criticisms that Talbott has made of the SP and that, for those who find these defenses of the SP convincing, Crisp's response should be adequate. Secondly, we will argue that, for those who find the SP unacceptable, there is another way of defending the SVoH against Talbott's arguments: namely, that infinite punishment can be just if God experiences infinite pain as a result of certain sins. If the punishment must fit the crime, the just retributive punishment for the sinner who causes God infinite pain would be to experience infinite pain himself; and, since it would be impossible for a finite being to experience infinite pain in a finite time period, the only

way that justice can be served is if the sinner suffers finite pain for an infinite length of time. We propose that this could explain why Hell must be infinite. We argue that this possibility ought to be taken seriously for both biblical and philosophical reasons. Thus we shall conclude that the SVoH can be defended with or without the SP.

1 Talbott's argument against the Strong View of Hell (SVoH)

We begin with a few definitions:

- **The Strong View of Hell (SVoH)**: That Hell exists as a place of infinite retributive punishment, that some people go to Hell, and that there is no escape from Hell. Jonathan Kvanvig defines the Strong View of Hell (SVoH) as consisting of the following four components:

  (H1) The Anti-Universalism Thesis: some persons are consigned to Hell;

  (H2) The Existence Thesis: Hell is a place where people exist, if they are consigned there;

  (H3) The No Escape Thesis: there is no possibility of leaving Hell, and nothing one can do, change, or become in order to get out of Hell, once one is consigned there; and

  (H4) The Retribution Thesis: The justification for and purpose of Hell is retributive in nature, Hell being constituted so as to mete out punishment to those whose earthly lives and behavior warrant it. (1993, p. 19)

We will add a fifth component to Kvanvig's definition: (H5) that Hell will exist for an infinite length of time.

- **Retributive Proportionality (RP) Principle**: The principle of justice that the punishment must fit the crime. That perfect justice demands that an offender be punished no less and no more than the exact amount equal to the offense they committed.
- **Status Principle (SP)**: "for any person who commits a sin, the guilt accruing for that sin leading to punishment is proportional to both, (a) the severity of the actual or intended harm to the person or object concerned, and (b) the kind of being against whom the wrong is committed." (Crisp, 2003, p. 39).
- **Retributive Justice**: That justice is a matter of retribution, not rehabilitation or deterrence.

In "Punishment, Forgiveness, and Divine Justice," Talbott gives many arguments that the SVoH is inconsistent with the justice of God. In the one argument of Talbott's that we will focus on, he grants the principle of retributive justice for the sake of argument and then makes a compelling case that a place of infinite punishment could not be supported by retributive justice. According to Talbott, retributive justice is the theory that "the primary consideration in punishment should be justice, not deterrence and not rehabilitation" and that "we must measure the seriousness of a crime according to the degree of harm done, and we must proportion the punishment to the seriousness of the crime" (1993, p. 155).

Talbott argues that the only sins which could merit an infinite punishment would be (1) annihilating someone else's soul or (2) causing someone infinite harm. He then says that this could never happen because a loving God would not allow it. This could be questioned, but we think there is at least strong intuitive support for the idea that neither (1) nor (2) occur as part of the actions which Christians have traditionally considered sinful. For example, neither (1) nor (2) seem to be things that occur when a rape or murder is committed. Instead of debating Talbott's argument, that a loving God would never allow (1) or (2) to occur, we will simply grant Talbott the premise that neither of these two sins are ever committed against other humans (however, we will argue later that (2) could be committed against God). Given these assumptions, we will formulate Talbott's argument against the SVoH as the following:

1. God's justice is retributive justice.[1]
2. According to retributive justice, the punishment must fit the crime: the amount of harm caused by the sinner must be exactly equal to the amount of harm that the sinner receives as punishment.
3. According to the SVoH, there is a Hell and sinners in Hell receive an infinite amount of harm as punishment.
4. No sinner can cause an infinite amount of harm.
5. Therefore, no sinner can be justly punished by receiving an infinite amount of harm.
6. Therefore, the SVoH is false.

One of the strengths of this argument (from Talbott's perspective) is that it grants the premise of retributive justice to the defender of the SVoH. To many people, it may seem natural to assume that the disagreement over the SVoH is mostly a disagreement over the merits of retributive justice;

however, Talbott's argument shows that the SVoH is problematic even when the premise of retributive justice is granted to its defenders. In the next section we will explain how Crisp responds to Talbott's argument.

2 Crisp's defense of the SVoH

In his 2003 paper, "Divine Retribution: A Defense," Oliver Crisp defends the thesis that Hell is infinite by defending two principles: (1) the Retributive Proportionality (RP) principle, that the punishment must fit the crime, and (2) the Status Principle (SP), that "for any person who commits a sin, the guilt accruing for that sin leading to punishment is proportional to both, (a) the severity of the actual or intended harm to the person or object concerned, and (b) the kind of being against whom the wrong is committed" (2003, p. 39).

Crisp's response to Talbott's argument against the SVoH hinges on his defense of the SP. This works as a response to premise (2) of Talbott's argument as we have formulated it: that "the amount of harm caused by the sinner must be exactly equal to the amount of harm that the sinner receives as punishment." According to the SP, a just punishment takes into account not only harm but also status. Crisp argues that the "value of a deity outweighs the value of a human to an infinite degree, such that crimes against a member of that ontological kind [deity] carry significantly greater (in fact, infinite) consequences" (2003, p. 40). Crisp defends the SVoH with the following argument.

1. God is infinitely worthy of regard.
2. The gravity of an offence against a being is principally determined by its worth or dignity.
3. There is an infinite demerit in all sin against God.
4. Hence, all sin is infinitely heinous. (2003, p. 41)

2.1 Is all sin equal?

Talbott argues that the SP cannot save the defender of the SVoH because: "…if every sin is infinitely serious and thus deserves the same penalty as every other sin, namely everlasting torment, then once again the idea, so essential to the retributivist theory, that we can grade offenses collapses" (1993, p. 159). Another way of stating this problem is that the SP cannot give us a consistent function from (a) severity of harm and (b) status to the amount of punishment that is deserved. For example, if we add (a) and (b), then the punishment would be the same for all sin against God because adding any finite number to infinity would be

infinity. Likewise, if we multiply (a) and (b) then the punishment would also be the same for all sin against God because multiplying infinity by any number would be infinity. As Talbott says, if all sin against God deserves the exact same punishment, then offenses against God cannot be graded.

Crisp argues that there are different degrees of punishment in Hell, which would require a method of grading various infinitely heinous sins. Crisp does not provide a specific function that could accomplish this task, however, we think that Crisp has opened the door for an adequate function. For example, the severity of harm of the sin could be equal to the severity of harm administered upon the sinner in Hell per some finite unit of time (let's say per hour). Then the number of hours for which the sinner deserves to endure this amount of harm could be determined by the status of the one whom the sinner harmed. If some sinner S caused ten units of harm to a human, then S would deserve to endure ten units of harm per hour for one hour (for those of the status *non-divine* the number of hours is one in this example). If S caused ten units of harm to God then S would endure ten units of harm per hour for an infinite number of hours (for those of the status *divine* the number of hours is infinite in this example).

The defenders of the SVoH who hold that there are different degrees of punishment in Hell do not need to provide the actual function that God uses; they merely need to argue that such a function is not impossible. As the above example shows, it is possible for there to be a coherent function from harm and status to the amount of harm the sinner experiences in Hell per unit of time (for an infinite length of time). Therefore, Crisp's theory should not be rejected on the grounds that the existence of an appropriate function is impossible.

2.2 Levels of Hell

Talbott argues that the idea of different levels of Hell does not help the defender of the SVoH because: "that seems inconsistent with the idea that every sin against the infinite God is infinitely grave and therefore equal to every other sin, and it does nothing to ameliorate the difficulty anyway. If all of the sinners in Hell are dead in the theological sense, if all have lost everything that might make life worth living and have lost it forever, then all have received essentially the same punishment: everlasting separation from God and a permanent loss of happiness" (1993, p. 159).

Contrary to what Talbott assumes here, the defender of the SVoH does not need to defend the idea that all punishment in Hell is equal.

There is nothing incoherent about saying that two people could experience different degrees of pain per moment for an infinite length of time. Talbott's argument that everyone in Hell receives "essentially the same punishment" seems to rest on the assumption that everyone who is separated from God must always feel the same amount of pain per moment. This certainly may be the case, but we have no proof that it wouldn't be possible for God to arrange things such that these people experience different amounts of pain per moment. At this point we must admit that, as far as we know, it is possible that they could be made to feel different amounts of pain per moment.

2.3 Harm versus dishonor

Another objection that could be raised against Crisp's theory is that God has no justification for infinite retribution (even given the SP) because nobody ever actually harms God. It cannot be God's status alone that decides the level of punishment because there needs to be a crime for which the person is being punished. But, if God cannot be harmed, as many people believe, then nobody could earn an infinite punishment. In his definition of the SP, Crisp says that "for any person who commits a sin, the guilt accruing for that sin leading to punishment is proportional to both, (a) the severity of the actual or intended harm to the person or object concerned, and (b) the kind of being against whom the wrong is committed" (Crisp, 2003, p. 39). But if the actual or intended harm against God is zero, then the sinner cannot be punished infinitely.

There is an obvious response in defense of Crisp's view. There could be intended harm against God even if nobody could ever truly harm God. However, it is extremely plausible that there are many cases of sin where the sinner does not intend harm against God. For example, when the sinner does not even believe in the existence of God or when the sinner believes that God cannot be harmed. This would seem to exclude atheists and those who believe that God cannot be harmed from the threat of Hell.

Crisp could argue that, when it comes to God, the severity of harm being measured in (a) isn't really harm in a normal sense, but rather something like dishonor. He could say that God cannot be harmed, but God can be dishonored and that dishonor is also something for which a proportional punishment is warranted. The SP would then need to be changed to: for any person who commits a sin, the guilt accruing for that sin leading to punishment is proportional to both, (a) the severity of the actual or intended harm *or dishonor* to the person or object concerned, and (b) the kind of being against whom the wrong is committed.

However, this may threaten to undermine the RP principle of retributive justice because God would be returning harm for dishonor and it isn't clear that these two things are commensurable.

Using dishonor instead of harm also seems to undermine the need for the SP – why not simply say that some (or all) sins cause infinite dishonor to God? This would allow for the justification of an infinite punishment without needing to bring in the controversial SP principle. For those who think that dishonor and harm are commensurable, there are ways of creating functions from dishonor and status or just dishonor to different degrees of infinite punishments in Hell.

2.4 The search for an adequate function

It might be the case that there are different infinitely heinous crimes against God which merit different degrees of infinite punishment in Hell. In this case we have differing classes of crime. Say we have the class of crimes comparable to forgetting to recognize God's goodness. That's an infinite dishonor. Belonging to the same class might be discontent about His divine plan. It may be of a greater or lesser degree than the first crime, but the action belongs within a certain class of heinousness. Now we consider willful and open rebellion. This action is beyond anything of the class prior. It is a whole new kind of infinity. And in this way we can imagine all sorts of infinities which are ordered amongst themselves.

In order for such a theory to conform to the Retributive Proportionality (RP) principle there would need to be a way to measure whether a particular size of infinity is equal to a particular level of Hell. This problem goes beyond the dishonor/harm commensurability problem mentioned earlier. Even if dishonor and harm are commensurable and can both be measured in some unit X, we would still need it to be the case that sizes of infinite X are commensurable with finite amounts of X over infinite time. For example, someone could say that the smallest infinity (in units of X) is equal to one (in units of X) per second over infinite time and that the next largest infinity is equal to two per second over infinite time. But, as far we know, nobody has proven that these are equal. We suggest that further research is needed on the issue of whether infinite values at a time can be mapped in a non-arbitrary way to finite values over infinite time.

The idea behind the function is this. Suppose there are some finite kinds of harm, such as someone spitting in his neighbor's face. We could rank that as ten units and say that a just punishment would be for the spitter to receive ten units of harm as punishment. And we could assign

the stabbing of that same neighbor to be 100 units of harm and say that a just punishment is for the stabber to receive 100 units of harm (beyond the fact that stabbing does more harm than spitting these numbers are arbitrary). Though heinous, the crimes only caused the neighbor a finite amount of harm under our model.

But over and above all pains receivable by finite creatures is a new class of discomfort. Say that a spirit is locked in a prison and tortured for all eternity. This would cause infinite harm. Likewise sins against God may cause God infinite dishonor. We will now propose three theories that could explain why the punishment of Hell must be infinite. (1) Finite Harm/Status Theory: that sin causes God finite harm and that when this is combined with God's infinite status it justifies an infinite punishment. (2) Finite Dishonor/Status Theory: that sin causes God finite dishonor and that when this is combined with God's infinite status it justifies an infinite punishment. (3) Infinite Dishonor Theory: that sin causes God infinite dishonor and thus justifies an infinite punishment.

2.5 Finite Harm/Status Theory

Before we get into the theories regarding God, let us ease into our proposed concept. First we shall describe a model for human justice where all wrongs and punishments are finite. Let us construct a function assigning finite harms to finite punishments. Suppose you cause your neighbor ten units of harm. Then a plausible sentence is one unit of harm per day for ten days of your life (the unit of time used is not important; one could experience one unit of harm per second or per minute or per hour and so on as long as it adds up to the correct amount of total pain). Thus we have the function:

> $f(n)$ = one harm per unit of time for n units of time (Where n is the amount of harm caused by the sinner).

Or we could shorten the duration of punishment while appropriating the same total pain:

> $f(n)$ = n harm per unit of time for one unit of time.

In order to make this same model apply to God we could add status to the function so that the one harmed is assigned a status of either divine or non-divine. If the status is non-divine then the punishment is again $f(n)$ = n harm per unit of time for one unit of time. But if the status is divine then the punishment is $f(n)$ = n harm per unit of time for

infinite time. Of course, it seems that the shorter the unit of time used, the worse the punishment would be. Perhaps the greater the amount of harm done to God, the smaller the unit of time that is used in Hell. Likewise, perhaps the more sins against God committed, the smaller the unit of time that is used in Hell. A punishment could be made worse either by increasing the amount of harm per unit of time or by shortening the unit of time.

2.6 Finite Dishonor/Status Theory

This theory would produce a function identical to the last one except that instead of considering finite harm to God it would consider finite dishonor to God. So that the function for assigning punishment to those who dishonor God would be $f(n)$ = n harm for infinite time (where n is the amount of dishonor to God done by the sinner). As with the Finite Harm/Status Theory, the punishment could be made worse either by increasing the amount of harm per unit of time or by shortening the unit of time.

2.7 Infinite Dishonor Theory

Now we suppose we can cause God different degrees of dishonor up to infinite dishonor (and perhaps even different degrees of infinite dishonor). We may assign punishment in the following way. We could say that if one causes infinite dishonor to God, then one receives one unit of pain per unit of time for an infinite length of time. The more often that one causes infinite dishonor to God (and/or the greater the level of infinite dishonor), the greater the amount of pain per unit of time (or the smaller the unit of time). We can't claim to know the exact function for any of these three theories, only that either the amount of pain per unit of time or the size of the unit of time would need to change depending on the number and degree of infinite sins against God.

3 Objections to the status principle (SP)

Crisp's theory (or any other theory using the SP) still faces another objection from Talbott:

> once you begin to measure the seriousness of a sin by some criterion other than the degree of harm done, you seem to undermine the retributivist rationale for proportioning the degree of punishment to the seriousness of the sin. One can always challenge, of course, the moral intuitions that underlie the retributivist idea of a fitting punishment; one can challenge, for example, the widespread intuition that

> it is wrong to inflict upon wrongdoers greater suffering than they themselves have inflicted upon others. But in challenging such intuitions, one also undermines the only ground we have for accepting the retributivist theory in the first place. (Talbott, p. 160)

Whether or not one agrees with this argument made by Talbott seems to be largely a matter of one's intuitions on the subject of punishment and justice. It is hard to find intuition pumps on the matter of God's infinite status, which do not depend on one's brute intuitions about the SP. For example, most people would probably reject the idea that harm against a lord is morally worse than harm against a serf. But, presumably, people like Crisp would argue that this is irrelevant because a lord and a serf are of the same ontological kind, whereas God and humans are of different ontological kinds.

Crisp discusses the idea of creating "a bloated ontology including all sorts of different kinds, grading each according to perceived worth or dignity" (2003, p. 40). Crisp uses the example of harm against a professor being worse than harm against a dog, but he ultimately rejects such an approach because it "ultimately appeals for its justification to more basic intuitions than kinds, thereby vitiating the whole argument from ontological kinds" (2003, p. 40). The problem for Crisp, with his hesitancy to base the distinction between the kinds divine and non-divine on anything more fundamental is that it makes it difficult to use thought experiments or analogies to support his position. Therefore, it seems that whether or not one agrees with Crisp's position will bottom out in one's brute intuitions about ontological kinds and the SP (the very things being debated). For those who find the SP intuitive and who believe that people can cause God finite amounts of harm, we recommend the Finite Harm/Status Theory. For those who find the SP intuitive and who believe that God cannot be harmed but only dishonored, we recommend the Finite Dishonor/Status Theory. And for those who reject the SP but believe that sinners could cause God infinite dishonor, we recommend the Infinite Dishonor Theory. But for those who feel that the notion of retributive justice loses all force once something other than the amount of harm (such as status or dishonor) is added to the equation we have an alternative proposal, which we will defend in the next section.

4 Sin causes infinite harm to God

One way in which the SVoH could stand without adding the controversial SP or the controversial idea that dishonor and harm are commensurable

would be if some or all sin caused infinite harm to God. So far in this paper we have often spoken of harm in terms of pain experienced. By "pain" we mean the conscious experience of pain, not the physical damage or the neurological signals associated with it. We speak primarily of pain because, whatever else harm might be, it clearly has some important connection to pain. And since pain is something we can all relate to and form intuitions about, it is easier to speak of harm as pain than to speak of harm in a more abstract sense. Beyond pain, causing harm to a human may have something to do with causing physical damage to their body, but since God has no physical body this cannot be the meaning of causing harm to God. Therefore, when speaking of causing God harm we will speak of it in terms of causing God pain in the sense of the conscious experience of pain. God clearly has consciousness but, traditionally, is not thought to have a physical body and therefore it is difficult to know what harm to God could mean other than causing Him conscious pain.

Our theory is that sin can cause God different degrees of infinite pain. It is very similar to the theory mentioned earlier, where different sins cause different degrees of infinite dishonor to God. However, our theory does not face the problem of needing to convert units of dishonor into units of pain. Our theory allows for a function that inputs infinite amounts of pain experienced by God and outputs different amounts of finite pain experienced over an infinite amount of time by the sinner in Hell. Let's call our theory the Infinite Divine Pain Theory.

Infinite Divine Pain Theory: Under this theory some or all pain causes God pain. (It is important to note that the pain caused to God is not infinite in duration. It is either experienced at a moment or experienced atemporally.)[2] This theory models how people could be punished in Hell without recourse to the status principle or the notion of dishonor. Since the idea that God experiences infinite amounts of pain as a result of sin is likely to be controversial, we will start by addressing objections to our theory.

4.1 Objection 1: God cannot feel pain

At this point, many will object that it is impossible for God to be harmed, including by feeling pain. We think it is plausible that God can experience pain because we know that Jesus as God experienced pain. Therefore, there is a clear Biblical precedent for God being able to experience pain. We have three arguments for the premise that God can feel pain:

1. Jesus as God experienced pain.
2. God speaks of experiencing pain in the Old Testament.

3. It is traditionally assumed that God has consciousness, which means that it is logically possible that God could feel pain. This means that if God had other reasons for creating a world wherein He would feel pain, there would be no logical constraint on Him creating such a world. (1) and (2) give us reason to think that God did choose to create such a world.

4.1.1 Defense of (1)

Given the premise that Jesus took the punishment of Hell for those who go to Heaven, it is possible to establish that God can experience pain. The punishment of Hell deserved by those who go to Heaven was an infinite punishment, therefore Jesus took an infinite punishment. However, Jesus could not have taken this punishment as a finite human because a finite human could not experience an infinite punishment in a finite time. Therefore, Jesus must have experienced this punishment, at least partly, with His infinite divine nature. This means that it wasn't merely Jesus as a man that experienced the pain of the cross – it was Jesus as God. If Jesus as God experienced pain on the cross, then God can experience pain. Furthermore, if Jesus as God took the punishment of Hell for those He saved, then He must have experienced an infinite amount of pain, therefore God can and has experienced an infinite amount of pain.

4.1.2 Defense of (2)

The following verses all seem to indicate, prima facie, that God can feel pain:

- "And the LORD regretted that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart." Genesis 6:6
- "I regret that I have made Saul king, because he has turned away from me and has not carried out my instructions." 1 Samuel 15:11
- "Yet they rebelled and grieved his Holy Spirit. So he turned and became their enemy and he himself fought against them." Isaiah 63:10
- "How often they rebelled against him in the wilderness and grieved him in the desert!" Psalm 78:40
- "For forty years I loathed that generation and said, 'They are a people who go astray in their heart, and they have not known my ways.'" Psalm 95:10
- "And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption." Ephesians 4:30

Of course, theologians can provide alternative explanations for these verses that don't entail that God actually felt conscious pain in any of these situations. However, since we already know that Jesus as God experienced pain, it isn't clear to us why theologians should try to explain away the prima facie implication that God experienced pain in these cases as well.

4.1.3 Defense of (3)

If God has conscious experience then it seems logically possible for God to experience pain. It might strike us as shocking that God would choose to create a world wherein He experiences pain whenever someone sins. However, it seems to us that this is not very strong argument since it also strikes us as shocking that God would choose to create a world with evil and that God would choose to create a world where He takes human form and is punished for the sins of others (but Christians believe that God did both of those things).

4.2 Objection 2: even if God can experience pain, He cannot experience infinite pain.

Even if it was allowed that God could experience infinite pain, it might still seem that God could not experience infinite pain because it would overwhelm His being and prevent Him from doing anything else. A related objection is that, according to our theory, it seems that God would often be experiencing multiple infinities of pain at the same moment. For example, when multiple people sin against God at the same moment, it seems that our theory would entail God experiencing multiple infinities of pain in that moment. All of this may strike people as absurd at best and impossible at worst.

However, we believe that there is good reason to believe that we already know for a fact that God can and has experienced multiple infinities of pain. If Jesus took the punishment for multiple people when He was crucified and if the punishment those people deserved was infinite (as it would be if we believe that Jesus saved them from Hell), then it must be that Jesus experienced multiple infinities of pain. Since a human could not have experienced multiple infinities of pain we know that it must have been Jesus as God that experienced this pain. Therefore, we know that God has and can experience multiple infinities of pain.

4.3 Objection 3: our theory does not allow for a graded system of sins and punishments

If all sin that condemns one to Hell causes God infinite pain, then it seems that there would be no sense in saying that some of these sins are

worse than others. This would leave our theory open to Talbott's objection that different sins must be punished differently in order to satisfy the proportionality requirements of retributive justice.

There are multiple ways of dealing with this objection. One option would be to say that all sins that would condemn a person to Hell are equal because they are all infinite, but that there are different levels of Hell depending on how many of these sins a person has committed. For example, a person who commits an infinite sin only once would be punished with one unit of pain per hour for an infinite number of hours in Hell, a person who commits an infinite sin twice would be punished with two units of pain per hour for an infinite number of hours in Hell, and so on. This responds to Talbott's objection, but it might raise another problem because it implies that all sin against God is equal. To some people it might seem that there should be different degrees of sin against God. In response to this objection we would suggest that it is possible that God could experience different degrees of infinite[3] pain depending on the sin committed. We are not saying that this is definitely the case, only that it seems like a logical possibility.

5 A plausible alternative to Crisp's theory

5.1 Ockham's Razor

Our theory explains the data at least as well as Crisp's with the additional benefit of being simpler; our theory does not require the controversial Status Principle (SP). All we need in order to support an infinite Hell is the Retributive Proportionality (RP) principle. However, Crisp needs both the RP principle and the SP. The SP is problematic because it isn't just "an eye for an eye," it is "an eye for an eye plus whatever the value of the being from whom the eye was taken." This creates a new concept, which needs to be accepted in order to support an infinite Hell: namely, different beings have different values and these values influence justice so that some eyes are worth more than others.

5.2 Intuitive justice

Our theory seems intuitively more just because God would be punishing people in Hell with the same amount of suffering that He experienced when they sinned against Him. Theories which use the SP, on the other hand, entail that an incredibly small harm committed against God, even one which causes Him no pain at all, could warrant an infinite punishment simply because God has infinite status. This seems intuitively

unjust because the suffering caused by the punishment infinitely outweighs the suffering caused by the original crime.

5.3 The problem of evil

Our theory deals better with the emotional problem of evil than Crisp's theory. If God experiences infinite pain when creatures sin against Him, then He is no longer as distant from the problem of evil as He would be on standard models where God does not experience pain (except perhaps during the atonement). According to our theory, God is with us on a daily basis experiencing the pain and suffering in the world.

5.4 Literal interpretation

Our theory allows for a more literal interpretation of Bible verses where it is claimed that God experiences pain, such as the verses mentioned in section 4.1.1 (Genesis 6:6; 1 Samuel 15:11; Isaiah 63:10; Psalm 78:40; Psalm 95:10; Ephesians 4:30).

Conclusion

We have argued that the SVoH can be defended against Talbott's argument that it conflicts with the requirements of proportionality mandated by retributive justice. We have argued that Crisp's defense of the SVoH, using the SP, can withstand Talbott's criticism that it does not allow for graded punishments in Hell depending on the severity of the sin. As Crisp has argued, it is coherent to maintain that there are different degrees of punishment in Hell (such as experiencing different degrees of pain per hour) while also maintaining that Hell lasts for an infinite length of time. We have argued that it is possible to create various functions that take into account factors such as status, harm, and dishonor and then produces different degrees of infinite punishment for different sins.

However, we have also argued that support for the SP comes down to brute intuitions about retributive justice and that not much in the way of philosophical argument can be made against those who don't have pro-SP intuitions. This led us to argue that a defense of the SVoH without the SP would be preferable. This could be done by stipulating that God experiences either infinite dishonor or infinite pain as a result of some (or all) sin. This could justify an infinite punishment for those sins. However, dishonor may not be commensurable with the pain experienced in Hell and, therefore, using dishonor might not work.

We then argued that the SVoH could be justified if God experienced infinite pain as a result of some (or all) sin. If the sin caused infinite pain, then the sinner receiving infinite pain as a punishment would meet the requirements of proportionality. We have reason to believe that God can experience infinite pain because we have reason to believe that Jesus experienced infinite pain when crucified. We also proposed that God could experience different degrees of infinite pain depending on the type of sin and that this could explain the intuition that some sins are worse than others (even when both would send a person to Hell).

Notes

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1. It is important to note that Talbott does not actually believe that God's justice is retributive justice – he is merely attempting to show that the SVoH position fails even if this point is conceded to the defender of the view.
2. We don't assume any stance of God's relation to time.
3. We believe that, without needing to commit ourselves to any particular ontology of God, we can still infer that God must be at least as large as the largest infinity that mathematicians and logicians have been able to formulate. This is derived from the simple principle that we cannot possibly imagine (even formally) something greater than God. And since people have imagined some infinities which are larger than others, then God must be at least as large as the largest level of infinity which has been imagined. This means that it could be possible for God to experience different degrees of infinite pain. As an analogy (not as an ontological commitment!) we could think of God as an object with infinite dimensions where each side has infinite length. There would then be an infinite amount of degrees of infinite pain which this being could feel. This means that using nothing but the RP principle, we can defend the thesis that there are many levels of hell where different sinners are being punished differently according to the severity of their crimes and that the entire thing lasts for an infinite amount of time.

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4

The Temporality of Damnation: Examining Linear and Non-Linear Responses to the Puzzle of Eternal Experience

Frank Scalambrino

Introduction

It is important to note that, though the following discussion may be characterized as a kind of philosophizing in regard to theological issues, the following is not a work of theology. That is, the intention is not to restate theological positions regarding eternal experience. Rather, the intention is to draw a series of questions together from disparate origins so as to bring into focus a philosophical perplexity, i.e., the mystery or puzzle of eternal experience. Given the perplexing nature of the questions involved, were this a theological discussion, faith would undoubtedly regulate each individual's inevitable response to the concerns regarding an afterlife, concerns which are inextricably entwined with the execution of human action itself. Yet, since the following is a philosophical discussion, readers should hope for at least the following: first, an appreciation of the perplexity involved regarding the puzzle of eternal experience; second, an understanding of how different philosophical formulations of responses to the puzzle; lastly, a philosophical visualization of experience developed by thinking through temporality as a proposed solution to the puzzle.

This chapter argues that the question of temporality has primacy for the puzzle of eternal experience over the standard questions of embodiment and identity. As temporality's most logical competitors, questions regarding embodiment and identity are taken as the point of departure for thinking through the puzzle. In what will later be articulated as a

dialectical movement through different possible solutions, this chapter moves through the puzzle three times, each with a different formulation or understanding of the puzzle rooted in the progress made throughout the process. Hence, as the third pass through the puzzle will show, temporality may be understood to have primacy for the puzzle in that not only is it the condition for the possibility of enunciating the questions comprising the puzzle but also the solution to the puzzle itself involves an understanding of experience stemming from what may be thought of as a more perfected, i.e., dialectically developed, understanding of temporality.

1 The puzzle of eternal experience: embodiment and identity

On a first pass through the puzzle of eternal experience it is as if emphasis is placed on the aspect of experience, rather than that of the eternal. As will be shown, this emphasis is not necessarily incommensurate with either linear or non-linear understandings of time. The guiding question is simply: In what way can we say of an afterlife that it is the continuation of the life of the person who has died? On the one hand, since the death of the human body is taken to be the indicator of the human person's death, how can there be life after the death of the body? On the other hand, supposing there is life after the death of the body, why assume that such a life is identical with, i.e., the same as, the previous (physically) embodied life?

At this first pass through the puzzle, notice how already the "before and after" of time functions to ground the two questions. Further, in this way it will later be shown how the question of temporality has primacy for the puzzle of eternal experience. The "before and after" of time, grounds the two questions by determining the relation between the life of the individual *before* death and life *after* the individual's death. In other words, an understanding of time seems to be the very condition for asking about what may otherwise be seen as two completely opposed dimensions, such as those of life and death.

With the "before and after" of time as the ground, the two questions can now be further developed. The question concerning embodiment no longer stops at the moment of "how could one experience without a body?" Rather, the question becomes: Are there grounds for necessitating a different kind of embodiment after death in the continuation of an individual from life into death? Similarly, the identity question becomes: How are we to understand the continuation of an individual

from life into death as somehow constituting the same individual? Though answers to these questions will actually be examined in this chapter, before doing so it is important to first further develop the puzzle of eternal experience.

It is interesting to note a peculiar oscillation moving through the development of the puzzle from the first to the second pass and back in the third. That is to say, in attempting to formulate and understand the puzzle in terms of experience the emphasis shifts from the aspect of experience to that of the eternal. Ultimately, then, in the third pass through the puzzle emphasis will be directed toward how to understand what that which would be called "eternal experience" would be like, i.e., the ultimate development of the puzzle of eternal experience. Hence, just as the puzzle itself is developed so too are the questions of which it is comprised. Though there may be more questions than those of embodiment and identity, an examination of the development of other questions is outside the scope of this chapter. The embodiment and identity questions are selected as essential toward gaining an understanding of eternal experience.

In concluding this first pass through the puzzle, then, the questions thus far developed may be shown to change through different understandings of time, namely linear and non-linear. To think of the body as a physical configuration, generated and destroyed in linear time, provides a framework for thinking about the generation of a body-soul composite from which the soul somehow survives after the death of the body. Here, of course, accepting that there is a (linear) continuation, questions regarding how to understand this new non-physical, spiritual or "celestial" body emerge. "Linear time" here, of course, means an understanding of the past, present and future as moving linearly in one direction from the past to the future.

Hence, eternal experience, either of eternal damnation or of eternal beatitude, seems to center at this pass on the puzzle of how to understand what it would be like to experience such a non-physical body. The attempt to think into such an understanding would be paradoxical given that all that we know of experience is through a physical body. Moreover, the question emerges of how to understand the afterlife in a new body as being identical with the "before-life," as it were, in a physical body. Whereas one may initially think that the response of "the soul" ensures the identity across the threshold of death, philosophers complicate this by emphasizing how thinking Socrates dead the same as Socrates alive should be paradoxical. In other words, that generation

comes *after* destruction should precisely be evidence for the presence of a different being, not the same being.

Lastly, to think of the body as a physical configuration generated and destroyed in non-linear time provides a different framework for thinking about the generation of a body-soul composite and eternal experience. Consider a reading of Plato's dialog the *Phaedo* as it compares to comments made by Augustine. Notions of reincarnation, transmigration and metempsychosis articulate an account of life and death as eternally cycling moments. Whereas in linear time adhering to the best moral code is involved in arriving at the better of possible metaphysical destinations, e.g., Heaven or Hell, in non-linear time the best moral code is involved in being released from the eternal cycling. That is to say, in non-linear time it is as if eternal damnation, i.e. Hell, is itself the process of constant birth and re-birth. Since this, of course, entails having many different physical bodies as one is re-incarnated, notice how the questions of embodiment and identity emerge differently regarding non-linear time.

In non-linear time, the question of how to understand the body suddenly becomes transparent. In other words, rather than striving to understand what a re-incarnated body would be like, the challenge is, at least, to try to think of the current body you inhabit as one of the bodies into which you have been re-incarnated. In this way, it is as if you happen to be able to gain a philosophical relation to your current *body*, as Plato would have it, such that you may be developing a philosophical understanding of your *identity*. On the one hand, this points the way to the emerging discussion of identity. On the other hand, it points to the value of a moral code. For example, metempsychosis of the soul suggests the possibility of being re-incarnated into a non-human body, depending on how one's actions determined the relation between one's soul and the current body in which it is incarnated. The paradoxical question one is left with here, then, is: How to understand one's identity if it is the case that *before* this life one may have inhabited a non-human body and *after* this life one may inhabit a non-human body? Moreover, even without metempsychosis, reincarnation itself leads to this paradoxical question, i.e., how much or what of identity now is a continuation of a past identity?

In a characterization which undoubtedly influenced Nietzsche's notion of the "eternal return," Augustine referred to such an understanding in terms of "cycles of time, in which there should be a constant renewal and repetition of the order of nature" (Augustine, 1974, p. 242), and he

indicated multiple possible understandings of such a characterization. That is to say, how are we to understand the identity of that which returns? Should such cycles be understood as eventually recurring the exact same phenomena eternally? Does it suggest it is nature which eternally returns, and always as different from what it had been? How do these understandings allow for, if at all, the possibility of salvation from the eternal cycling? Whereas such questions involve the concern for the experience of two eternities as it were, i.e., the experience of Hell as eternal re-birth and the experience of eternal salvation from eternal re-birth, Augustine points to the Catholic faith in dismissing the idea of an eternal "recurrence of the same phenomena" (1974, p. 243). Augustine remarked, "For once Christ died for our sins and rising from the dead, He dieth no more," and referencing Psalm 11:8 interestingly noted, "we ourselves after the resurrection shall be 'ever with the Lord,' to whom we now say … 'Thou shalt keep us, O Lord, Thou shalt preserve us from this generation'" (p. 243).

2 The puzzle of eternal experience: becoming and being

The first pass through the puzzle of eternal experience revealed a shift of emphasis regarding the standard questions involved in accounts of life after death, i.e., embodiment and identity. Whereas the perspective of linear time emphasized the question of how to understand experience through a non-physical body, non-linear time emphasized the question of how to understand identity across multiple incarnations, and ultimately doubled the question regarding eternal experience. On the one hand, the thought of eternal experience regarding the cycling of nature seemed comprehensible, insofar as one can think of one's current experience as a moment in an eternal return, even if it is not fully clear how to understand the relation between eternity and what returns. On the other hand, the question of how to understand eternal experience *beyond* the cycling wheel of birth and re-birth, as it were, seemed to lead back to the paradoxical question of how to understand experience through a non-physical (and non-reincarnated) body.

On a second pass through the puzzle of eternal experience it is as if emphasis is placed on the aspect of the eternal, rather than that of experience. This section, then, will show that the questions differ in regard to this shift of emphasis while further showing how the relevance of a moral code seems to increase, regarding how to understand eternal experience, with each pass through the puzzle. Because this section builds off the work completed above, it is shorter. Namely, this second

pass through constitutes a return to the puzzle, re-examining it in terms of the differing understandings of the questions which emerged from the first pass. The first pass through the puzzle was fruitful, and yet it seemed to leave us back where we began; however, the notion of the influence of a moral code emerged as somehow pertaining to identity across multiple bodies in both the linear and non-linear understandings of time. In this way, as noted above, one's moral code is supposed to somehow determine a relation through which we might understand the otherwise temporally grounded continuation of identity, and perhaps ultimately also provide insight into eternal experience.

Interestingly, Augustine's invocation of faith can be understood in terms of Plato's suggestion of how it is that a philosopher is saved from the wheel of birth and re-birth. That is, recall that philosophy is a practice for death, insofar as it prepares one for the soul's separation from embodiment. Yet, "philosopher" here invokes the notion of a moral code of some sort, insofar as the philosopher, as a "lover of wisdom," settles on an identity in terms of some relation to embodiment. The philosopher ultimately sides with the non-physical over the physical, despite currently having a physical body. Augustine's invocation of faith may be understood in this light. That is to say, philosophically Augustine points to a moral code: an attempt to determine one's relation to the physical world in a Christ-like way and, thereby, to determine one's identity on the side of the soul.

So, again, insofar as a moral code may be seen to unify experiences across time, a moral code may be seen to also determine identity across time, i.e., linear and non-linear understandings of time. For example, an individual is punished *after* performing an action, and the action occurred *before* the punishment. Moreover, without some kind of justification for continuity, then, in terms of eternal damnation or eternal beatitude, the person in Hell or Heaven would not be the same person who performed the actions which determined their eternal destination. Hence, though it may be said of a body, or of a person's identity, that they undergo change, if morality is to have any sense at all we must be able to account for continuity across, or despite, such change.

In this way the questions of embodiment and identity may be seen in the more standardly metaphysical terms of "becoming" and "being." In other words, it is as if to identify oneself as currently an embodied being is to recognize oneself, through time, as involved in a process of becoming. Though temporally and philosophically this process may be understood in terms of linear or non-linear time, it is as if the second pass through the puzzle has brought our focus closer to "the now" by

identifying this moment of embodiment as a point of departure. We notice that, whether time is thought of as linear or non-linear, the determining of one's relation to the process, at every moment in the process, ensures some kind of continuity along that process. Hence, we may refer to "being in a process of becoming," to put it precisely.

Now, in completing this second pass through the puzzle, with an emphasis on eternity, we may formulate the following questions: Is this a process of becoming eternal? May the being be understood as eternal and also different from becoming? Lastly, how might the combination of the answers to these questions provide further insight into the puzzle of eternal experience? Notice then, the first question points to a non-linear temporal framework for understanding eternity. If becoming is eternal, then, despite this impermanent embodiment, we are assured that we are actually having an eternal experience *now*. Though this is still not a solution to the puzzle, it indicates progress toward a solution. Further, the second question may point to either a linear or a non-linear temporal framework for understanding eternity. That is to say, whether moving through a linear or a non-linear process of becoming, so long as the being moving through the process is thought to be eternal, or at least in a relation to something that is eternal, then understanding such a being would be tantamount to understanding damnation, or salvation from a linear or non-linear becoming. The following two brief sections approach these two questions.

3 The role of morality and perfection mediating damnation and beatitude

Without delving into a discussion of Aristotle on "final causes," consider the notion of "purpose." The idea that humans have capacities which can develop during life, leads to the idea that human life may have a kind of naturally endowed purpose. This may be most easily seen in relation to the previous discussion of non-linear time. For example, if it is the case, metaphysically speaking, that incarnate human life is condemned to cycle the wheel of birth and re-birth – yet with the possibility of nirvana, i.e., salvation – then it would be as if the *purpose* of incarnate human life is to live in such a way so as to move towards the fulfillment of that purpose. To say "the" purpose here is not to suggest it is the only purpose available to humans; however, it is to suggest that, from a metaphysical perspective, this purpose has the highest priority.

Of course, once the idea has been accepted that across different ways to live human life, as it were, some ways are better than others, then an

awareness of the role of ethics and morality immediately follows. That is to say, if the natural purpose inherent to human life requires a way of living for it to be fulfilled, then it should immediately follow that all humans would wish to obtain that knowledge so as to live a life which culminates in salvation. It also immediately follows that those humans who do not live life according to such a code may "arrive," so to speak, in a dimension which is not that of salvation, i.e., the eternal experience of Hell.

Returning to the notion of purpose, whether in relation to God or some characterization of metaphysical "forces" which generate humans, philosophers unpack the nature of purpose in such a way that the fulfilling or not fulfilling of such purpose has a relation to God, or the forces which determined the purpose. That is to say, at the end of life, whether thought in linear or non-linear time, a person's eternal experience may be characterized in terms of "judgment" and in relation to its origin of creation, through the notion of purpose. In this way, consider Aquinas' characterization:

> When the soul is separated from the body, it receives its reward or punishment immediately for those things which it did in the body [...]. In the providence of God, rewards and punishments are due to rational creatures. Since when they are separated from the body, they are immediately capable both of glory and of punishment, they immediately receive one or the other; and neither the reward of the good nor the punishment of the bad is put off until the souls take up their bodies again. (Aquinas, 1989, p. 91)

Interestingly, given such a description, though of course Aquinas has a linear understanding of time, this characterization could apply generally to either a linear or a non-linear understanding of time. Moreover, it is as if, then, persons who "go to Hell" are those who "*will* not will what they need to will in order for God to be able to unite them to himself in Heaven" (Stump, 1986, p. 195).

Here, of course, willing points to the human use of free will to fulfill the purpose latent in human nature through the appropriate, i.e., best, moral code. Yet, especially if, following Augustine and Aquinas, God is understood as love and in terms of divine mercy, then how does this notion of perfection square with an eternal experience of damnation? In other words, God is love, so what is Hell? Eleonore Stump, by way of Dante and Aquinas, articulates an interesting response to just such a question. In regard to "the damned,"

> their repeated irrational choices violating their nature have produced in themselves a second, vicious nature. It is not possible for God to bring such persons to Heaven. Should he then annihilate them? To annihilate them is to eradicate being; but to eradicate being on Aquinas' theory is a prima facie evil, which an essentially good God could not do unless there were an overriding good which justified it. (Stump, 1986, p. 196)

Hence, following Dante as it were, "what God does with the damned is treat them according to their *second nature*, the acquired nature they have chosen for themselves" (Stump, 1986, p. 196). Further, it is interesting to see how this articulation may be understood in terms of non-linear time. For example, it may be as Plato characterized it in the *Phaedo*: that is, a return deeper into the Hell of the wheel of birth and re-birth.

Lastly, perhaps one point requires more clarification given popular depictions in contemporary film. Despite what Aquinas says above, it is perhaps not best to understand what he said in terms of a popular theme in film. That is, the above characterization is not to be understood as the eternal continuation of whatever happened to be the content of one's final moment. It is rather the case that eternal experience is determined by the culmination of one's moral being along a process of becoming. In other words, this is still not a solution to the puzzle of eternal experience, since eternal experience is not to be understood here as the continuance of one's final moment eternally; rather, it is the continuance of the individual's accomplished perfection at the time of the final moment, i.e., the perfection of the goodness latent in human nature.

4 The dialectic of now(-)here

There are two further clarifications needed before a final pass through the puzzle of eternal experience. First, though the previous section showed how a linear depiction of becoming into eternity may also be relevant for non-linear understandings, it is possible to gain a more complicated understanding of non-linear time. Second, some clarification may also be provided regarding the relation between the three passes through the puzzle. That is, the three passes through the puzzle may be understood as functioning within "dialectic," i.e., a dialectical movement toward a solution to the puzzle.

First, one of the most complicated elements involved in the puzzle may be to understanding non-linear time without thinking of traversing the circumference of a circle, i.e., without some such "image" of eternity.

One way to think into a more complicated understanding of non-linear time, then, may be to think through a more allegorical image; consider the image of the "dancing Shiva," i.e., Nataraja, a popular Hindu deity. The deity is shown dancing within a ring of fire and on the back of a dwarf. Though the dwarf motif may recall Nietzsche's depiction in *Zarathustra* as the thought of the "eternal return" emerges there (cf. Nietzsche, 1969); according to Hindu teaching, "The dance is a pictorial allegory of the five principle manifestations of eternal energy [i.e., power] – creation, destruction, preservation, salvation, and illusion" (Kapur, 2013, p. 461). Hence, through this image the moment-to-moment of human experience may be thought of as connected: not through the ring of fire as much as through the rhythm of the dance, which selects moments from out of the fire.

On the one hand, this more complicated understanding of non-linear time is worth considering insofar as it may deepen our understanding of the solution to the puzzle of eternal experience. On the other hand, a solution to the puzzle should be able to stand as a solution even in relation to the more complicated understanding of non-linear time. So, if it is the case that human perfection through a moral code leads to salvation, then we may be able to think of the human experience from moment to moment as opaquely governed by metaphysical selection in regard to the human actualization of various latencies.

Second, despite our perplexity over questions regarding the continuation of the body and of physical identity, those questions led, after two passes through the puzzle of eternal experience, to the notion of a moral code which somehow accounts for continuation into eternal experience. However, clarification is needed regarding the relation between perfection through a moral code and temporality. The first pass discussed embodiment and identity discovering a ground of time, i.e., recall the role of "before and after" as the very precondition of asking the question. The second pass emphasized the role of moral perfection as the element which synthesized both: on the one hand, embodiment and identity and, on the other hand, the former synthesis with time. That is to say, perfection of latent human goodness emerged as a way to understand the continuation of identity beyond the death of the body.

Hence, it suddenly becomes possible to indicate a kind of dialectical movement at work in moving through the puzzle toward its solution. "Dialectic" here simply means a three-step movement in which each subsequent step follows as the development of the previous, and each step moves toward a higher understanding through the unification of the steps. In this way, it seems as if each pass through the puzzle may

be seen to synthesize the elements of the puzzle toward greater unity. Especially because the puzzle in question is the puzzle of eternal experience, the greatest unity will occur in regard to an understanding of a person's relation to something that is eternal, i.e., outside time. Yet, because the puzzle ultimately asks about experience, the final moment of the dialectic will be the return to the beginning through the higher unity that has been gained. The question, then, for which the third pass through the puzzle should provide an answer, is: What does that look like? "That" being eternal experience.

Interestingly, though, there are linear and non-linear articulations throughout each of the passes through the puzzle: the unity of the third pass through, as it were, provides a solution which, whether we consider human experience to be in linear or non-linear time, "looks" the same. That is to say, the dialectical movement through the puzzle leads us back to the here and now, i.e., a dialectic of the now here, such that we can look at *experience* differently. Seeing experience in this different way should be understood as a solution to the puzzle. In the following section, then, the third pass through the puzzle will be guided by these dialectical insights. Moreover, the dialectical unity of the different understandings of time and a response to the question of temporality, understood as grounding embodiment and identity, emerges as a solution to the puzzle.

5 The puzzle of eternal experience: palingenesis and perfection

On a third and final, for this chapter, pass through the puzzle of eternal experience it is as if emphasis returns to experience, and yet the emphasis on experience *this time* is as eternal experience. The insight gained from the second pass through the puzzle indicated the importance of a moral code toward the perfection of the human person for the sake of the eternal experience of happiness. Beyond embodiment and identity, becoming and being provided a vision of human experience in the here and now such that salvation from eternal damnation could be more easily understood. That is to say, though being in the now is a kind of condition for human experience – e.g., to experience in the past qua past would be to time-travel – combining becoming with the idea of perfection through a moral code has interesting consequences for identity.

The history of philosophy refers to the idea developed here as "palingenesis." This will be discussed in terms of both linear and non-linear

time. However, in general the idea may already be seen. That is, if we hold that the being in question is a being in a process of becoming, and then we hold that the being may be changed along a dimension of perfection, so to speak, then it follows that at each moment the being may be thought of as being generated anew. This is called palingenesis.

Before discussing palingenesis in terms of linear and non-linear time, a point of clarification may be helpful. Critics of palingenesis may suggest that indicating a being is capable of change from moment to moment merely indicates non-substantial change. Now, there is a long and a short way to respond to this criticism. The long way would include an extended discussion of Immanuel Kant's philosophy as it relates to that of Aristotle's. However, the short way would follow from pointing out that such a criticism of palingenesis treats the discussion of salvation and damnation as if it were still in the first pass through the puzzle. That is to say, if what is meant by becoming is only a kind of non-substantial change, then we are back wondering about continuity across substantial change, i.e., generation and destruction. Yet, this impasse was already overcome.

In other words, the difference of the being from moment to moment in the process of becoming is not to be taken up in the ontological terms of substantial and non-substantial. Rather, the difference is to be understood metaphysically in terms of a determination regarding salvation or damnation. So long as a human may perfect or not perfect their nature toward one destination or another, there must be the possibility of metaphysical change all along the process of becoming. We call this palingenesis. It is as if the being were pulsing in the process of becoming so that with each pulse it may also *be* along a dimension of perfection. The moment of death is no longer understood physically as the death of the body or ontologically as substantial destruction; rather, the moment of death is metaphysically understood as that point at which the being stops pulsing, i.e., that point at which the being can no longer change its position in the dimension of perfection.

In terms of linear time, palingenesis is relatively straightforward. From birth to death human existence may be seen as striving to morally perfect aspects of its nature. Palingenesis in this context means the possibility of sufficient change along the dimension of perfection to determine eternal salvation or damnation. Yet, it is interesting to note that according to Matthew 19:28 Jesus used a term rendered in Greek as "palingenesis", and though there is some disagreement as precisely what Jesus was referring to, one of the standard interpretations links palingenesis with "God's final judgment" of souls. So, palingenesis still leaves

the question of eternal experience open. However, after discussing non-linear time, this third pass through the puzzle will offer a solution, now that palingenesis has been dialectically uncovered.

In terms of non-linear time, palingenesis may be understood in regard to eternal cycles or in regard to the eternal return of power, (e.g. the dancing Shiva comments above). In regard to eternal cycles of time, palingenesis may be understood as the metaphysical condition for the possibility of final nirvana, i.e., exit from the wheel of birth and re-birth. However, in regard to the eternal return of power, palingenesis too becomes more complicated. On the one hand, the momentary pulsing, so to speak, of being in a process of becoming is no longer understood as necessarily connected in a way ensuring continuity regarding identity. Rather, identity is determined along the moral dimension of perfection. So, it would be as if the being's pulsing rhythmically, as it were, placed it in non-continuous positions on the wheel of birth and re-birth, e.g., zigzag pulsing like lightning within a rotating wheel of fire. On the other hand, this opens up the possibility of an awareness of one's current embodiment as a palingenerated being. Moreover, such a self-understanding may empower individuals regarding their position in the dimension of moral perfection.

Interestingly the philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer specifically discussed palingenesis in relation to metempsychosis. He noted,

> Buddhism … teaches not metempsychosis, but a peculiar palingenesis resting on a moral basis, and it expounds and explains this with great depth of thought. … Yet, for the great mass of Buddhists this doctrine is too subtle; and so plain metempsychosis is preached to them as a comprehensible substitute. (Schopenhauer, 2010, p. 311)

Perhaps it was as if, since perfection along the moral dimension is of more importance regarding salvation than correct metaphysical understanding, the doctrine of metempsychosis served as a sufficient substitute. However, as we have seen above, though an understanding of palingenesis is subtle, it may be understood as the metaphysical condition for metempsychosis. Yet, the difference between merely understanding metempsychosis and understanding palingenesis refers to different possible understandings of being now in a process of becoming.

How does the notion of "palingenesis and perfection" provide a solution to the puzzle of eternal experience? Eternal experience is not to be understood in terms of embodiment or identity. Eternal experience is not to be understood in terms of being in a process of becoming.

Rather, eternal experience is to be understood as experience determined by one's position along the dimension of moral perfection. Palingenesis helps us "see" what this may "look" like. That is to say, the third pass through the puzzle suggests that we look at our experience in the now and understand it in terms of its capacity to be different in such a way that even embodiment and identity are determined in regard to that difference.

The question of how to make oneself more perfect along a moral dimension is different from, and easier to discern, than the question of how to see that one's current experience itself could be different along a moral dimension. Yet, if one is able to see that in terms of the qualities associated with salvation or damnation one's current experience could be different, then one is able to see that such qualities are attributes of one's position along a moral dimension. That is also to say that it is one's position along a moral dimension that determines one's experience from moment to moment. Hence, *the solution to the puzzle of eternal experience*: the experience of the now before death is the experience after death, with the important difference that after death one is no longer able to change one's position, i.e., to increase one's perfection along a moral dimension. Rather, the after death experience is eternal. This holds for both linear and non-linear time, so long as we understand that in non-linear time it is as if one eternal experience is being traded for another in terms of salvation. In other words, though the experience of the now on the wheel of birth and re-birth is an eternal experience, the eternal experience of final nirvana would analogously coincide with the perfection that in linear time was called "after death eternal experience."

Conclusion

What the dialectical development of the puzzle of eternal experience brought forth is a more philosophical understanding of experience. Just as the puzzle's standard questions involved embodiment and identity, the solution involved temporality and experience. That is to say, in the attempt to solve the puzzle of experience questions regarding embodiment emerge insofar as experience seems determined by the kind of body a being inhabits. Yet, because death seemed to precisely involve the shedding of the cocoon, so to speak, of embodiment, questions emerge regarding the identity of the individual being across the threshold of death. Further, an even deeper complexity was revealed by examining different formulations, in terms of linear and non-linear time, regarding

the questions which had emerged. The resulting perplexities motivated the dialectic for two subsequent passes through the puzzle.

The higher standpoint gained by the dialectical movement of the first pass through the puzzle, in terms of linear and non-linear time, re-formulated the questions regarding embodiment and identity in the more metaphysical terms of becoming and being. By thinking through the puzzle of experience in regard to becoming and being, the notion of perfection (along a moral dimension) emerged as the higher standpoint for the third and final pass through the puzzle. The third pass through the puzzle uncovered what may be characterized as the full metaphysical formulation of the original concerns regarding embodiment and identity, i.e., palingenesis and perfection. Relating palingenesis and perfection back to temporality allowed a solution to the puzzle of eternal experience to emerge. It may be said, then, that the solution provided a more philosophical understanding of experience, insofar as the dialectical movement actually allows for the here and now to be thought through differently. The understanding of temporality which leads to such a philosophical understanding of experience solves the puzzle and provides insight into what the experience of eternal salvation or eternal damnation would be like in terms of eternal experience.

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Part II
Justifying Hell?

5
Hell as Punishment: Pitfalls for the Pit

Galen A. Foresman

1 Hell's brief and abridged history

There is a common enough belief in contemporary western society that Hell is a place of punishment for those souls judged unrighteous by God. And though it may seem from Biblical passages that this has always been the prevailing view of the Church, in *Western Attitudes Toward Death: From the Middle Ages to the Present*, Philippe Ariès (1974) argues that this popular contemporary belief, that one's afterlife is determined by how one lives, was not prevalent until the 12th and 13th centuries. Prior to that, Ariès notes, "[t]he dead who belonged to the Church and who had entrusted their bodies to its care, went to sleep … and were at rest until the day of the Second Coming, of the great return, when they would awaken in the heavenly Jerusalem, in other words in Paradise" (1974, pp. 30–1). During that time, simply belonging to the Church corpus was sufficient for admittance to the heavenly and eternal afterlife. Ariès goes on to say, "[t]here was no place for individual responsibility, for a counting of good and bad deeds. The wicked, that is to those who were not members of the Church, would doubtlessly not live after their death; they would not awaken and would be abandoned to a state of nonexistence" (1974, p. 31). In other words, failing admittance into eternal paradise did not entail the eternal sufferings of Hell, but instead, a complete, painless nonexistence.[1]

It is not until the 12th century that the iconography of the final judgment begins to appear, separating the just from the damned. This was, however, always in association with the second coming of Christ and the Apocalypse. During the 13th century, "the apocalyptic inspiration and the evocation of the Second Coming were almost

blotted out. The idea of the judgment won out and the scene became a court of justice ... [where] [e]ach man is to be judged according to the balance sheet of his life. Good and bad deeds are scrupulously separated and placed on the appropriate side of the scales" (Ariès, 1974, p. 32).

These shifts in understanding the afterlife did more than simply change how one lived. They provided the Church with an opportunity to monetize their role among believers. Literally fearing the wrath of God during their judgment, the sale of indulgences for the forgiveness of sins increased dramatically during this time, despite the Fourth Lateran Council's (1215) attempt at curbing these abuses. Even after Martin Luther's (1483–1546) *Ninety-Five Theses on the Power and Efficacy of Indulgences* (1517), which explicitly denounced the use of indulgences, and marks the beginning of the Protestant Reformation, the role played by the Church in one's own judgment and afterlife was far too powerful to surrender in favor of a return to pre-twelfth century beliefs. As a result, we still find this belief prevalent in contemporary western society, encouraging and inspiring much of Christian evangelism and missions. Consider, for example, that one of the most famous sermons in American history was given by Jonathan Edwards, entitled "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God," which attempts, through vivid depictions of the misery and suffering endured endlessly by those consigned to Hell, to motivate sinners, Christian and non-Christian alike, to repent and join Christ.

In contrast to this historical backdrop, which goes a long way to explaining how the belief in Hell has become so widespread and recalcitrant, I argue here that an account of Hell as punishment is either not justifiable or not possible according to contemporary philosophical theories of punishment.[2] As a result, either all current theories of punishment are inadequate, or Hell should not be understood as punishment. In the case of the former, we will have to admit that we currently have incomplete understandings and justifications for punishment, while in the case of the latter, it must be admitted that we have far less reason to fear God's wrath should judgment come to us after we die.

2 Understanding Hell as punishment

Traditionally, a person is condemned to Hell as punishment. *The Encyclopedia of Religion* describes three dominant Christian theologies on the subject:

1. In Roman Catholic Christianity hell is deemed to be a state of unending punishment for the unrepentant who die without the grace of God as transmitted through the sacraments. This state is characterized both by absence from God's presence *(poena damni)* and by the suffering of fire and other tortures *(poena sensus)*. (Tober and Lusby, 1987)
2. Eastern Orthodox Christianity, in sharing the teaching that hell is a destiny of eternal fire and punishment awaiting the cursed and unredeemed following the Last Judgment and that heaven is the ultimate destiny of the redeemed, has placed focal emphasis on the resurrection of Jesus as assuring the resurrection of the faithful. (Tober and Lusby, 1987)
3. Protestant Christianity ... has retained the traditional Christian teachings respecting heaven and hell. ... With the dominance of the scientific worldview in the modern era and the theories preferred by the psychological and social sciences, literal and spatial interpretations of heaven and hell have been found untenable by some Protestant thinkers. In terms of theological argument, it is contended that it is contradictory to posit hell as eternal punishment while affirming God as one who is loving and merciful and wills all to be saved and forever seeks the lost. (Tober and Lusby, 1987)

For the purposes of this chapter, I will set aside the nuances of various Protestant theologies that attempt to account for Hell, while retaining its existence and compatibility with an omnipotent, omniscient, and loving God. The concern of those arguments parallels concerns raised by arguments from the existence of evil in the world.[3] The focus here, however, is more narrowly aimed at the possibility of Hell existing as a just punishment, not the incompatibility of Hell and some properties of God. To that end, I will address two distinct inquiries regarding punishment: (1) what it is, and (2) what justifies it.

Broadly speaking, punishment is "the hard response to wrongdoing" (Murphy, 2012, p. x). An admittedly loose definition, it still manages to capture much of how the term is commonly used. Given that a wrongdoing has occurred, we will often call the hard response to that wrongdoing "punishment," and in the context here, Hell is the hard response to sinners "... who die without the grace of God." However, the problem with such a broad definition of punishment is that it captures far too many actions that are not punishment, as well as leaves out cases we would aptly deem to be punishment. An example of the latter would occur whenever we described a person as being punished for a crime he

or she did not commit. H. L. A. Hart in *Punishment and Responsibility: Essays in the Philosophy of Law* specifies five elements of an adequate definition of punishment:

1. It must involve pain or other consequences normally considered unpleasant.
2. It must be for an offense against legal rules.
3. It must be of an actual or supposed offender for his offense.
4. It must be intentionally administered by human beings other than the offender.
5. It must be imposed and administered by an authority constituted by a legal system against which the offense is committed. (Hart, 2008, p. 38)

Of importance here, is Hart's attempt in (3) and (4) to capture the idea that punishments are intentional actions carried out against individuals believed (correctly or incorrectly) to have committed a wrongdoing. Also, since Hart was dealing with justifications for legal punishment, he sets aside as "sub-standard" punishments "for breaches of non-legal rules or orders" (2008, p. 39). Nevertheless, these elements are easily adapted to an understanding of Hell as punishment. As such, a revised working definition of punishment that includes these five elements for an analysis of Hell as punishment follows (revisions italicized):

1a. It must involve pain or other consequences normally considered unpleasant.
2a. It must be for an offense against *God*.
3a. It must be for an actual or supposed offender for his offense.
4a. It must be intentionally administered by *something* other than the offender.
5a. It must be imposed and administered by an authority constituted by *God's will*.

In these terms, it may be objected that the wording of (3a) is now unnecessary, since Hell is for an actual offense, not a supposed offense. Assuming the final judgment is made with perfect knowledge, it is not necessary to say "supposed offender." However, for Protestant theologians who argue that Hell is a separation from God experienced here on Earth, the language of "supposed offender" is useful to account for infants, who have not yet sinned but will presumably be offenders in due course.

While Hart's elements of punishment provide a robust conceptual framework for punishment, it is not without its limitations. Joel Feinberg highlights one such limitation with definitions like Hart's in his piece, "The Expressive Function of Punishment." According to Feinberg (1970, p. 95):

> When these articles go on to define "punishment," however, it seems to many that they leave out of their ken altogether the very element that makes punishment theoretically puzzling and morally disquieting. Punishment is defined, in effect, as the infliction of hard treatment by an authority on a person for his prior failing in some respect.

Specifically, Feinberg is concerned that definitions such as Hart's include hard treatments for offenses that are better described as penalties rather than punishments. Penalties differ in that the harsh treatment associated with them lack an expression of moral condemnation for the prior failure. For example, failing to pay taxes on time incurs a fine, but it would be a stretch to say that this fine is a punishment. Similarly, the deportation of illegal immigrants could be understood as an unpleasant consequence of entering a country illegally, but to say that the *punishment* for illegal immigration is deportation implies that the act of returning one to his or her home country carries with it "moral disapprobation" that is often absent from this practice. Similarly, a football team that, despite their best efforts, performs poorly in a game might be met with several grueling practices, but it would be odd to describe the coach, whose only intention was to improve the team's future performances, as punishing the team.

For Feinberg, these cases, and those like them, are not cases of punishment, because punishment is always accompanied with the expression of a judgment of moral disapproval. Feinberg says (1970, p. 96):

> Punishment is a conventional device for the expression of attitudes of resentment and indignation, and of judgments of disapproval and reprobation, either on the part of the punishing authority himself or of those "in whose name" the punishment is inflicted. Punishment, in short, has a *symbolic significance* largely missing from other kinds of penalties.

Feinberg's point is that punishment is more than just harsh treatment for offenses. It is intended to send a message of moral condemnation to the rule breaker. A true punishment will capture and express the emotional frustration, resentment, and indignation felt by those who support and

enforce a norm. In punishing, an authority expresses to the offender that their actions are offensive to moral, legal, or social sensibilities.

Whether or not the examples of penalties so far cited have intuitive appeal, Feinberg's addition helps to explain why well-known distinctions in the United States' legal system exist: such as decriminalization, strict liability, and regulatory and punitive sanctions. Decriminalization occurs when an offense is worthy of a penalty but not a penalty that construes the offender as a criminal, like speeding tickets. Rarely is it thought necessary to send the message of moral disapprobation to a sometimes lead-footed commuter. Similarly, laws of strict liability do not concern themselves with the culpability of the offender, and in so doing, the resulting penalty cannot be said to express moral condemnation. In an expression of moral condemnation, the authority judges that the offender has done something deemed offensive, but strict liability merely holds an individual responsible for damages and losses, even when the offender was completely unaware that the damages and losses were occurring and had, furthermore, taken every reasonable step to ensure that they didn't. A homeowner may do everything possible to ensure that their guests are safe upon visiting for a dinner party, but should some klutz trip over a doorjamb and break his or her nose, the homeowner could be held responsible. Note, however, that in so doing, there wouldn't be any reason to send that homeowner some further message regarding their moral failure in allowing this to happen. Hence, any such harsh treatments associated with decriminalization or strict liability fail to be punishments.

Lastly, regulatory sanctions in the United States are used to regulate certain activities, but because they are not punitive sanctions, regulatory sanctions can be retroactive, effectively penalizing actions that were perfectly permissible at the time. Because, however, these penalties are not considered punishments in U.S. law, they skirt *ex post facto* protections provided by Article 1, Section 9, Clause 3 of the U.S. Constitution. And, although it is conceivable that expressions of moral disapprobation could be made for actions having occurred in the past, doing so implies that offenders should have somehow felt guilty for or recognized the wrongfulness of their actions, even though they were perfectly permissible at the time.[4]

If Feinberg is correct in adding an expressive function to the definition of punishment, then it can be added as the sixth element to a theory of punishment:

6a. It (punishment) must include "... the expression of attitudes of resentment and indignation, and of judgments of disapproval and

> reprobation, either on the part of the punishing authority himself," God, or of God, "'in whose name,' the punishment is inflicted."

Importantly, it is unlikely that Hart would have agreed to such an addition to his elements of punishment, since his allegiance to legal positivism would prohibit a necessary connection between punishment and judgments of moral condemnation. Because legal positivism asserts that the existence of law is independent of the merits of the law, punishment needn't depend on "the expression ... of judgments of disapproval and reprobation." When, however, the existence of law and its merits are inextricably interconnected, as they are with God's law, punishment for an infraction entails an expression of disapproval. Unlike failing to comply with a law, which may or may not reflect the standards and norms of most of society, failure to comply with God's law is nothing short of failing to comply with God's absolute moral standard. Judgment and punishment for such a failure cannot avoid expressing God's complete and utter disapproval and reprobation.

Biblically, there is much evidence for God's attitude toward infractions of his law. In Exodus 20:4–6, God is portrayed as describing himself as a jealous God, willing to punish the children for the sins of their parents through four generations. The wording of the passage and severity of such a punishment suggests God's wrath clearly expresses the complete and utter disapproval relevant to the symbolic significance described by Feinberg. This is further confirmed by Exodus 20:6, in which God contrasts his jealousy with his love, "... showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments" (Exodus 20:4–6 NIV). If the opposite of punishment in this context is praise, blessings, and reward, then God's desire to express positive and encouraging attitudes far outweighs his desire to express those associated with punishment. However, regardless of God's preferred attitudes, his punishments cannot avoid Feinberg's expressive function of punishment.

Adding Feinberg's expressive function of punishment to understandings of Hell as a punishment complicates matters in terms of its properly being called "punishment" and in terms of whether or not it would be justified. These are related problems, as will be shown, since conceptualizing Hell such that it maintains the expressive function of punishment invariably undermines its legitimate use.

Some interpretations of Hell simply fail to be properly categorized as punishments. If, for example, Hell is eternal suffering of fire and other tortures, it is difficult to comprehend a sin or set of sins that

would warrant an expression of disapprobation to that degree. While extremely strict, even the example from Exodus ended after the fourth generation. Eternal suffering and torture does more than express the attitude of a jealous, albeit righteous, God; it reflects the attitude of a vindictive and unreasonable God. While this seems quite inconsistent with God's loving nature, it also construes Hell as something potentially more horrible than punishment. If Hell inflicts suffering out of scope with the reasonable expression of disapprobation warranted for the offense (and infinite suffering and torture is bound to cross that threshold), it ceases to be properly described as punishment and is more akin to the cruel dungeon of a sadist. This result occurs because the "punishment" no longer maintains the necessary symbolic significance expressed through moral disapproval, and instead, expresses attitudes of vengeance and cruelty. When Socrates was sentenced to death for corrupting the youth and believing in false gods, whether or not he was guilty of these offenses, the "punishment" expressed the vindictive nature of Meletus, not moral censure for wrongful behavior. Similarly, excessively harsh punishments for blacks in the southern United States during the Jim Crow period expressed attitudes of prejudice and racism rather than the attitudes of disapprobation.

On a common contemporary interpretation of Hell's warrant, God's infinitely holy nature creates a boundless divide between God and the sinner. Sins committed by the sinner aren't simply infractions of arbitrary rules created by God; they are, instead, quite literally actions contradictory to what God is and what God loves. As such, they are infinitely abhorrent to God's holy nature. Based upon such an interpretation, punishment for sinning might seemingly necessitate something infinitely harsh, since any sin is equally abominable to God. If an analogy were possible – and I do not think that it is – the closest example might be something like the criminal justice system equating every legal infraction with mass murder, regardless of the age of the guilty party. In so doing, a society would be expressing strong condemnation for any and all legal offenses, even though some of those "punished" could never comprehend the gravity of their offense. Perhaps such punishment is legitimate given God's infinitely holy nature, but the issue is that God's attitudes toward sin could never be understood by those being punished. In other words, if Hell is understood as warranted in lieu of God's infinite holiness and infinite disdain for sin, the expressive function of punishment will always be impotent to express God's attitudes toward sin to anyone but God. But, if no one can fully comprehend the severity of his or her sin, then everyone lacks the *mens rea* necessary to

intentionally sin in such a way that Hell is deserved. As a result of interpreting the desert of Hell in this way, believers can maintain that it is properly called a punishment; but they could not, however, argue that it is ever actually deserved.

This raises a related issue concerning Hell in terms of strict liability. Attitudes of resentment and indignation, as well as judgments of disapproval and reprobation, assume some degree of culpability. It is not enough that an individual is responsible for an offense for these expressions to be warranted; the offending person had to understand that what they were doing was wrong. For many, the issue here is not the failure to recognize that their action was immoral in some sense, but rather, they will fail to understand that they have committed an offense against God, element (2a) of the revised definition of punishment as it applies to Hell. Because of this, God should in no way feel or take offense, thereby eliminating the source of any attitudinal expressions like resentment and indignation or judgments of disapproval. For example, if I have a rule in my house that shoes are to be removed upon entering and I notice that at my dinner party all of my guests are wearing their shoes, then I may be dismayed at their infraction and wish that things had been otherwise. Certainly, I would have no reason to assume that my guests meant me any disrespect. So, while my dinner guests are breaking this very important rule of mine, because they do not know that I have this rule, they might not be disrespecting me in the process. Any harsh treatment they might receive from me for their having broken my rule would fail to express a judgment of moral disapproval or indignation for their infraction, since my guests do not know that they are doing anything wrong.

With God's perfect knowledge of the hearts and minds of humanity throughout history, there must be many cases, of which God would be aware, in which people have committed sins, completely unaware that God had made rules prohibiting the sinful action. Furthermore, this difficulty becomes more acute when grace and salvation are only obtainable through the Christ, since even those who are subtly aware of a natural or cosmic law from a creator will no doubt fail to know how to rectify their trespasses. This is akin to one of my dinner party guests realizing that there is a pile of shoes by the door after they have tromped around my house, and so thoughtfully takes off his or her shoes upon this realization. My continuing to maintain attitudes of resentment and indignation at that point would be unreasonable, and more so if I maintained those attitudes because my guest did not know that forgiveness was only obtainable if she asked it of the son she did not know I had.

Again, the issues here should not be misconstrued as problems with attributes of God, but rather with interpretations of Hell as God's punishment for sinners. Either these interpretations are not properly defined as punishment, or they are not punishments that sinners truly deserve. On some popular understandings of the extent and degree of Hell make it out to be a place inconsistent with any reasonable attitude warranting punishment. Other popular beliefs concerning the strict liability of sin warranting Hell fails to properly justify the expression of attitudes described in (6a). As a result, sending transgressors there could not be considered a deserved punishment. These complications for understanding Hell are worth considering, but I do not take them to be insurmountable to every understanding of Hell as punishment. More difficult, I believe, is conceptualizing Hell as a justified punishment.

3 Justifying Hell as punishment

Justifications for punishment fall into two categories, retributive and utilitarian. A useful way to distinguish these types of theory is in terms of the reasons cited as justifications for the punishment. Retributive justifications for punishment are often described as drawing upon backward-looking reasons, while utilitarian justifications for punishment can be understood as drawing upon forward-looking reasons. In either case, reasons justifying punishment must adequately respond to two distinct questions regarding the use of punishment. When or for what reason(s) is punishment justified? And, what is the nature and extent of a justified punishment? The preceding question seeks a response that adequately explains why a person is punished for an offense in the first place, as opposed to some alternative course of action like forgiveness. The latter seeks a response that explains why a particular punishment is fitting for a particular offense.

Granting for now that Hell is a punishment according to the six elements described in the previous section, its use as a punishment requires justifications that adequately account for why Hell is deserved in the first place, as well as an adequate account for why Hell is a suitable punishment for an offense against God. Without both of these types of justification, a believer is left to wonder whether a just God would actually use such a place to punish persons.

Jeremy Bentham (1988) recognized the mixed feelings evoked by punishment, having this to say in "Cases Unmeet for Punishment," Chapter XIII of *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*:

> The general object which all laws have, or ought to have, in common, is to augment the total happiness of the community; and therefore, in first place, to exclude, as far as may be, every thing that tends to subtract from that happiness: in other words, to exclude mischief.
>
> But all punishment is mischief: all punishment in itself is evil. Upon the principle of utility, if it ought at all to be admitted, it ought only to be admitted in as far as it promises to exclude some greater evil.

As Bentham understood it, regardless of the possible good reasons for punishing, it still entails at minimum the subtraction of happiness in the person punished, which is only justifiable in so far as doing so prevents some worse evil from occurring. Notably, his negative articulation of this justification does not entail that it is justifiable to create a greater total sum of happiness, but despite this nuance, contemporary utilitarian justifications for punishment do allow for punishing to create happiness, as opposed to simply preventing greater evil.

The most common utilitarian justifications for punishment include deterrence, rehabilitation, and incapacitation. A punishment that creates a deterrent effect is justified, because it reduces the total number of offenses in the future. A punishment that rehabilitates the offender is justified because it reduces the offender's likelihood of committing the offense or similar offenses in the future. Incapacitation is justified under a utilitarian theory because it prohibits the offender from continuing to commit offenses that presumably harm either themselves or others. In each of these cases, the particular type of punishment justified depends entirely on its effectiveness in producing the most pleasure over pain.

On most understandings of Hell, rehabilitation is not a possible justification. Eternal suffering does not leave room for possible rehabilitation and redemption. If it did, it would not be eternal. Furthermore, suffering flames and torture as a means of rehabilitation seems either entirely ineffective or inefficient. Ineffective in that the pain and suffering produced by that sort of rehabilitation would likely create the wrong type of rehabilitation required by God, since the reason for repentance would invariably be an effort to avoid suffering as opposed to truly seeking forgiveness for one's wrongdoing. If, however, this method of rehabilitation leads to an afterlife of eternal bliss, then it might be warranted, since the suffering experienced could be eventually outweighed. But then again, couldn't God conceive of a better means to achieving that end? In his article "Universalism, Hell, and the Fate of the Ignorant," Stephen C. Davis (1990) hypothesizes that Hell could be a place where salvation is still possible. However, the

Hell which he conceives is a place apart from God, freely chosen by those too hard-hearted to accept God "as the source of true love, joy, peace, and light" (Davis, 1990, p. 178). And notably, "[i]t is not a place of agony, torment, torture, and utter horror" (Davis, 1990, p. 178). A Hell of this sort could provide for the possibility of rehabilitation, but it would require some heavenly intervention, perhaps in the form of angelic missionaries, to soften the hearts of those who choose to live there.

The other possibility is that the threat of Hell deters offenders from committing offenses. In other words, the threat of going to Hell is so bad that offenders behave themselves in an effort to avoid being condemned there for eternity. The problem with justifying Hell's existence in this way, however, is that it depends on the rationality of persons and their ability to freely choose. A person may ignore the threat of Hell for two perfectly legitimate reasons. The threat of Hell will not deter anyone who does not believe in it or know about it. The fact that Hell is eternal means there will be no firsthand accounts of those who experienced it and lived to tell the tale, like Dante. This, of course, means that its existence as a deterrent is mitigated by a lack of evidence that it exists. In which case, it creates massive amounts of suffering to deter only a fraction of humanity. Assuming that fraction of humanity deterred is greater than the total number suffering, Hell might be justified. However, Hell need not actually exist to deter in this way, since merely the presumed threat of Hell would have a similar impact without all of the suffering. If there is no Hell now, it appears its actual nonexistence does not seem to diminish its deterrent power.

Taken seriously, however, Hell as infinite suffering is the ultimate deterrent. Should God decide to make evidence of Hell's existence more visible, I am sure that there would be a dramatic impact. In fact, a Hell taken seriously in this way would presumably be empty. Everyone would do whatever they could to avoid going there, since nothing would be worth that risk. There would, no doubt, be the occasional outlier who failed to act rationally in the face of clear and present evidence for the existence of Hell, and his or her eternal suffering would be justified given the dramatic deterrent impact it would provide for everyone else. Unfortunately, however, this justification for Hell is not available to those defending its existence, since it depends on there being obvious evidence for its existence, which there isn't.

Hell as a means of incapacitation is justified only if, by sending offenders to Hell, their separation from everyone prevents greater harm from occurring. Unlike deterrence, this utilitarian justification has the

upshot of not depending on the rationality of persons, merely the separation of the offenders from the rest, like the wheat and the chaff. The problem for this justification is that it fails to justify the particular means for obtaining the incapacitation. An offender is equally incapacitated by being placed on a remote paradise island containing no other people as they would be suffering in Hell. So while incapacitation may be justified to prevent greater harms from occurring, it is not sufficient to justify the shackles of Hell.

Having exhausted utilitarian approaches to justifying Hell's existence as a punishment, the only possible alternatives are retributive justifications. In *The Critique of Practical Reason* (1996) Book 1 Chapter 2, Kant eloquently describes the inherent satisfaction of a just punishment, which is attributable to retributivism:

> When someone who delights in annoying and vexing peace-loving folk receives at last a right good beating, it is certainly an ill, but everyone approves of it and considers it as good in itself even if nothing further results from it.

Kant aptly noticed that we approve of someone getting punished when they deserve it. Even if the punishment doesn't lead to any further good in the world, there is a sense in which the punishment is justified as a setting aright of the inequity caused by the offense. A classic example of retributivism of this form is the *lex talionis*: retaliating in like kind and degree for an injury suffered. The *lex talionis* is often used synonymously with "an eye for an eye," since that captures the general idea of retaliating in like kind and degree.

While Kant's point in the previous passage was that people feel a sense of approval when just punishment is meted out, it leaves obscure what really makes punishment appropriate. Because retributive theories of punishment draw their justificatory reasons from the offense, understanding these theories means entirely ignoring the consequences of the punishment. These types of justificatory reasons are common in areas outside punishment, like the justification of rewards or how we justify payment for work. If, for example, I reward my children for good behavior, then the reward is justified simply because they behaved well. No other reasons are necessary. My children do not need to behave well ever again to deserve the reward now for their good behavior. Similarly, a person hired to do a job that they complete is owed compensation for their work. If they are not paid, the only relevant reason for demanding payment will be that it is deserved for completing the agreed upon work.

Similarly, retributivism justifies punishment simply by virtue of what is deserved for the offense committed.

Unlike payment, however, people rarely demand that they be punished for their wrong actions. Nevertheless, for Kant and other retributivists a person has the right to be punished, because punishing a person takes seriously his or her autonomy. Failure to punish is tantamount to treating a person like a little child who fails to fully comprehend the implication of their choices. On retributive justifications for punishment, Hell is justified because the person chose to commit an offense. It is simply a matter of honoring the person's right to be punished, to take his or her choices seriously, hold that person accountable, and ultimately, treat them with the dignity that agency deserves. Kant concludes his example of the right good beating by noting that, "even the man who receives it must in his reason acknowledge that he has met justice, because he sees the proportion between good conduct and good fortune, which reason inevitably places before him, here put into practice." While not quite an example of a right to be punished, it nevertheless emphasizes that even the guilty will recognize it was deserved.

Unfortunately, Hell still fails to be justified, even under the retributive approach. While retributivism justifies giving a person what he or she deserves, it fails to justify why that desert is eternal suffering. Clearly, being treated in like degree and kind, which is what retributivism justifies, the eternal suffering of Hell fails in terms of the appropriate duration. The term of a mortal life can only contain a finite number of sins, and a retributive theory could not justify infinite suffering regardless of how bad those sins might be. Even if a single sin is infinitely egregious to God, a person's failure to comprehend the absolute nature and degree of the sin would mitigate against sentencing one to eternity for it, as explained in the preceding section. Furthermore, if the sin is understood as a disobedience to God, irrespective of the particular infraction, it is not at all clear why disobedience, *simpliciter*, is adequately accounted for through torture and suffering. In turning one's back on God, the appropriate punishment would seem to be for God to metaphorically turn his back on the offender. Hell would certainly count as this, but the torture and suffering of fire is superfluous.

If, however, Hell is as Stephen Davis hypothesizes, then such a place apart from God may be justified on retributive grounds. The issue, I think, still remains as to whether a hardened heart could ever freely choose anything. If we understand a hardened heart as a psychological state preventing kindness, compassion, trust, love, and the like, no doubt being in such a state greatly inhibits rational agency. Presumably,

one finds themselves with a hardened heart due in part to their own choices, but also, like many psychological states, the hardened heart is largely the result of factors over which they had little or no control. As such, perhaps it would be better for God to treat such individuals as children, lacking fully developed agency, and work to rehabilitate them, regardless of their will.

Conclusion

Ultimately, contemporary accounts of Hell that describe it as a place where sinners go to suffer an eternal punishment must account for how such a place could be adequately understood as a punishment and justified as a punishment. I have shown here that contemporary philosophical definitions of punishment and justificatory theories for punishment make that task difficult, if not impossible, for many popular understandings of Hell. Nevertheless, the philosophical theories herein could be entirely deficient, which would not bode well for many of our social and political theories, which are put into practice daily in courthouses across the world. Alternatively, accounts of Hell deemed deficient by the reasonable standards set out here should be abandoned. Given the almost complete lack of evidence for the existence of such a Hell, there is a heavy burden on those faithful believers to convert those that are reasonable.

Notes

1. On this understanding, the fires of Hell illustrate the burning away of existence, not eternal pain and suffering.
2. Contrasted to some Protestant theologians who contend that Hell has no spatial or temporal existence distinct from life on Earth, e.g., Karl Barth (1959).
3. See Marilyn McCord Adams (1993).
4. Feinberg (1970) specifically cites the 1960 Supreme Court case of *Flemming v. Nestor* as a compelling example of an egregious abuse of regulatory sanctions to effectively punish an individual.

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6

Leibniz's Stoic and Spinozistic Justification for Eternal Damnation

Charles Joshua Horn

Introduction

Leibniz's metaphysics is oftentimes fundamentally related to his own theological views. While it is sometimes the case that his metaphysics is broadly consistent with these theological beliefs, there are some circumstances in which these beliefs are difficult to reconcile with one another. One such problematic case concerns Leibniz's views regarding the nature of Hell and, in particular, eternal damnation in the best of all possible worlds. The problem is that Leibniz seems to endorse two inconsistent claims. Speaking primarily as a Lutheran, Leibniz believed that eternal damnation was justified for individuals based on the nature of sin.[1] But speaking primarily as a metaphysician, Leibniz believed that there is no transcendent reality such as Hell and that the entire causal chain, except the act of creation, is fully actualized in the best of all possible worlds. Despite the apparent inconsistency, I believe that Leibniz has the resources to resolve the tension in his thought. In Section 1, I will present the Stoic and Spinozistic view of virtue and vice and show that Leibniz was working primarily out of a similar system. In Section 2, I will show that, even though Leibniz was working out of a deterministic system, his view did not amount to necessitarianism, and so at least for some individuals, perpetual psychological torment was possibly escapable. In Section 3, I will argue that Leibniz's conception of Hell is not a transcendent reality, but is based on the psychology of those that sin, and moreover, the reward or punishment of those individuals is carried out in the best of all possible worlds.

1 Inclined toward stoicism and Spinozism

Leibniz's discussion of the damnation of the wicked is most fully developed in his *Confessio Philosophi*, a piece regularly dated around 1672–1673, the period when he first arrived in Paris, but before his famous meeting with Spinoza. Within either the standard Judeo-Christian view or the Leibnizian metaphysical view, it is perfectly natural to wonder what could possibly justify the *eternal* damnation of any individual given that any sin, no matter how morally repugnant, is finite. That is, what justification could be given to infinitely punish the damned for finite actions? During this relatively early text, Leibniz argues that the eternal damnation of the wicked is justifiable because these individuals die in a state of perpetual misery: that is, they die in a state of everlasting hatred toward God. Strictly speaking, this was fairly unconventional – the traditional view[2], of course, is that one need not commit an infinite amount of sins to suffer endlessly and that even one unforgiven sin is sufficient for eternal damnation. Leibniz writes,

> I believe it was the state of the dying man, namely his burning hatred of God – the state in which he died in which consists the nature of despair. Moreover, this suffices for damnation. For since the soul is not open to new external sensations from the moment of death until its body is restored to it, it concentrates its attention only on its last thoughts, so that it does not change but rather extends the state it was in at death … The greatest sadness is misery, or damnation. Hence, he who dies hating God damns himself. (A VI 3, 118–119/CP. 36–37)

While the hatred of God explains damnation, it is the *eternal* hatred of God that justifies the *eternal* damnation, such that "they damn themselves again and again" (CP 81).[3] But it is not just that the wicked hate God: they hate what God represents. They are upset about the order of things which has been ordained by God as a free decree in creating the best of all possible worlds. It is this 'psychology of the damned' as Lloyd Strickland has called it, which explains why individuals suffer endlessly. He writes, "The psychology applies to all those who hate God (which includes those who do not know him, i.e. atheists) and whose who are dissatisfied with the world. These 'furious haters of the nature of things, as Leibniz calls them, harbor deep frustrations because they desire things to be otherwise than they are but they are unable to change them." (2009, p. 313)

My proposal is that Leibniz's justification for the psychology of the damned is grounded upon Stoic and Spinozistic principles related to virtue and vice. According to Leibniz, happiness is a consequence, not only of our knowledge that this is the best of all possible worlds, but also in the fact that the best of all possible worlds is exemplified in the highest possible degree of harmony and perfection. Leibniz writes,

> Just as in the best constituted republic, care is taken that each individual gets what is good for him, as much as possible, similarly, the universe would be insufficiently perfect unless it took individuals into account as much as could be done consistently with preserving the harmony of the universe. It is impossible in this matter to find a better standard than the very law of justice, which dictates that everyone should take part in the perfection of the universe and in his own happiness in proportion to his own virtue and to the extent that his will has thus contributed to the common good. (G. VII. 307/ AG 154)

If happiness comes from accepting the glory of God's creation, then it would stand to reason that one way to understand misery and suffering would come in rejecting the natural order of things. But for Leibniz, rejecting the natural order of things as exemplified in the best of all possible worlds is thoroughly irrational. Since two of the features of the best of all possible worlds are that it is absolutely unique (there is no other possible world *exactly* like it) and that it is determined (by virtue of the principle of sufficient reason), then misery would come in desiring for the world to be other than it is. In short then, the psychological suffering of the damned is irrational such that their suffering is caused by desiring for the world to be other than it is – a desire for the world to be irrational: put simply, this desire is grounded on turning away from God. Let's treat each of these features in more detail.

According to Leibniz, the best of all possible worlds is unique: that is, there is no other possible world constituted by exactly the same set of finite essences.[4] The uniqueness of each possible world, including the actual world, must be the case because Leibniz is committed, by most standard accounts, to superessentialism.[5] According to this view, every property of each essence is necessary to its being: that is, for any substance, x, and for any property F, necessarily, if x exists, then x has the property F.[6] One consequence of superessentialism is that individual finite essences are "world-bound": that is, the very same essence cannot exist in other possible worlds. In one notable example, Leibniz

describes this principle with respect to Judas's betrayal of Christ, "But someone will say, why is it that this man will assuredly commit this sin? The reply is easy: otherwise it would not be this man." (A. VI, iv, 1576/ AG 61) Every single property of Judas, including his betrayal of Christ, is necessary, and so it would be incoherent for Judas to desire for a world to unfold without his betrayal of Christ – such a world is not even possible. In the context of the discussion concerning Hell, Judas's eternal damnation would be justified, according to Leibniz, if Judas rejected the natural order of things. Such a rejection would be tantamount to rejecting God.[7]

The unique nature of the best of all possible worlds also follows directly from the principle of sufficient reason – the notion that there is an explanation or reason for why everything is the way that it is rather than otherwise. Leibniz argues that if there were two indiscernible worlds: that is, two worlds which are qualitatively identical and yet numerically distinct, then God would have no reason for choosing to create one world rather than another. But since there must be a reason or cause for everything to be the way that it is, rather than otherwise, God could not arbitrarily choose one world to create instead of another. And since God chose to create *a* world, then we know that, based upon Leibniz's principles, there must be only one uniquely best world. Sometimes Leibniz even uses evocative imagery to highlight the fact that there is only one possible world. For instance, in a well-known image from the end of the *Theodicy*, Leibniz describes, through the voice of Athena, a pyramid which represents the set of all possible worlds. He writes,

> The halls rose in a pyramid, becoming even more beautiful as one mounted towards the apex, and representing more beautiful worlds. Finally they reached the highest one which completed the pyramid, and which was the most beautiful of all: for the pyramid had a beginning, but one could not see its end; it had an apex, but no base; it went on increasing to infinity. That is (as the Goddess explained) because amongst an endless number of possible worlds there is the best of all, else would God not have determined to create any; but there is not any one which has not also less perfect worlds below it: that is why the pyramid goes on descending to infinity. (G. VI 364/ H 372)

Another feature of the best of all possible worlds, indeed, a feature of any possible world, is that the entire causal chain, except God's free choice to create or not create the world, is determined. Each world is determined as a consequence of the principle of sufficient reason. For

determinism to be false there would have to be a possibility of a truly spontaneous action: that is, an effect with no cause, an explicit violation of the principle of sufficient reason.

It should be apparent then that Leibniz's conception of psychological suffering, a necessary feature of his view of Hell, is the direct result of desiring for the world to be other than it actually is. In metaphysical terms though, such a desire is incoherent and amounts to a direct rejection of the rationalism that defines his metaphysical and theological worldview. As we have seen, for Leibniz the best possible world is distinctive for at least three important reasons. First, given God's benevolence, a different possible world could not have been the best of all possible worlds because there is only one unique best world.[8] Second, purely possible worlds could not be identical with the actual world because of his commitment to superessentialism. And third, the world could not have been different in terms of having the same individuals, but a different state of affairs because everything unfolds in each world not with necessity, but with certainty.

It is my contention that Leibniz's view of the psychological suffering related to a rejection of the divine and rational order of nature is motivated, at least in part, by ancient Stoicism and his contemporary, Spinoza. Leibniz understood God to be a benevolent, transcendent, and anthropomorphic being with a will and intellect, faculties which are guided by the force of reason. Leibniz describes the faculties of God's nature in rendering the best of all possible worlds in the *Theodicy*. He writes, "It is the power of this substance that renders its will efficacious. Power relates to being, wisdom or understanding to truth, and will to good. And this intelligent cause ought to be infinite in all ways, and absolutely perfect in power, in wisdom, and in goodness, since it relates to all that which is possible." (G. VI, 106–107/ H 127 – 128)

By contrast, the ancient Stoics understood the divine to be an active immanent force in the world. It is this active principle which permeates every aspect of reality and makes it intelligible. Moreover, the ancient Stoics are clear that the virtuous life is attained in living a life of reason: that is, in accordance with the order of things. Epictetus, for instance, writes, "Seek not that the things which happen should happen as you wish; but wish the things which happen to be as they are, and you will have a tranquil flow of life." (*Enchiridion* VIII) We might also consider Seneca's claim that "What, then, is the part of a good man? To offer himself to fate. It is a great consolation that it is together with the universe that we are swept along; whatever it is that has ordained us to live, so to die, by the same necessity it binds also the gods." (*De Providentia* 5.8) In an important sense then, both the ancient Stoics and Leibniz endorsed a

view of the robust rational order of nature. Donald Rutherford describes this similarity in the view of the ancient Stoics and Leibniz nicely, "Both [the ancient Stoics and Leibniz] advance the conception of a divinely ordered universe, in which human beings flourish – live virtuously and happily – to the extent that they conform their will to the order that governs nature as a whole." (2001, p. 141) But it is not merely the rational order of nature which is at issue concerning the psychology of the damned; rather, it is the turn away from the rational order of things which causes suffering. Put differently, the psychology of the damned is a consequence of rejecting the divine.

Spinoza's understanding of God is similar in many ways to the ancient Stoic view. According to Spinoza, God is identical with Nature. As a result, Spinoza's conception of God is not *divine* in the sense of being transcendent, special, unique, or worthy of praise. Rather, Spinoza's God lacks all of the anthropomorphic properties associated with the traditional Christian and Leibnizian view. But similar to the ancient Stoics, and Leibniz too, Spinoza's understanding of God structures the rational order of nature, albeit in different ways. And, similar to the ancient Stoics, the rational order of nature has broad implications for Spinoza's ethical system. For Spinoza, acting freely is not understood as the ability to do one action rather than another because there is only one way that nature can unfold. Rather, freedom is understood as liberation *from* something: that is, liberation from one's own passions. To act contrary to our passions requires power, and thus increasing one's power is a requirement for acting virtuously. He writes, "By virtue and power I understand the same thing, that is (by 3p7) virtue, insofar as it is related to man, is the very essence, or nature of man, insofar as he has the power of bringing about certain things, which can be understood through the laws of his nature alone." (E. 4def8) Moreover, happiness can only be achieved with the successful acceptance that the world could not possibly be other than it is. But such knowledge is contingent on understanding God's nature as inevitable. Spinoza writes, "The greatest thing the mind can understand is God, that is (by Id6), a being absolutely infinite, without which (by Ip15) nothing can either be or be conceived. And so (by p26 and p27), the mind's greatest advantage, or (by d1) good, is knowledge of God." (E. IVp28dem)

It should be clear that Leibniz's ethical principles are guided, not unlike the ancient Stoics and Spinoza, by his metaphysical and theological views. And although determinism is a feature of the ancient Stoic, Spinozistic, and Leibnizian depictions of reality, all determinism is not

created equal. In the next section, I will show that Leibniz's compatibilism has important implications for those who are damnable.

2 Determinism without necessitarianism

Although there are many interesting similarities between Leibniz's understanding of the ancient Stoics and Spinoza, there is one difference in particular which will have important ramifications for his view of Hell. Leibniz believes that the Stoics had a notion of tranquility guided by the determined unfolding of the world. But he also draws an analogy between the determinism of the Stoics and a view prevalent in Christianity – a *contentment* in the role of providence, a contentment that is not possible in Spinoza's metaphysical view because of the absence of an anthropomorphic God. Leibniz calls this distinct kind of determinism the *fatum christianum* in the *Theodicy*. He writes,

> It is true that the teachings of the Stoics (and perhaps also some famous philosophers of our time), confining themselves to this alleged necessity, can only impart a forced patience, whereas our Lord inspires more sublime thoughts, and even instructs us in the means of gaining contentment by assuring as that since God, being altogether good and wise, has care for everything, even so far as not to neglect one hair of our head, our confidence in him ought to be entire. And thus we should see, if we were capable of understanding him, that it is not even possible to wish for anything better (as much in general as for ourselves) than what he does. It is as if one said to men: Do your duty and content with that which shall come of it, not only because you cannot resist divine providence, or the nature of things (which may suffice for tranquility, but not for contentment), but also because you have to do with a good master. And that is what may be called *Fatum Christianum*. (G. VI. 30–31/ H. 54–55)

Although Spinoza had a great deal in common with the ancient Stoics, Leibniz believed that there was a crucial difference in their understanding of modality. Because the Stoics held a view, according to Leibniz, much like the *fatum christianum*, wherein God is also providential over the world, we can be content in the fact that, although the world may not unfold as we like, we nevertheless know that it is governed by reason for best. He writes, "In order to act in accordance with the love of God, it is not sufficient to force ourselves to be patient; rather, we must truly be

satisfied with everything that has come to us according to his will." (G. IV. 429/ AG 37–38)

In addition to the *fatum christianum*, Leibniz also makes an important distinction in his early *Confessio* between the damnable and the damned, arguing that the wicked are never damned, but only damnable, because it is always possible for them to be set free from such eternal psychological torment. Significantly though, Leibniz argues that although the wicked are always damnable and are able to be set free, they never will such action. He writes, "at no time are they [the damnable] henceforth damned for all eternity. They are always damnable; they are always able to be set free, but they never will it." (A. VI. 138/ CP. 81) It seems then that, on the face of it, Leibniz is adopting a view of universal damnation meaning that salvation never occurs for the damned, despite the fact that it is nevertheless possible. Such a reading of Leibniz allows him to portray God's love and mercy as ultimately outweighing his wrath, despite the fact that since God knows everything about each individual essence, God knows from all eternity that the damned could never alleviate their own psychological torment. For all intents and purposes then, it appears that Leibniz upholds the salvation for some of the wicked in name only.

Despite its plausibility, I am deeply skeptical of this justification for the eternal damnation view. The mistake, I contend, is based on a misunderstanding with respect to Leibniz's views on modality. In short, the justification ignores Leibniz's deeply held conviction that there is a difference between hypothetical necessity (which he accepts) and absolute necessity (which he denies). A truth is hypothetically necessary to the extent that the consequent follows only if the antecedent is assumed. Leibniz writes in a letter to Pierre Coste from 1707,

> sins and evils, which he has judged permissible in order to allow greater goods, are included in some way in his [God's] choice. It is this necessity that we can now attribute to things to come, a necessity which we call *hypothetical* or *consequential*: that is, necessity based on a consequence of the hypothesis of the choice made. This necessity does not destroy the contingency of things and does not produce the absolute necessity that contingency cannot allow. And almost all theologians and philosophers (that is, except the Socinians) acknowledge that we cannot oppose it without upsetting God's attributes and the very nature of things. (AG 193)

In the context of Leibniz's views concerning the possibility of universal salvation, the justification for eternal damnation wrongfully assumes

that because the wicked do not act on their ability to be set free, it nevertheless does not follow that they could not. Moreover, if I am correct in highlighting Leibniz's ancient Stoic underpinning for psychological torment, which is distinctive from Spinoza's insofar as Spinoza's metaphysical view does not incorporate the roll of providence, and I am correct in attributing to Leibniz a view of universal salvation, a view which many other Leibniz commentators have also attributed to him, then there is a strong reason to suggest that Leibniz's view of universal salvation is also grounded on another key component of ancient Stoicism: namely, the doctrine of the sage.

We find in the ancient Stoic conception of the sage one of the most salient differences with Spinoza. According to the ancient Stoics, one lives virtuously by acting rationally: that is, only acting on the things within one's own control. Furthermore, such action is aimed at suppressing the passions insofar as they are irrational. According to the Stoic framework, only the sage is perfectly virtuous because he alone is capable of completely liberating oneself from these passions.

Perhaps the most important ethical import of Spinoza's system is also the development of the kind of character needed to act rationally and above one's passions, but he believes that we can only approximate this kind of perfect individual. Strictly speaking, it is impossible for individuals in Spinoza's system to obtain completely a state of perfection because such a scenario would imply that it was possible to separate oneself completely from nature. But Spinoza is quite clear throughout his writings and especially in the *Ethics* that no human can eliminate all of the passive affects from his life. As he indicates in Part IV, "It is impossible that a man should not be a part of nature, and that he should be able to undergo no changes except those which can be understood through his own nature alone, and of which he is the adequate cause." (E. IVp4) He continues in the corollary, "From this it follows that man is necessarily always subject to passions, that he follows and obeys the common order of nature, and accommodates himself to it as much as the nature of things requires." (E. IVp4c)

The Stoic and Spinozistic conception of the sage is vitally important for our discussion of Leibniz's doctrine of Hell and in particular, the concern about universal salvation. The position I have developed here is that Leibniz found much more to be desired in the ancient Stoic view of modality than the brute metaphysical necessity found in Spinoza, wherein the world is not governed by a benevolent sovereign. Furthermore, we have reason to believe that Leibniz's view of virtue and vice is predicated on a view which he himself traces to the

Stoics concerning the *fatum christianum*. My contention is that if we were to push Leibniz's own commitments to their proper conclusion, he would be compelled to accept a view like the Stoics wherein one could completely separate oneself from the passions, even if this possibility is available to a select few, and even if, in actuality, nobody ever does so. Most notably, one of the passions of which it is possible to be cleansed is the hatred of God, which follows from desiring the world to be otherwise. Thus, it follows that Leibniz must believe that the psychology of the damned *can* be overcome, even if it never does.

3 Leibniz and Hell

What we have established so far is that Leibniz's views concerning personal immortality with respect to the afterlife are quite nuanced. In one sense, Leibniz is committed to the traditional theological view: that Hell is a state of psychological suffering for the wicked because the only thing that would satisfy a meaningful conception of divine justice is if individuals were held accountable for their actions. And since it seems to be empirically true that bad things sometimes happen to good people, and good things happen to bad people, there must be a mechanism in place to correct for such injustice. But he is also committed to the metaphysical view that substances only begin or end in annihilation,[9] and that death does not involve a complete separation of the soul's body, for those bodily parts will go on to occupy different organisms in time. The way out of this dilemma, I think, is that the psychological suffering of the damned is carried out in this reality, not some transcendent "afterlife" to come. As Rutherford writes, "The point to be stressed about Leibniz's doctrine of immortality is that it involves no commitment to an extramundane afterlife. Reward and punishment are delivered by natural means within a succession of linked earthly existences." (*Monadology* 6, Footnote 27, p. 159)

Leibniz's understanding of Hell is importantly related to his own theodicean picture. God's justice guarantees that the just will eventually be rewarded and the wicked will eventually be punished, despite such retribution not coming from the traditional afterlife. But if there is no metaphysical conception of the traditional afterlife, then divine retribution must be exercised in the best of all possible worlds itself, and indeed must be. In his criticism of Malebranche's occasionalism, the view according to which God is the only efficient cause in the universe, Leibniz thinks that it is unbefitting a perfect being to constantly intervene in the world.[10] As a result, the only way in which Leibniz envisions

God acting on the world is through the act of creation, and even then God seems to be the exception to the metaphysical rule. Insofar as God is a substance and substances are not causally efficacious on one another, it would be difficult to recognize how God could exercise reward and punishment as another kind of action independently of the act of creation. Therefore, reward and punishment must be part of God's providential plan for individuals from the moment of creation.

Another reason that punishment and reward must be exercised in the actual world stems from Leibniz's celebrated doctrine of marks and traces. According to this view, every individual essence contains within itself its entire causal story. It would follow that divine justice, whatever it will be, must be included in the concept of each individual essence in the same way as every other consequence that will follow from its own nature. He writes, "when we consider carefully the connection of things, we can say that from all time in Alexander's soul there are vestiges of everything that has happened to him and marks of everything that will happen to him and even traces of everything that happens in the universe, even though God alone could recognize them all." (A VI iv 1541/ AG 41) Of course, such a view is perfectly consistent with Leibniz's determinism, and also the predominantly held Christian view in omniscience and divine providence.

Concluding Remarks

We might ask how it is possible to reconcile the existence of a providential, benevolent, wise, and powerful God with a view of eternal suffering. One plausible response to such a puzzle is that God gave individuals free will in a strong libertarian sense: in order to freely turn toward his love or away from it to a life of sin. If we freely choose poorly, then such damnation is easily reconcilable with God's justice. However, a libertarian sense of freedom is not possible in Leibniz's thoroughly rational system because the kinds of spontaneous actions required by libertarian freedom are inconsistent with the principle of sufficient reason. Rather than locating the source of the problem in free agency, Leibniz justifies the punishment of the damned on a feature of their psychology. Insofar as these individuals sin, they are turning away from God and the rational order of nature: they are, in other words, desiring for the world to be other than it is.

In this essay, I have argued that Leibniz's justification for eternal damnation is based upon ancient Stoic and Spinozistic views concerning the nature of vice. Importantly though, Leibniz treats the determinism

of ancient Stoicism as distinct from Spinoza insofar as the Stoics incorporated something akin to the *fatum christianum*, the contentment that comes from being governed by a providential God. Moreover, Leibniz can accept the universal salvation view of the afterlife by utilizing his metaphysical distinction between hypothetical and absolute necessity, and by embracing a view of the sage like that held by the ancient Stoics, but denied by Spinoza.

Notes

Leibniz's primary texts will be cited with the following abbreviations:

——[A] *Sämtliche Schriften und Briefe*. Ed. Deutsche Akademie der Wissenschaften. Darmstadt, Leipzig, Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1923. Cited by series, volume, page.

—— [G] *Die Philosophischen Schriften von Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz*. Ed. C.I. Gerhardt. Berlin: Weidmann, 1875–1890. Reprint, Hildescheim: Georg Olms, 1978. Cited by volume, page.

—— [Grua] *Textes inédits d'après de la bibliothèque provincial de Hanovre*. Ed. Gaston Grua. Paris: Presses Universitaires, 1948. Reprint, New York and London: Garland Publishing. 1985.

—— [CP] *Confessio Philosophi: Papers Concerning the Problem of Evil, 1671–1678*, trans. and ed. Robert C. Sleigh, Jr. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005.

—— Spinoza's *Ethics* [E] will be cited by Part (I–V) and with the following abbreviations: Proposition (P), Axiom (A), Definition (D), Corollary (C), Scholium (S), Explanation (Exp).

1. Leibniz's views concerning the extent of eternal damnation are fairly well documented. Historically, there were three views that he could have endorsed with respect to the fate of the damned. According to the traditional view, the damned would suffer eternal punishment in hell. According to the annihilationist view, the damned would be punished for a certain period of time before being annihilated. According to the Universal Salvation view, the damned would eventually be saved. For more, see Andrew Carlson (2001), Catherine Wilson (1995), Anne Becco (1978, pp. 119–42), Allison P. Coudert (1995), and Lloyd Strickland (2009).
2. Admittedly, it is immensely controversial what the "standard" interpretation of the relationship between sin and Hell actually amounts to. Biblically, perhaps the closest that we can get to a definitive view that the wicked suffer can be found in Matthew 25:46. Also, see Augustine, *City of God* XXI. 11.
3. While I do not want to dwell on the time periods that Leibniz writes about eternal damnation, it is important to note that his views regarding eternal sin as justification for eternal punishment are held even into his mature period. For instance, in a letter to Electress Sophie, he writes that "my view is that punishments would only be eternal because of the eternity of sins. Those who will always sin will always be justly punished. See A I, 10, 59–60. Even in his Theodicy, he writes that "the damned ever bring upon themselves new pains through new sins." G VI, 142/H 162.

4. It is controversial whether the laws of nature supervene on individual essences or whether God decrees these separately. I am bracketing this contentious issue here for the sake of brevity.
5. For rival accounts, see Cover and O'Leary-Hawthorne (1999) and Sleigh (1990).
6. There are many passages which support such a reading. See for example Grua 327, "You will object that it is possible for you to ask why God did not give you more strength than he has. I answer: if he had done that, you would not exist, for he would have produced not you but another creature." Another example comes in the correspondence with Arnauld. Leibniz writes, "A falsity would therefore exist, if I did take [the journey], which would destroy the individual or complete concept of me, or what God conceives or conceived of me even before deciding to create me…" (LA 58).
7. Interestingly enough, we might wonder whether Jesus would also be committed to Hell in moments when he was uncertain about the order of things, for instance, when he was exhibiting uncertainty and angst in the garden of Gethsemane.
8. Of course, the plurality of possible worlds is *metaphysically* possible insofar as they are compossible. That is, other possible worlds are collections of logically compatible compossible essences. But this need not infringe the claim that the *best possible world* is absolutely unique.
9. See Monadology 6, "Thus, one can say that monads can only being or end all at once: that is, they can only begin by creation and end by annihilation, whereas composites begin or end through their parts" (G 607/AG 213).
10. See G VI. 541/ L 587: "Instead of this [pre-established harmony], the common system has recourse to absolutely unexplainable influences, while in the system of occasional causes God is compelled at every moment, by a kind of general law and as if by compact, to change the natural course of the thoughts of the soul to adapt them to the impressions of the body and to interfere with the natural course of bodily movements in accordance with the volitions of the soul. This can only be explained by a perpetual miracle, whereas I explain the whole intelligently by the natures, which God has established in things."

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Leibniz's Primary Texts with Standard Abbreviations:

[A] G. Leibniz (1923) *Sämtliche Schriften und Briefe* Deutsche Akademie der Wissenschaften (ed.) (Berlin: Akademie Verlag).

[AG] G. Leibniz (1989) *Philosophical Essays*, R. Ariew and D. Garber (eds and trs.) (Indianapolis: Hackett).

[CP] G. Leibniz (2005) *Confessio Philosophi: Papers Concerning the Problem of Evil, 1671–1678*, R. C. Sleigh, Jr. (ed. and tr.) (New Haven: Yale University Press).

[H] G. Leibniz (1985) *Theodicy: Essays on the Goodness of God, the Freedom on Man and the Origin of Evil*, E. M. Huggard (tr.) (La Salle: Open Court).

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[L] G. Leibniz (1969) *Philosophical Papers and Letters*, L. E. Loemker (ed. and tr.) 2nd edition (Dordrect: D. Reidel).
[LA] G. Leibniz (1967) *The Leibniz–Arnauld Correspondence*, H. T. Mason (ed. and tr.) (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press.)
Other Primary Texts with Standard Abbreviations
[E] B. de Spinoza (1994) *Ethics*, E. Curley and S. Hampshire (eds and trs.) (London: Penguin Books). Cited by Part (I–V) and with the following abbreviations: Proposition (P), Axiom (A), Definition (D), Corollary (C), Scholium (S), Explanation (Exp).
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A. P. Coudert (1995) *Leibniz and the Kabbalah* (Dordrecht: Kluwer).
J. A. Cover and J. O'Leary-Hawthorne (1999) *Substance and Individuation in Leibniz*. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press).
D. Rutherford (2001) "Leibniz and the Stoics: The Consolations of Theodicy," in E. J. Kremer and M. J. Latzer (eds) *The Problem of Evil in Early Modern Philosophy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press), pp. 138–64.
R. C. Sleigh, Jr. (1990) *Leibniz and Arnauld: A Commentary on Their Correspondence* (New Haven: Yale University Press).
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C. Wilson (1995) "The Reception of Leibniz in the Eighteenth Century," in N. Jolley (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to Leibniz* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press), pp. 442–74.

7
Kant, Morality, and Hell

James Edwin Mahon

1 God and morality

The first thing to note about the place of God, and ultimately Hell, in Kant's account of morality, is that Kant rejects the idea that morality is in any way based upon, or derived from, God and His commands.[1] The position that morality is based upon, or is derived from, God and His commands, is known as Divine Command Theory, or Theological Voluntarism. This is the view that, if there is no God then nothing is morally right or morally wrong – or morally optional;[2] on the other hand, if there is a God, and if God issues commands (e.g., "Thou shalt not lie"), then it is morally wrong to disobey those commands, morally right to obey them, and, it seems, morally optional to behave in ways that are not covered by those commands.

Kant rejects Divine Command Theory for the same reason that the characters of Socrates and Euthyphro reject it in Plato's dialogue *Euthyphro* (Plato, 2002). It is false that nothing is morally right, morally wrong, or morally optional independent of God's commands. The proof of this is that, if God were to, for example, command people to perform some immoral action, such as to lie, then it would still be morally wrong to lie, despite God's command to do so: "So nobody, not even the deity, is an originator of moral laws, since they have not arisen from choice, but are practically necessary; if they were not so, it might even be the case that lying was a virtue" (*L* 27:283, p. 76). As Kant says in more detail in his lectures on ethics:

> For example, if I am not supposed to lie because God has forbidden it, but has done so because it pleased Him, then He could also have not forbidden it, had He so wished. But … I must not lie, not because God

> has forbidden it, but because it is bad in itself. ... [A]n action must be done, not because God wills it, but because it is righteous or good in itself; and it is because of this that God wills it and demands it of us. (*L* 27:262, p. 56)[3]

Morality, as Kant says, is not created at all. Rather, morality is a set of necessary truths – *a priori* truths – that are independent of God and that are discovered by reason (see R. G. Swinburne, 1976). As Kant says, "People have perceived their duties correctly, and recognized the odiousness of lying, without having any proper notion of God" (*L* 27:277, p. 68). God does not create morality, "just as God is no originator of the fact that a triangle has three sides" (L 27:283, p. 76). In fact the "moral laws ... are ... just as necessary and eternal as God" (*L* 27:331, p. 114).

Kant points out that it is quite obvious that Divine Command Theory is false. As he says: "God wills it – why should I" (*L* 27:9, p. 5)? If I already know that God is moral, then I will do what God commands, but not because God commands it; I will do it because it is morally right. On the other hand, if I do not know that God is moral, then I will not do what God commands simply because God commands it: I will not do it because it might not be morally right. A divine command that something be done does not, by itself, make it morally right – no more than a federal law, or a parent's command, or a Nazi officer's order, ever, of themselves, make it morally right to obey. As Kant says: "Supposing the *arbitrium* [will] of God to be known to me, where is the necessity that I should do it, if I have not already derived the obligation from the nature of the case?" (*L* 27:9, p. 5) To believe that a divine command to do something makes that thing morally right to do is, simply, to commit the fallacy of deriving a (moral) "ought" from an "is."[4] One would first need at least some other moral ought, such as "One ought to obey God," or "Whatever God commands is right," to make God's commands something morally right to do, and this moral ought (if it were a moral ought) would itself be completely independent of those commands. Morality, therefore, is independent of God. Indeed, according to Kant, the truths of morality apply to God as much as to His creations: "the human being (and with him every rational being) is an *end in itself*, that is, can never be used merely as a means by anyone (not even by God)" (*CPR* 5:131, p. 245). Hence, "even in God, morality must exist" (*L* 27:10, p. 6). The reason why people hold that morality is somehow based upon, or derived from, God, as Kant explains, is that duties are often given in the form of a prohibition: "The cause of this derivation of morality from the divine will is as follows: Because moral laws run, Thou shalt not, it

is supposed that there must be a third being, who has forbidden it" (*L* 27:277, p. 68).

Nevertheless, it is true that there is an important relationship between morality and God: God is a moral being. Indeed, God is "the *only holy*, the *only blessed*, and the *only wise*" (*CPR* 5:131, p. 245) being. Because God is a moral being who is "morally perfect (holy and beneficent)" (*CPR* 5:129, p. 245), everything that God commands is morally right. As he says: "the subjective morality of the divine are therefore coincident with objective morality" (*L* 27:263, p. 56). Because God is omniscient as well as moral, God commands everything that is morally right: "God wills everything that is morally good and appropriate" (*L* 27:1425, p. 68). All moral duties, therefore, are *also* the commands of God. Indeed, Kant says that, properly understood, religion is "*the recognition of all duties as divine commands, not as sanctions*" (*CPR* 5:130, p. 244), and "All morally good actions are thus, in their highest states, religious acts" (*L* 27:17, p. 10). A moral individual who is a theist understands that, for example, even if it is a moral duty not to lie because lying is morally wrong, and not because God commands it, in addition to its being a moral duty not to lie, God commands us not to lie. This is true for every duty: "all moral laws … are rules of divine will" (*L* 27:263, p. 56).

2 God and punishment

To return to Kant's argument against Divine Command Theory, it is possible to argue that, whether or not it is morally right to do what God commands because God commands it, it is nevertheless in one's self-interest to do what God commands because God commands it. Otherwise, one will be punished. A divine command is not a *command*, after all, unless it is backed up by a sanction. As the legal positivist John Austin (1861, p. 6) pointed out, "a command is distinguished from other significations of desire by this peculiarity: that the party to whom it is directed is liable to evil from the other, in case he comply not with the desire."

Kant considers this objection by imagining a non-moral God who issues commands and punishes those who do not obey: "How dreadful, though, is a God without morality" (*L* 27:10, p. 6). As terrifying as this prospect is, it would pose no conflict for the moral individual. Since morality is independent of a non-moral God, and since what the non-moral God commanded would be morally wrong to do, one would only have a self-interested reason to obey the command of a non-moral God, whereas one would have an overriding moral reason to disobey the

command. The result is that "He will punish me; in that case it is injurious" (*L* 27:9, p. 5) but nothing more, and the moral individual would avoid moral wrongdoing. As Kant elsewhere says, "one who threatens me does not obligate, but extorts" (*L* 27:1426, p. 69). Such a moral individual would be like the Stoic in extreme pain who was proud because "he was aware that he had not incurred by it any wrongful action and thereby made himself deserving of punishment" (*CPR* 5:60, p. 189).[5] More importantly, what the non-moral God would do to the moral individual for refusing to obey the wrongful command would not, in fact, *be* punishment. In such a case the "God displays merely ill-will" (*L* 27:10, p. 6). For a non-moral God to inflict harm upon a moral individual for refusing to do what was morally wrong would simply be a morally wrongful act by the non-moral God – that is, the harming of an innocent person. As John Rawls (1955, p. 7) has pointed out, punishment, according to retributivist philosophers like Kant, is reserved for the infliction of harm upon the *guilty*: "no man can be punished unless he is guilty."[6] Punishment, on Kant's retributivist account, is the morally rightful infliction of harm upon those who have violated their moral duties, and thus who are guilty. A non-moral God, by its very nature, could never punish.

By contrast, God, who is a moral being, does engage in punishment. Indeed, God *must* punish. All moral wrongdoing, according to Kant, is deserving of punishment, that is, the infliction of harm on the person who has committed the moral wrong:

> Finally there is in the idea of our practical reason something further that accompanies the transgression of a moral law, namely its *deserving punishment*. Now, becoming a partaker in happiness cannot be combined with the concept of punishment as such. For, although he who punishes can at the same time have the kindly intention of directing the punishment to this end as well, yet it must first be justified in itself as punishment, that is, as mere harm, so that he who is punished, if it stopped there, and he could see no kindness hidden behind this harshness, must himself admit that justice was done to him and that what was allotted him was perfectly suited to his conduct. In every punishment as such there must first be justice, and this constitutes what is essential in this concept. (*CPR* 5:27, p. 170)

To punish is an act of justice, and to *refrain* from punishing – to refrain from inflicting harm on those who have transgressed their moral duties – is to *commit* an act of injustice. God, in addition to being holy and

beneficent, is just: "We must therefore represent to ourselves a supreme being, who is holy in His laws, benevolent in his government, and just in His punishments and rewards. Now this in one being is the concept of God that is needed for religion, as the basis of natural religion" (*L* 27:306, p. 95). Indeed, Kant says about God that we "fear Him as a just judge" (*L* 27:322, p. 107) and our "fear of God is directed simply to the righteousness of His justice" (L 27:322, p. 108).

As was established above, every moral duty is also something that God commands people to do. Given that God commands people to fulfill their moral duties, it follows that He must back up those divine commands with divine sanctions. Since God is omnipotent, it follows that He can punish anyone who transgresses any moral duty: that is, disobeys His commands. Since God is just, it follows that He must always punish all wrongdoers:

> The binding force of the law lies, therefore, in principle as it is known to reason; on the other hand, we can and must attach to this hypothesis the sense that God, as a moral and omnipotent being, is the supreme executor of all inner and outer moral laws, that He adds to their force the efficacy that is needed to manifest it, and that we, therefore, when we observe or transgress the laws, are subject to God's judgment-seat, in that we have acted according to His will, or against it, and must expect the consequences. (L 27:530, p. 291)

God is thus the "supreme law-giver" (*L* 29:629, p. 246) for all morality – the executor of all morality: "You know the necessity of morality, and must also know that God is the supreme executor of its laws" (*L* 29:628, p. 245).

Here it is important to note the distinction between God's beneficence and God's justice. In God's role as punisher of those who transgress morality, God must act justly, rather than beneficently. Beneficence consists of promoting the happiness of others who are *innocent* of wrongdoing (only). Those who are guilty of wrongdoing are not candidates for beneficence: they are candidates for punishment, which is a requirement of justice. As Kant is fond of pointing out, "indulgence and dispensation ... do not harmonize with justice" (*CPR* 5:124, p. 103). In a lengthy passage in the lectures on ethics, Kant explains that because *morality*, which is independent of God, requires that moral wrongdoers be punished, it follows that God must punish moral wrongdoers:

> Because men are exceedingly frail in all acts of morality, and not only what they practice as a good action is very defective and flawed, but

> they also consciously and willfully violate the divine law, they are quite unable to confront a holy and just judge, who cannot forgive evil-doing *simpliciter*. The question is, can we, by our vehement begging and beseeching, hope for and obtain through God's goodness the forgiveness of all of our sins? No, we cannot without contradiction conceive of a kindly judge; as ruler he may well be kindly; but a judge must be just. For if God could forgive all evil-doing, He could also make it permissible and if He can grant it impunity, it rests also on His will to make it permitted; in that case, however, the moral laws would be an arbitrary matter, though in fact they are not arbitrary, but just as necessary and eternal as God. God's justice is the precise allocation of punishments and rewards in accordance with men's good or bad behavior. The divine will is immutable. ... So begging can bring about no remission of punishment; the holy law necessarily entails that punishments should be appropriate to actions. (*L* 27:331, p. 114)

Here it is worth making explicit the form that God's punishment of moral wrongdoers takes. It is to send wrongdoers to Hell, where "[H]ell [is] ... a state containing nothing but evil and involving a total loss of consolation and the utmost pain" (*L* 27: 691, p. 420).

God's role in Kant's account of morality, therefore, is not to create morality, or to ground morality, or to serve as the basis of morality, since morality is independent of Him, and even applies to Him. God's role is to *enforce* morality, in the sense of punishing those who transgress their moral duties, by sending them to Hell, and rewarding those who abide by morality, by sending them to Heaven. Kant says that "God must necessarily reward men whose behavior is in accordance with the moral law" (*L* 27:268, p. 60), but it is equally true that He must necessarily punish those whose behavior is not in accordance with the moral law. Without the availability of Hell, God could not punish moral wrongdoers, and hence would not be just.

In order for God to punish moral wrongdoers (and reward moral rightdoers), it is necessary that God be omniscient, for a very particular reason. Morality does not merely require that one perform certain actions and omissions. It requires that one perform those actions and omissions because it is one's moral duty to do so – that one have a "good will" (*G* 4:393, p. 49) and act from the motive of duty, which is the only moral motive. Only God, however, is able to know the motives behind people's actions and omissions, and whether or not they are acting from the motive of duty. In addition to acting contrary to duty ("consciously

and wilfully violate the divine law"), it is possible for people to act in accordance with duty from motives that are other than the motive of duty ("what they practice as a good action is very defective and flawed"). As Kant is fond of saying: "God desires, not the action, but the heart" (*L*: 27: 274, p. 65).[7] One fails to be moral – one's actions fail to have moral worth – if one abides by one's moral duties from a motive that is not the moral motive.

Kant provides two examples of such failures in the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*. One involves a merchant who abides by the moral duty to treat all of his customers equally and charge everyone the same price, but who does so from the motive of self-interest, and not from the motive of duty:

> For example, it certainly conforms with duty that a shopkeeper not overcharge an inexperienced customer, and where there is a good deal of trade a prudent merchant does not overcharge but keeps a fixed general price for everyone, so that a child can buy from him as well as everyone else. People are thus served *honestly*; but this is not nearly enough for us to believe that the merchant acted in this way from duty and basic principles of honesty; his advantage required it; it cannot be assumed here that he had, besides, an immediate inclination toward his customers, so as from love, as it were, to give no one preference over another in the matter of price. Thus the action was done neither from duty nor from immediate inclination, but merely for purposes of self-interest. (*G* 4: 398, p. 53)

The second involves a person who is beneficent, which is a moral duty, but who acts out of a direct inclination to help others, and not from the motive of duty:

> To be beneficent where one can is a duty, and besides there are many souls so sympathetically attuned that, without any other motive of vanity or self-interest they find an inner satisfaction in spreading joy around them and can take delight in the satisfaction of others so far as it is their own work. But I assert that in such a case an action of this kind, however it may conform with duty and however amiable it may be, has nevertheless no true moral worth but is on the same footing with other inclinations. (*G*, 4: 398, p. 53)

Both of these individuals fail to be moral, although they abide by their moral duties. It follows that, unlike in the case of a human law, where one

meets one's legal obligation simply by performing the (outward) action or omission – as it has been said, "hardly any rule of penal law is more definitely settled than that motive is irrelevant" (Hall, 1947, pp. 153–4) (it does not matter *why* you did not commit murder, only that you did *not* commit murder; and it does not matter *why* you committed murder, only that it *was* murder)[8] – in the case of morality, one fails to meet one's moral obligation simply by performing the (outward) action or omission from a non-moral motive. One must also perform the action or omission from a moral motive – the motive of duty. What this entails is that one may be punished by God – or at the very least, one may fail to be rewarded by God – if one abides by one's moral duties, that is, obeys God's commands, from a non-moral motive.

> For example, the moral law tells us to promote the happiness of all men, and God wills this also; if I now act in accordance with the divine will, and practice well-doing to obtain rewards from God thereafter, I have not done the action from any moral disposition, but by reference to the divine will, in order to be rewarded later on. Insofar as a man may have fulfilled the divine law in a pragmatic sense, he has at least satisfied the law, and may to that extent expect good consequences, in that he has, after all, done what God wanted, even though the disposition was impure. But God wills the disposition; morality is what conforms to His will, and as laws of that kind they oblige absolutely ... We have therefore to regard God, not as a pragmatic lawgiver, but as a moral one. (*L* 27: 283, pp. 76–7)

God's role, therefore, is that of a moral judge, to punish moral wrongdoers (and reward moral rightdoers) for failing to live up to morality. In order to avoid punishment by being sent to Hell, and earn the reward of being sent to Heaven, it is necessary "to please God by inner dispositions, and to practice His holy law, and to hope by His benevolence for a supplement to our frailties" (*L* 27: 334, p. 117). Having the right inner disposition is necessary to be moral in the case of divine justice.

3 Belief in God

Given the important role that God plays in Kant's account of morality, it may seem peculiar that Kant holds that it is impossible to know whether or not God exists, or whether or not the soul is immortal, or whether or not Hell and Heaven exist. As it turns out, however, the impossibility of

knowing any of these things might actually help people to achieve the end of avoiding Hell and making it to Heaven.

Kant is rightly famous for undermining all of the celebrated "proofs" for God's existence. In a single section of his *Critique of Practical Reason*, for example, he runs through each of the three most famous "proofs" for God's existence – the Cosmological Argument, the Ontological Argument, and the Teleological Argument, or Argument from Design – and points out their flaws.

In the case of the Cosmological Argument, which holds that one can deduce the existence of God from the existence of the universe, Kant argues that, given our understanding of God as a being endowed with all perfections, in order to deduce the existence of a perfect being from the existence of the universe, it would be necessary to know that the world or universe is perfect. This, however, is impossible for us to know:

> But it is impossible through metaphysics to proceed by *sure inferences* from knowledge of this world to the concept of God and to the proof of his existence, for this reason: that I order to say that this world was possible only through a *God* (as we must think this concept) we would have to cognize this world as the most perfect whole possible and, in order to do so, cognize all possible worlds as well (so as to be able to compare them with this one), and would therefore have to be omniscient. (*CPR* 5: 138–139, p. 251)

In the case of the Ontological Argument, which holds that one can deduce the existence of God from the concept of God as a being with all perfections – since existence is a perfection, and thus God has the perfection of existing – Kant argues that all the argument demonstrates is that existence, like omniscience or omnipotence, belongs to the concept of God. It still remains to be determined if there is anything that exists that corresponds to this concept:

> [I]t is absolutely impossible to cognize the existence of this being from mere concepts, because every existential proposition – that is, every proposition that says, of a being of which I frame a concept, that it exists – is a synthetic proposition, that is, one by which I go beyond that concept and say more about it than was thought in the concept, namely, that to this concept *in the understanding* there corresponds an object *outside the understanding*, which it is absolutely impossible to elicit by any inference. (*CPR* 5: 138–139, p. 251)

Finally, in the case of the Teleological Argument, or Argument from Design, which holds that God's existence can be deduced from the order that we find in the universe, Kant argues that the most that can be inferred from the order of the universe is a being that is intelligent, powerful, and good. This, however, falls short of God, who is not merely that, but omniscient, omnipotent, and omni-beneficent:

> Since we can know only a small part of this world and can still less compare it with all possible worlds, we can well infer from its order, purposiveness, and magnitude a *wise, beneficent, powerful*, and so forth author of it, but not his *omniscience, all-beneficence, omnipotence*, and so forth. (*CPR* 5:140; 252)[9]

In place of all these arguments for God's existence Kant provides a radically different argument, one that has sometimes been referred to as the Moral Argument for the existence of God, although it should not be thought of as an attempt at a "proof."

Kant argues that God, personal immortality, and with them, Hell and Heaven, are possible, and that there is no disproof of any of them (they are not self-contradictory, and they are not disproven by science, since they are outside the purview of science; see Sullivan, 1989, p. 224). He also argues that we know it to be true that we *have* moral duties, and that we know it to be true that our moral duties are categorical – that is, that they *must* be fulfilled, *without* exception. He also argues that we know that there is no guarantee that abiding by such moral duties will bring us happiness, since being happy is distinct from being moral, and we also know that those who do not abide by their duties can be happy. The certainty of our moral duties, combined with the certainty that fulfilling them does not necessarily lead to our own happiness, leads us to conclude that there is a future state in which, of necessity, those who do not abide by their moral duties are punished (Hell), and those who abide by them are rewarded (Heaven). The *only* way in which such a just outcome can be *certain* is if God exists, we are immortal, and Hell and Heaven exist. Hence, we believe that "God will, in total, at the end of it all, make everything good" (*L* 27: 28, p. 14). That is, God will punish the wicked, and reward the virtuous, in a way that is perfectly proportionate to their vice and virtue. Our belief in morality leads us to believe this. It is, however, less than proof: "We know God, not by intuition, but through faith" (*L* 27: 338, p. 120).

It is important to note here that the fact that the Moral Argument for the existence of God is less than a proof – the fact that there is no proof for the existence of God – might actually help people to avoid Hell. If the existence of God, immortality, and Hell and Heaven, were provable – in particular, if being sent to Hell were a certainty if we transgressed our moral duties, and being sent to Heaven were a certainty if we abided by our moral duties – then this might have the effect of undermining our moral motivation. In such a situation, we would have an extremely strong non-moral motivation not to transgress our moral duties (and disobey God's commands) – namely, the self-interested motive of avoiding Hell – and an extremely strong non-moral motivation to abide by our moral duties (and obey God's commands) – namely, the self-interested motive of getting to Heaven. This self-interested motivation to avoid transgressing our moral duties and to abide by them (to avoid disobeying God's commands and to obey them) might compete with the moral motivation to avoid transgressing our moral duties and to abide by them from the motive of duty: that is, to do so because it is the morally right thing to do, irrespective of divine reward and punishment. However, in order to avoid divine punishment, or at least in order to receive divine reward, it is not enough to avoid transgressing our moral duties and to abide by them (to avoid disobeying God's commands and to obey them). One must also do so from the motive of duty. This is what it means to be moral. Since it might be more difficult to abide by our moral duties from the motive of duty if we had a competing self-interested motivation to do so, it follows that it might be more difficult for us to be moral if the existence of God, immortality, and Hell and Heaven were certain. Although it seems paradoxical to say so, it might be more difficult to avoid Hell, if the existence of Hell (and God, immortality, and Heaven) were certain. Or at least, it might be more difficult to get to Heaven.[10] This may be a further reason why, as Kant (1998, p. 117) said, he "had to deny knowledge in order to make room for faith."

As the situation stands, the existence of God, immortality, and Hell and Heaven are not certain. Nevertheless, we do not have mere uncertainty. We have a belief in their existence. Such a belief gives us the hope that "God will, in total, at the end of it all, make everything good." What we must do is be *worthy* of divine reward, by abiding by our moral duties, from the motive of duty: "If only we cultivate good dispositions, and bend all our efforts to fulfillment of the moral law, we may hope that God will have the means to remedy this imperfection" (*L* 27:318, p. 104). This should be enough to keep us out of Hell.

Notes

1. In citing Kant's works the following abbreviations are used:
   —— *G: Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (*Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten*) [1785], translated by Mary J. Gregor, in *Practical Philosophy*, edited and translated by Mary J. Gregor and Allen W. Wood (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 37–108.
   —— *CPR*: *Critique of Practical Reason* (*Critik der Practischen Vernunft*) [1788], translated by Mary J. Gregor, in *Practical Philosophy*, 137–271.
   —— *MM*: *The Metaphysics of Morals* (*Die Metaphysik der Sitten*), comprising the *Metaphysical First Principles of the Doctrine of Right* (*Metaphysische Anfangsgünde der Rechtslehre*) [1797] and the *Metaphysical First Principles of the Doctrine of Virtue* (*Metaphysische Anfangsgünde der Tugendlehre*) [1797], translated by Mary J. Gregor, in *Practical Philosophy*, 353–603.
   —— *L*: *Lectures on ethics* (*Vorlesungen über Ethik*) [1924] translated by Peter Heath and edited by Peter Heath and J. B. Schneewind (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997).
   —— *RE: Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason,* translated by George di Giovanni, in *Religion and Rational Theology*, edited and translated by Allen W. Wood and George di Giovanni (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 24–37.
   Pagination references in the text and footnotes are as follows: first, to the volume and page number in the German edition of Kant's works, *Kants gesammelte Schriften*, edited by the Königlich Preußischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, subsequently Deutsche, now Berlin-Brandenburg Akademie der Wissenschaften (originally under the editorship of Wilhelm Dilthey) (Berlin: Georg Reimer, subsequently Walter de Gruyter, 1900 –); secondly, to the translations. All emphases in the original unless otherwise indicated.
2. The claim that "If there is no God, then everything is permitted," which has often been attributed to a character in Fyodor Dostoyevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov,* is, as a summary of Divine Command Theory, self-contradictory. If morality is entirely dependent upon God, and if there is no God, then there is no morality; if there is no morality, then *nothing* is (morally) permitted (or prohibited, or required). Morality must exist for anything to be (morally) *permissible* to do, even if the narrower meaning of "permissible" (i.e., optional), as opposed to the broader meaning of "permissible" (i.e., either optional or required), is intended. If there is no morality, then nothing is morally okay, or morally right, morally wrong, because all of those categories are moral categories. See S. Darwall (1998, p. 42). I am indebted to Darwall's discussion of Theological Voluntarism.
3. See also: "suicide is not abominable because God has forbidden it; on the contrary, God has forbidden it because it is abominable ... So the reason for regarding suicide and other transgressions of duty as abominable must be derived, not from the divine will, but from their inherently abominable nature" (*L* 27:342–343, p. 124; cf. *L* 27:375, p. 149).
4. G. E. Moore (1993, p. 179) argued that "the assertion 'This is good' is *not* identical with the assertion 'This is willed,' either by a supersensible will, or otherwise." To believe so, was to commit the "naturalistic fallacy" (1993, p. 62) of identifying morality with something non-moral.

5. One might say here, with Socrates, that "a good man cannot be harmed either in life or in death," in the sense that a "good man's" goodness – his good character or moral being – cannot be affected by the immoral acts of others, and that the most that can happen to a "good man" is that he physically harmed or killed (Plato, 2002, p. 44).
6. Even consequentialists, who would justify "accepting the infliction of suffering on innocent persons if it is for the good of society (whether or not one calls this punishment)" (Rawls, 1955, p. 9), and who would perhaps call this "punishment," would perhaps be reluctant to call the infliction of harm on an innocent person who refused to obey a command of non-moral God a "punishment."
7. See also "God looks to the humbled heart and not to the humbled body" (*L* 27:339, p. 120).
8. Motive must be irrelevant to the judgment of innocence or guilt under the law, since it is not possible, on Kant's account, to determine a person's motives. It is enough to determine a person's intentions (the *mens rea*), regardless of the motive behind the intention.
9. See also the more extensive criticisms of these three celebrated "proofs" (Kant, 1998).
10. Lara Denis (2003, p. 204 n 12) has said that "Because we do not *know* that God exists, Kant thinks that our interest in pleasing God through our good conduct need not undermine pure moral motivation." The implication here, I take it, is that, if we *did* know that God exists, then this *would* undermine our pure moral motivation to do our duty, since we would have an *even stronger* interest in pleasing God through our good conduct. But the effect of undermining our pure moral motivation would be to make us less eligible for divine reward.

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8

Hell Is For Children? Or The Violence of Inculcating Hell

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The notion that there is a place where the damned are sent to wallow in pain and shame for eternity is to many minds jejune, if not conceptually bizarre and incompatible with divine beneficence. To invoke just two philosophers who in their own ways dismissed the idea of Hell, Russell and Mill both held that the idea of Hell hardly passed muster in terms of logical consistency with the characterization of God in charge of the cosmos or as adequate for human morality. For believing in a place of everlasting torment, Russell (1927, section "The Moral Problem") questioned Christ's very character,[1] whereas Mill (1991, p. 56) argued that belief in the "hope of heaven and the threat of hell" as the primary motives for living virtuous lives reduced human morality to a "selfish character" and made religious conviction a doctrine of "passive obedience." Even the theologian Pascal wrote in the *Pensees* that the apprehension about what may happen after death is neither a sign nor manifestation of genuine faith.

Philosophers and theologians have been so troubled by the inconsistencies and incoherence that pleonastic and torturous theodicies were composed to reconcile God's eternal goodness with an eternal holocaust for the weak-willed or wicked. Indeed, a long line of Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment commentators has more or less dismantled Hell. Consequently, today legions of atheists and agnostics tend to dismiss the concept outright, whereas even the religiously convicted among us in liberal democracies tend to embrace a kind of "Hell-Lite" concept, one not quite as heavy as might be found in the frightening Bosch depiction of infernal eviscerations or Goya painting of Saturn eating the head of his own child, allowing for only the most evil of evil agents to fall into its chasm instead of the multitudes of non-believers that traditional dogmas insisted would burn for eternity.

Whereas many adults – having been raised in Hell-Lite environments, or perhaps been lucky enough to escape the oppression that is Hell indoctrination in the literalist environment – can provide reasons for dismissing or taming Hell, the same cannot be said of children, who obviously lack the sophisticated conceptual frameworks and cognitive apparati for thinking clearly and carefully about an idea that itself has a variety of presentations as provided by adults. It is out of a sense of responsibility to these innocents being convinced of the existence of such an ontologically precarious notion of a horrific, literal Hell that several prominent public figures and intellectuals have argued that encouraging and teaching children to believe in a permanent and fixed location where souls are damned and perpetually tortured physically and mentally, is not only intellectually irresponsible but immoral and perhaps should be made illegal.

In this chapter, we propose to take a closer look at this issue in a way that is both analytical and exploratory of implications. Definitions in legal or standard use of the type of abuse under consideration will be sketched and fleshed out, so that the psychologically destructive and intellectually stunting nature of the abuse of children becomes the focal points of consideration. This will also help us gain a clearer understanding of what is involved legally and morally in applying the term accurately to cases. Next, following a line of argumentation haphazardly proposed by several well-known public intellectuals, we extract a general argument along these lines, followed by more detailed epistemological, moral and legal arguments. While the onus is clearly on those who commit to the claim that teaching ontological commitment to Hell to children is a species of psychological abuse, we show that the claim not only stands up to scrutiny, but is strong enough to call into question not only the traditional conceptual distinction between private and public life that is one of the hallmarks of liberal theory, but also the very configuration of the socio-political structures that rely on the resulting beliefs.

1 Revealing revelation

While contemporary theistic accounts of the incompatibility of God's love with a "gnashing of teeth" perpetual Hell are popular and ubiquitous, the fact remains that foundational biblical texts absorbed and believed to be literal by many millions of American Christians today establish the horrific dimensions of Hell as an actual place of eternal holocaust and torment.[2] Isaiah (66:22–24) vaticinates how the faithful will gaze upon the cadavers languishing in the conflagration of God's

wrath: "And they will go out and look upon the dead bodies of those who rebelled against me; their worm will not die, nor will their fire be quenched, and they will be loathsome to all mankind." According to the Book of Revelation, Hell is a place of "fire and brimstone" (14:10) featuring a "lake of fire" (20:14) where those who have rejected Christ (20:11–15), including those who have never even heard of him, will be sent for punishment such that "the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever and they have no rest day and night" (14:11). As the scholar D.L. Miller writes, "None other than Augustine and Thomas Aquinas confirm this fancy as theological fact…. [T]his view is basic to the Christian tradition throughout its history" (1989, p. 67). This is supported by the Catechism itself: "The teaching of the Church affirms the existence of hell and its eternity. Immediately after death the souls of those who die in a state of mortal sin descend into hell, where they suffer the punishments of hell, 'eternal fire'."[3]

For many believers, then, Hell is a place of profound horrors and torment into which willful sinners and non-believers alike are thrown by God for all eternity to suffer. It is a description that might be comical, or at least seen as evidence of literary creative genius, if not for the sincerity with which those committed to its ontology perpetrate belief in it.[4] And it is at exactly this type of literalist interpretationist position that we aim. We are neither reducing all religions or spiritual convictions to a caricature, as some authors do, nor straw-manning the situation. There is profound wisdom in some religious traditions. The problem is when certain kinds of theological approach to Hell – namely the literalist interpretation of Hell – are taken as fact and taught to children.[5]

2 Psychological abuse: defining terms

Whether the teaching of the literalist, horrific interpretation of Hell constitutes a type of psychological and emotional abuse is a matter deserving of more careful consideration.

To be sure, there are various types and consequent definitions of psychological abuse. The term "mental cruelty" has been used in divorce case law to refer to conduct of one spouse toward the other spouse resulting in physical and mental damage such that continuance of the marriage is not feasible. Notice, however, that in this definition the agents in question are adults, capable of identifying the point where the relationship is no longer endurable, and therefore of electing to separate. Unfortunately, children are always at the mercy of parents and other

authority figures, with little or no possibility of asserting their rights, let alone acting on what little autonomy they have come to know.

Perhaps a more applicable definition of a relevant term might be located in "emotional abuse." Instances of emotional abuse include isolation, intimidation, humiliation, or any other type of treatment which diminishes an agent's dignity or sense of self-worth, as evidenced by anxiety, depression, and dissociation. Under this definition, intentionally frightening a child, deliberately withholding information (such as information relevant to conflicting views of Hell) and influencing a child to falsely believe that he or she would not only fail to be an object of continued love from God but would not even have his or her minimal needs taken care of (as would occur if thrown into perdition) – each of these would constitute, not only a form of abuse, but arguably reportable forms of abuse.[6]

For the purposes of this paper, then, by "abuse" we mean activity that is physically or psychologically injurious to another. While the term may seem culturally relative, a psychological understanding of abuse depends, not on what individuals or cultures subjectively deem appropriate behavior, but on what stunts, traumatizes, or damages the mind and emotions.[7] A further dimension of the term "abuse" pertains to whether this damage has been inflicted for purposes that gratify the emotional needs of the perpetrator, which we will address later.

3 Merely harmless epistemological error, or psychological scarring?

We move now from abstract considerations of definitions to a more concrete, parallel example that will serve to flesh out the definitional concepts and example the psychological problems that can stem from the type of abuse under consideration.

If a child is admonished that abusing himself is a perverse and filthy sin against God; that such acts justify the contempt of his parents, friends, and all the angels in Heaven; and that he will ultimately be taunted and pricked by devils with pitchforks for all eternity in the fires of Hell, then the child is not only being misled by questionable metaphysical notions, but is potentially being traumatized by a host of other psychologically-masticating conflicts. Research has shown how much inculcation of dogmatic parental invective, and the infliction of shame, terror, and the threat of punishment, can be encoded at a neurological level and lead to modes of attachment disorder and affect dysregulation.[8] A child exposed to such horrific and threatening religious

pronouncements may be so thoroughly inculcated with the idea of God, angels, saints, or parents watching over him that he develops an intense and long-lasting dread of being watched and judged. He may come to deem his own body as dirty and evil, worthy of contempt and punishment; that any sensual (or other) pleasure is despicable and sinful – both in himself and others. He may, in effect, come to fear his own body.

He also may come to despise those who don't feel such alienation but enjoy their body's pleasures, developing not only a punitive or self-condemning and puritanical morality for himself, but becoming livid when others lack his self-contempt and guilt, feeling a compulsive need to enforce such beliefs and misery on others. For while the parents have inculcated the idea that the child is a perverse sinner for despoiling himself, he can seek redemption by adopting their morality and becoming their moral evangelist. Inwardly he may still be viciously wounded by that condemnation, but his survival may depend on aligning himself with their morality and being its representative instead of its victim. He can now inflict it punitively and sanctimoniously on others, and derive self-esteem not only from being morally pure but by being a righteous enforcer of these unreflectively held values. Hence, zealotry rescues the self from abjection and self-loathing, and what begins as a private matter amongst members of a family or between clergy and a family quickly becomes a matter of social and political concern, as the wounded child grows into an adult who inflicts his psychological pain on others.

Such reflexive moral righteousness isn't merely epistemological error. It's the very gestation of *delusion* – fantasy become dogma – forged, projected, and defended in the crucible of fear, threat, and punishment. And it's thereby a dangerous delusion at that, for the child and others. This is why Freud (1940) said some errors are hallucinations. Inner torment is mapped onto the world in hallucinatory fashion. The child need not see actual devils or succubae. He comes to see the temptations and deeds as ontologically evil in themselves: real and apodictically sufficiently true to be enforced, either by self-loathing or by dogma, doctrine, or death.

It may seem entirely rational to believe the putative religious facts presented by parents, teachers, and others within one's cultural environment. This environment is what Paden (1988) calls a "religious world," and it would be more unusual not to believe the established sense of what is culturally real, obvious, and established. It often happens, however, that people within a cultural milieu also actively and vehemently reject ideas that threaten their worldview, even ideas that are

recognized as irrefutable scientific "facts." Thus, some beliefs are not mere blithe errors accepted reasonably because everyone else does, but are fervent denials and rejections of ideas that threaten the values and beliefs sacred to that group. The tenets of that faith may well repudiate established scientific ideas, and are "counterfactual" disavowals of ideas deemed offensive, heretical, or misaligned with the notions coveted by that community.[9]

This kind of teaching can become indoctrination, which cripples the mind's capacity to perceive certain aspects of the world without lapsing into aggressive denial, disavowal, and a concerted mutilation of perception so that the experiential world accords with the theological fantasy world. Hence La Barre (1980) calls every fundamentalism an "intellectual lobotomy." And, surely, a dogmatic insistence on the ontology of Hell, as a searing abode where sinners suffer in excruciating agony, may indeed hinder the capacity for rational thought; which can be so influential that the psyche either turns against itself in fear, self-contempt and pathological neurosis, or survives only through a mode of ingenuity that frantically masks the real sources of pain and conflict, invents all manner of disguise, rationalization, excuse, and theodicy to ward off the perceptions of actual evil while one yearns for parental love, and projects one's own glut of inner offal upon the world.

What is at stake, then, is nothing less than the child's sense of self-worth, which is at least partly dependent on his ability to think objectively and rationally about such heady topics; as opposed to being gripped by the emotions of fear and terror, which run roughshod over reason. Likewise, such indoctrination of the most vulnerable amongst us becomes a matter of public concern by virtue of the effects such ideas, unreflectively held by children, can have on their attitudes and behaviors towards others in later life.

Again, we are not arguing that all religiousness has this result or that teaching any conception of Hell has this effect. We have attempted implicitly to show what we will now make explicit: the primary issue relates to the continuous external pressure that comes to bear on the internal states of children and adolescents from participating as unreflective vessels in either family or public religiousness, which involves indoctrinating children with this view of Hell as a real, horrific place of punishment and torment. An authority figure who, in a top-down hierarchical fashion, foists this idea upon a child is doing something that cannot be justified; this kind of activity should be restricted because it is reasonable to interpret it as a kind of abuse. That a child or adolescent might have a set of religious beliefs, *privately* arrived at and held,

relating to the God of his or her understanding, prayer, or even other more serious theological matters is not at issue.

We think these distinctions between and amongst private and family or public religiousness are relevant for two reasons. First of all, we acknowledge that the term "religiousness" is vague and can be used in many ways, so we want to carve up the semantic landscape more rigorously to sidestep problems associated with ambiguity. Secondly, the distinctions are important to note, because even though results from research on the relationship between religiousness and wellbeing of children and adolescents are mixed, the results of at least one recent study show there is indeed a helpful and quite meaningful distinction to be made between externally driven or public religious participation and internally accepted or private religious belief amongst youth. For instance, whereas private religious conviction in at-risk children is helpful in protecting them from emotional and behavioral problems, such children, when exposed to the pressures of more intense *family* religiousness, tend to suffer exacerbated emotional problems (Ahmed et al., 2011). It does not seem unreasonable to think that these results, applicable to at-risk children, can also be extrapolated to apply to children in general. An abundance of research has shown how destructive authoritarian parenting can be, when children are coerced to conform and internalize parental values under severe threat. Nor does it seem unreasonable to think that the primary source for exposure to and belief in a horrific Hell would be from an external source: i.e., parents with varieties of psychological and behavioral disturbances and maladjustments, as detailed previously.

Additionally, the neurological and affect dysregulation research cited earlier strengthens the argument that the very kinds of fear and terror expressed by children and adults raised to believe in the palpable threat of Hell as a real, horrific place qualify as symptoms and manifestations of abuse, properly understood.[10]

To be sure, we acknowledge that not every child so castigated and indoctrinated mutates into a puritanical zealot or a quivering mass of indecision and fear. There is a spectrum of abusive inculcation, from children mildly conflicted and alienated from their thoughts, desires, and nascent sexuality, to those who become abusers as they recycle the trauma and pain. But there is no doubt that the internalization of shame, guilt, and rage characterized here has had profound political, social and cultural consequences for the way the attitudes and behaviors of children (and adults!) are regulated, condemned, and punished.

4 Arguments and counterarguments considered

Several contemporary intellectuals have made different cases against religions and religious belief, including Sam Harris, Richard Dawkins, Dan Dennett, and Christopher Hitchens. Perhaps less well-known is Dawkins's assertion that teaching children to believe in a fire and brimstone Hell is impermissible. In *The God Delusion* Dawkins explicitly commits to the claim that teaching children that Hell is a real place of perpetual torment is not only immoral but should be considered a form of psychological abuse as described above (2006, chapter 9). Scattershot though his arguments are, we believe the general argument as formulated below is worth considering:

Argument A:

(P1) All forms of psychological abuse of children are immoral and should be made illegal.

(P2) Teaching children that Hell is a real, horrific place where people are punished physically and mentally for eternity is a form of psychological abuse.

(C1) Teaching children that Hell is a real, horrific place where people are punished physically and mentally for eternity is immoral and should be made illegal.

However, we think there are two important elements of this general argument – and of arguments of other thinkers including the already cited Russell and Mill – that need to be made explicit, because it is these elements that are implicit in all arguments that run along these lines, and which ultimately point to the type and severity of harm that such teaching perpetrates on the innocent. The first element has to do with its coercive nature. The second has to do with the fact that such teaching, when targeted on children, hinders intellectual growth, and consequently their ability to objectively determine what sorts of beliefs are justified and therefore worthy of their consideration and attention, and what sorts of beliefs are not; i.e., it constitutes a kind of corrosive indoctrination. And there is empirical evidence for the latter claim (Corriveau et al., 2014). The argument, then, in its fullest form looks something like the following.

Argument B:

(P1) Teaching children to believe that Hell is a real, horrific place relies on a reduction of critical thinking and a commitment to an ontology that is epistemologically unjustified.

(P2) Reliance on a reduction of critical thinking and a commitment to an ontology that is epistemologically unjustified is indoctrination.

(C1) Teaching children to believe that Hell is a real, horrific place is a form of indoctrination.

(P3) It is immoral for any agent or agents in positions of power to indoctrinate the less powerful among us.

(P4) A parent or parents constitute(s) an agent or agents in positions of power over their children who in turn constitute a special group of the less powerful among us.

(C2) It is immoral for parents to indoctrinate their children.

(C3) Given C1 and C2, it is immoral for parents to teach their children to believe in Hell as a real, horrific place.

(P5) Immoral acts that are forms of abuse should be legally restricted and punished.

(P6) Teaching children to believe in Hell as a real, horrific place is an immoral act that is a form of abuse.

(C4) Teaching children to believe in Hell as a real, horrific place should be legally restricted and punished.

We think the connections amongst the general definitions of psychological abuse, evidence from psychology and psychoanalysis of what and how this kind of abuse can be and is constituted, and the specific more detailed Argument B for considering indoctrination of the belief in a horrific Hell in children, are not as controversial as they might have seemed *prima facie*. However, we recognize there might be objections to some of these elements of our argument or other kinds of objections. In the section that follows, we will consider some possible objections to a few of the more controversial premises in Argument B, along with a few of the practical arguments that might be offered.

4.1 Objections to premise 1

Premise 1 proposes that teaching children to believe that Hell is a real, horrific place relies on a reduction of critical thinking and a commitment to an ontology that is epistemologically unjustified.

If a being from another planet were to visit earth and learn of the variety of religions and beliefs about spirituality and the afterlife or lack thereof, no doubt such a being would be impressed. Humans have developed an amazing repertoire of convictions about spiritual things. But the belief in a horrific Hell of everlasting torment, pain, and torture, created by a father-figure God, would be interpreted as clever and creative,

but would not be taken ontologically seriously. Aside from accepting pure dogma, what reason can anyone have for actually believing such a place exists? Why that particular version of a possible afterlife consequence and not the Hindu version? By what criteria would one be able to commit reasonably to belief in any of the metaphysically problematic conceptions of the afterworld and our places in it?

This gets to one of the crucial issues looming in this analysis. Premise 1 is intimately bound with the notion of what is rational and irrational to believe. Unfortunately, in discussions on rational versus irrational belief, there is often a conflation of issues that we think bears on our current topic.

The terms "rational" and "irrational" are often deployed without making clear that there are both internal and external application parameters that attach to their use. It may be rational from the internal vantage for a paranoid schizophrenic to wear an aluminum foil helmet if she believes that doing so will stop the CIA from reading her mind, but from the external vantage her belief that the CIA is interested in reading her mind, and has the capability to do so through the cable wiring that comes into her home, is irrational. There is no good evidence for believing the CIA has an interest in reading her mind; there is no good evidence for believing the cable wiring that comes into her home is capable of performing the function she thinks it is performing in the CIA's surveillance process.

Likewise with belief in Hell as a real, horrific place: from our point of view we can understand why people hold this belief; because we understand, for example, that people are often raised in environments where belief in Hell as a real, horrific place is expected and taught. However, from an external vantage, the belief that there is such a place as Hell, and that it is a horrific place of eternal torment and pain deliberately created by God as punishment, is irrational. There is no good evidence for thinking that there is such a place as Hell involving eternal torment and pain deliberately created by God as punishment. It is simply an unjustified belief, and it is epistemically irresponsible to pretend otherwise. It is most certainly unjustified to force a child to believe in such a place as a horrific and tormenting Hell to which they might be sent, given the fact that it is not possible to epistemically justify belief in this conception of Hell in the first place.[11]

We acknowledge that this imputes irrationality to many millions of people. It wouldn't be the first time millions of people were mistaken about their epistemological commitments.

4.2 Objections to premise 6

Premise 6 proposes that teaching children to believe in Hell as a real, horrific place is an immoral act that is a form of abuse. In previous sections we attempted to do most of the work of convincing the reader to accept that teaching children to believe in Hell as a real, horrific place to which they might be sent by God is a form of abuse. We acknowledge the difficulty in accepting this premise, but we think part of the difficulty lies in three facts, all of which are interconnected. The first is that it implies that many priests and ministers, and millions of parents in the United States and around the world, are acting immorally by virtue of what they teach their children to believe about Hell. Second, the premise draws attention to a generally accepted feature of contemporary child-rearing: that raising children to believe in Hell is either beneficial or an outright obligation. Third, the effects of this kind of abuse are not immediately evident in the way that, for instance, physical abuse is immediately evident.

In a parallel to an element of the previous section's discussion, some might observe that the fact that the premise implies many priests and ministers and millions of parents in the United States and around the world are immoral actually indicates its absurdity. Again, it might be an unsavory consequence of accepting premise 6, but unsavory and unwarranted are not the same thing. We think that, given the lack of any substantive evidence for believing Hell is a real, horrific place, ontological commitment to the same is simply not justified. Furthermore, globalization has removed any excuse from ignorance that apologists might make on behalf of well-intentioned parents. Parents in advanced nations have a moral responsibility to protect their children, both physically and mentally. This responsibility includes the obligation to teach children to think critically, and to rely on adequate evidence for holding any belief or set of beliefs, including those pertaining to Hell – not doing so is an epistemological and moral failure.

However, it is a moral failure the consequences of which are so far removed from the initial "lessons" that it is difficult to see any connection between what was taught in childhood and the kinds of pathologies that may develop in later life, or problems that may become evident. Yet, there is a body of research cited herein that speaks to this very issue (Miller, 1991; LeDoux, 1992; Schore, 2003; Atran, 2002; Ahmed et al., 2011; Corriveau et al., 2014). Premise 6, then, is not based on mere speculation: Argument B has empirical support relating to possible long-term effects.

4.3 Practical counterargument the first

Some will argue that there are overwhelming practical problems involved in enforcing or even establishing judicial precedent for such a restriction against psychologically abusing minors by teaching them the doctrine of Hell.

That there might be practical problems for implementation and enforcement is not a refutation of the argument itself. Difficulty in creating implementation and enforcement measures is no reason to think the argument is invalid or unsound. Perhaps the task might be daunting, but no matter how difficult enforcement may be, practically speaking, we think in principle the legal restriction is desirable. However, we do not accept the argument that the practical problems will be overwhelming, and certainly won't be insurmountable. Similar practical implementation difficulty arguments against establishing policy and legal restrictions to deal with physical and psychological abuse of spouses and children were put forward throughout the 20th century; yet these policy and legal restrictions have in fact been created; and enforcement measures, even though imperfect, have been used to affect positively the lives of thousands of people.[12]

Indeed, the real difficulty is probably not in implementation and enforcement after the fact, but in establishing judicial precedent for inclusion of teaching minors about Hell in an unacceptable way as a form of psychological abuse. Conservative judges will be loathe to do so: certainly, the current Supreme Court will be unwilling to establish any sort of precedent along these lines. More liberal or center-left judges in smaller towns and communities outside larger urban areas or in larger cities, might be willing to hear such arguments and begin establishing precedent.

To be clear, we are not advocating that any forms of teaching children and adolescents regarding Hell be legally restricted. We are not targeting religion survey courses, in which religious doctrines are discussed and analyzed, because these courses are examples of the kind of approach to such matters that promote the use of critical thinking, crucial not only to the self-confidence of those who practice it, but also to the health of the social body itself in any well functioning, well educated republic. Rather, we are specifically targeting the "teaching" to minors regarding a Hell of perpetual pain and terror that is meant to enforce a very specific doctrinaire position, such as might be perpetrated in any of a number of Bible camps found throughout the United States, or indeed in homes (the problems with enforcement associated with the latter are addressed separately as the fourth counterargument below).[13]

4.4 Practical counterargument the second

Some might argue that even if we concede there is a sort of harm involved in indoctrinating minors regarding a Hell of perpetual pain and terror, the numbers of children negatively affected don't meet the threshold for warranting interference by the state. Indeed, the argument might go: so few people are actually traumatized by this kind of teaching that it is not worth committing state resources to enforcing anti-abuse laws in response; resources used for enforcement responding to this kind of abuse would be better allocated to education or treatment institutions, not law enforcement.

We grant that there are people who, when exposed to indoctrination of this kind, do not grow up to become fearful and indecisive, or monstrous evangelizers. This doesn't address, however, the rights of those people whose life trajectories are in fact altered by such teachings. There are, clearly, some people whose lives are deeply affected by indoctrination into a belief system wherein sins are punished forever and ever in the most brutal ways imaginable. If masses are harmed, or if only a handful is harmed, the point is the same: unjustified harm must be stopped or minimized when it is possible to do so. And it is certainly possible to do so in relation to this particular cultural phenomenon, which is oddly given a complete pass when it comes to considerations of abuse and responsibilities to the most vulnerable.

To make our point more directly, we offer a parallel situation involving the medical care rights of children. A majority of states have determined that the religious conviction of parents against medical intervention when their child is ill does not trump the child's right to adequate and appropriate medical care. In fact, states prosecute such cases under manslaughter laws. There have been 400 instances of such child deaths reported since 1975. The fact that only a few hundred children have died under such circumstances doesn't obviate the evil of their suffering and ultimate death, and certainly does not obviate our collective responsibility to do something to assist those children who find themselves in similar circumstances.

Likewise, psychological abuse is not tolerated in other instances "a little bit at a time," and even if some children are not traumatized by being indoctrinated into believing they could end up in a horrific Hell, many others will be, and their lives permanently, negatively effected. States have a responsibility to look out for the interests of these children by prosecuting those who would endanger their mental health and future accordingly.

4.5 Practical counterargument the third

Finally, there will be those who argue that precluding parents from teaching their children the doctrine of eternal punishment in Hell will impinge on the freedom of those parents to raise their children as they see fit, eroding their authority over their children. This argument moves from one of unwanted but foreseeable consequences regarding state interference, to a freedom of religion, and thus free speech argument regarding the sanctity of the private vs. public distinction.

Regarding the foreseeable yet unwanted consequence of the state interfering with parents' rights to raise their children as they see fit: as we've already pointed out, the state already does so, justifiably, whenever the balance of harm to a child outweighs parental rights.

Regarding the undesirable interference of the state in freedom of religion, and thus free speech, we would point out that the state already interferes in all manner of religious issues and practices. Courts have determined that certain religious practices involving the use of controlled substances are not permitted. Polygamy is illegal. Ironically, no clear harm regarding drug use or adults consenting to polygamous marriage can be identified; whereas a clear harm can be identified in the case we are have outlined here, not to mention religious practices involving hallucinogens and multiple marriage partners relate largely to mature consenting adults, whereas the indoctrination of children regarding Hell involves no such fully formed agents.

Furthermore, the free speech argument is extremely weak. The right to freedom of speech is not absolute in the United States, nor should it be. Free speech rights have repeatedly and not unreasonably been clarified, restricted, and circumscribed by courts, including the U.S. Supreme Court. There is no reason to think the courts couldn't do so in relation to the kind of harmful indoctrination we have described herein while still preserving the principled commitment to freedoms of religion and speech.

Finally, restricting parents and clergy from indoctrinating children regarding Hell would further erode the private vs. public distinction that has been one of the conceptual apparati of liberal democracies. Forms of government such as these frequently distinguish the sphere over which the state should have authority versus the sphere over which the state should have no or limited authority. Accordingly, we are tempted to simply deny that any additional corrosion of the private vs. public distinction will be involved in including Hell indoctrination of children under the legal category of psychological abuse. However, even if the practical result would be a further corrosion of the private vs public distinction, we deny it is an altogether unwanted consequence.

The contingent nature of socio-politico configuration of the private vs. public distinction means that the distinction may not involve a necessary set of concepts for the continued existence of liberal democracies. Although the conceptual distinction between public and private spheres may have served a useful purpose in circumscribing and limiting the authority of the state over citizens, associations, and private relationships in civil society, perhaps if has outlived its usefulness. Certainly, the documented abuses associated with the traditionally conceived, private family unit, and the legal restrictions against state interference afforded this contingent social and legal entity, may indicate that this is the case.[14] Several political philosophers have called into question the value of this conceptual schema, pointing out that the distinction's application, from ancient Greece to today, still largely results in the subordination of women and children to men within the private household, and the perpetuation of stultifying gender roles in society.[15] Likewise, the private vs. public distinction seems to be unhelpful when it comes to appreciating the potential of individuals who are already members of society and de facto its future: namely, children. To exclude the interests of children exposed to mind-addling nonsense which can lead to permanent psychological trauma and an inability to think clearly and critically about an aspect of the human condition as significant as the afterlife – and all for the benefit of affirming a conceptual distinction that itself is not without its unwanted consequences – is to violate their rights and to knowingly condemn them to harm with insufficient reason. That is not only irresponsible, but flatly, inarguably, immoral. It is to accept the "formation of a persecuting society" for chiefly eschatological purposes: metaphysical mumbo jumbo used to reinforce religious identity and in-group attitudes on the most impressionable and least powerful among us.[16] As a powerful collective reinforcement mechanism against individual deviance, then, teaching the doctrine of perpetual punishment in Hell actually contradicts the reputed primary value of autonomy of the individual, premised in the public vs. private distinction.

4.6 The argument from good intentions

Another argument, which has been embedded in several previous points but which we now want to address more explicitly, is that the good intentions of parents and priests, who only wish to ensure the safety of the souls of their children, outweigh the harms that can possibly come from such indoctrination. It is our position that, as with so many forms of abuse, the stated intention doesn't negate the damage to the child, or the moral and legal responsibility to mitigate such harms. Neither do

the rationalizations, putatively pure motives, or feeble moral defenses justify such traumatic indoctrination, nor negate the possibility that non-rational, and even subterranean but vicious motives may impel such indoctrination. Good intentions simply do not obviate the responsibility of parents to teach their children not what to think but how to think, especially in relation to as tenuous a subject as the reality and properties of Hell; furthermore, good intentions based on religious fervor don't trump epistemic responsibilism.

In *Banished Knowledge: Facing Childhood Injuries* (1991), Alice Miller relays the story of a group of parents ritualistically bringing their children to a forested area before a confederate Santa Klaus who mysteriously reveals detailed knowledge of their good and bad activities (mostly bad, it turns out). The parents may have had good intentions, but as Miller points out they seem to fail to see how absolutely cruel and even terrorizing the event is for their children: An omniscient bearded guy knows everything they do and threatens to withhold gifts from them if they continue to do bad things; and all of this takes place in a public setting before other children and parents from the community. And if *that* well-intentioned ritual isn't bad enough, Miller points out that, eventually, the children learn that mother and father were lying the whole time, which then forces the child to reconcile the accurate knowledge they now have of the lying, manipulative parent with their need for a continued loving relationship with the same. The psychological tension this creates in the child has long-lasting, traumatizing effects.[17]

Good intentions simply don't negate this kind of psychological damage.

5 Teaching Hell as a real, horrific place is not innocuous

There are social consequences of undermining individual autonomy and crippling analytical thought: A populace can be so roused by the notion of conspiring satanic enemies that it may be misled by manipulative propaganda about apostasy or evildoers. While indoctrinating children in the Hell-as-a-real-horrific-place idea is only one piece of the complex machinery of social attitudes and political action, it is still a piece of that complex machinery that depends on a suspension of rational inquiry and serves to thwart careful consideration of the motives of political leaders. Consequently, it is not without negative repercussions. The result of inculcating the literal belief in a horrific Hell, for so many people, is that they do not limit their belief to their private conduct: not

only are they harmed, but they harm in Hell's name. History is in part a record of the holocausts inflicted by such incendiary beliefs.

Notes

1. "There is one very serious defect to my mind in Christ's moral character, and that is that He believed in hell. I do not myself feel that any person who is really profoundly humane can believe in everlasting punishment."
2. See R. Bell (2011), J. Ferwerda (2011) and J. Ortberg (2010), among others, writing in the New Christianity or Universalism vein. Contrary strict biblical interpretationist views on this continuing debate can be read in R. Peterson (1995) and E.W. Fudge (2013). Of course, some take the Bible to be communicating at the level of symbolism, and some theologians have long understood the images in Revelation to be political or allegorical. Theologians have distinguished, for instance, between the *descensos ad inferos* and *descensos ad infernos* – the symbolic descent into the abyss of the self, and the literal descent into a physical, infernal Hell (see Miller, 1989, chapter 2). However, as D. L. Miller and others have demonstrated, both theologians and their parishioners have most certainly, historically taken the events, people, and places described in the Bible literally, whatever varied meanings might be found in the texts. According to the results of PEW research the percentage of Americans who believe the Bible should be taken literally is currently 31%. See http://www.pewforum.org/2012/10/09/nones-on-the-rise/, date accessed 15 January 2015.
3. http://www.catholic.com/tracts/the-hell-there-is; also http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015 /_P2O.HTM, date accessed 15 January 2015.
4. For the Medieval mind, fire is the appropriate punishment of heretics and others who fall outside Christian society, foretelling what awaits them in the afterlife (see M. Barbezat, 2014). Things seem not to have changed for the vast majority of believers. While there are those who read Revelation as allegory, the preponderance of believers take the idea of Hell literally and deem it heresy to suggest otherwise.
5. Readers should note that the age of accountability according to the Catholic Church is approximately 12. If by the age of 12 a child is to be held accountable for his beliefs, then it follows that relevant "teachings" have been taking place at a young age indeed. Of course, the Catechism doesn't necessarily embrace the concept of Hell under discussion here (see 632–635 at usccb.org, where Hell is simply the absence of being in the sight of God), but this is contrary to other statements in the Catechism, where Hell is as conceptualized in this discussion (see 1034–36).
6. In "The Battered-Child Syndrome," Kempe et al. (1962) not only identify criteria for diagnosing physical and psychological abuse of children, but famously establish the professional responsibility of physicians to follow up on suspicions of abuse.
7. See Sagan (1988, p. 27).
8. See, for example, Schore (2003) and LeDoux (1992).
9. See Atran (2002), and studies on Terror Management Theory, which demonstrate how worldview defense is related to the fear of death (http://www.tmt.missouri.edu/publications. Html, date accessed 15 January 2015).

10. We realize the claim hinges on whether Hell, as a real, horrific place of punishment deliberately created by God, is false. We hope to have shown that belief in this conception of Hell is simply unjustified. That a book asserts it as an ontological fact is insufficient evidence when one considers the variety of books that assert different conceptions of Hell, not to mention there are plenty of books that name entities that don't exist and to which no one will make an ontological commitment (e.g., the Flying Spaghetti Monster). That some people claim to have seen a horrific Hell in near-death circumstances is insufficient evidence when one considers the variety of near-death experiences in which persons do not claim to have seen a horrific Hell, and the fact that those who "experience" Hell in this fashion have invariably been raised to believe in a horrific Hell (has a Buddhist relaying a near-death experience ever claimed to have seen a horrific Hell?). Not to mention, there are plenty of neurological studies to provide empirical explanations for these "experiences"; thus, an application of Ockham's razor dismisses the religious interpretation of the phenomenon. And these exhaust the objective pieces of data for supporting the Hell as horrific place thesis.
11. When Abraham is commanded by God to murder his son, in "The Conflict of the Faculties" (1798) Kant famously said Abraham's reply ought to have been, "That I ought not to kill my good son is quite certain. But that you, this apparition, are God – of that I am not certain, and never can be, not even if this voice rings down to me from visible heaven." Even the pious Kant held that epistemic justification was required.
12. Most robustly at the federal level in 1974, as part of the Federal Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (42 U.S.C.A. §§ 5105–6).
13. Such as Child Evangelism Fellowship's Good News Clubs.
14. See C. MacKinnon (1989, pp. 171–83) and S. Okin (1989, pp. 134–69).
15. See S. Okin (1989, esp. ch. 5), C. Pateman (1988), J. Elshtain (1981). For a summary, contemporary account of problems associated with the public vs. private and public vs. domestic distinctions, see W. Kymlicka (2002, pp. 386–98).
16. For more on this concept, see M. Barbezat (2014).
17. See chapter 1, wherein Miller also argues such customary myths should be made criminal as forms of abuse.

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Part III
Hell and Others

9
Damnation as Marginalization

Nicolas Michaud

Hell sounds unpleasant. It is hard to imagine that many people hope for damnation for eternity. For that matter, very few people likely hope to be damned to Hell even for a little while, as "damnation" implies everlasting torment and punishment in Hell. The term "damned," however, does not just denote one's occupancy in Hell; it also brings with it numerous and significant connotations. To be "damned" can mean many things, ranging from condemnation by God, inheriting the mark of Cain, or rejection by a particular religious institution. For our purposes, however, I wish to focus on those damned to Hell themselves. There is a point when this adjective does not so much *describe* a particular group as it does *name* them – the "Damned." Somewhere in that liminal space between adjective and proper noun is the heart of the very concept of damnation. This core reveals the power of damnation not only as defining but also as marginalizing. Damnation, one realizes, is perhaps as one of earliest and most pervasive means by which to define, cast out, and commit justifiable harm to *the Other.*

In order to engage damnation in the context discussed here, we must first consider "otherness" and what being the "Other" means. One might, prima facia, assume that otherness in the context of damnation simply means, "They who are considered damned and thus separate from the Saved." Thus, I recognize that the "Other" and the "Damned" are, perhaps, obviously tautological; I also recognize that we must unpack these notions in order to understand what we mean when we use them. To say that someone who is damned is going to Hell is a given, but that very condemnation suggests far more than one may at first realize. To say that one is damned is not just to say that one is not favored

by God; it also suggests that there is both an inside and an outside, and the damned are those pushed to the outside – they are, in a sense, "marginalized."

Thus, there is a three-step investigation in this chapter. Firstly, the consideration of marginalization as integral to damnation is addressed. This issue is a practical one. If there are consequences of marginalization that can be "seen," then it is here that we will note similarities between the treatment of those deemed damned and those considered marginalized, at least conceptually. Secondly, the understanding of marginalization makes it possible to understand the damned as the "Other" if they are a marginalized group. Finally, the consequence of such realizations is the conclusion that those who recognize the damned are doing so in a way that enables harm while at the same time absolving themselves of that harm, by default, without need of an absolving act such as sacrifice, prayer, or confession.

1 Marginalization

Although it is outside the scope of this chapter to engage a full-bore, in-depth analysis of marginalization, we should consider how the term is best defined. Marginalization seems to exist as a cultural construct made through language, values, and norms. To be marginalized hinges on the way a culture treats some agents as central and as the "norm" or "default" and those who are pushed to the fringes because they are by virtue of birth, social status, economy, or some other factor "not the norm." Marginalization is perhaps most clearly understood as economic. The treatment of women in the United States, for example, as they are often paid far less for the same work as men, pushes women to the outside. There may be many reasons given for this economic mistreatment, but the result, regardless of apologetics, is that women are treated as if, by default, they are inferior.

By "the marginalized," we often mean people who are mistreated by society, so it may seem somewhat counter-intuitive to consider the Damned as marginalized. The connotations of "damnation" take on a quality of "deserved punishment." Thus, if the Damned are in some way marginalized, we may be inclined to believing *they deserve to be placed on the outside*. To consider them "marginalized" would be to also imply that they *shouldn't be marginalized*, and so one might balk at labeling the Damned this way, as it may seem to victimize them. Simply, it is rare to recognize a group as marginalized while also asserting that such marginalization is a good thing.

Consider, though, the marginalized: They are the outsiders, the ignored, and disenfranchised. Our colloquial understanding of marginalization assumes that the marginalized have been "taken advantage of." They are used and misused to benefit those in the center; thus they are the disempowered. Bruce Horner (2002, p. 572), describes marginalization in the following way: "Marginalization is understood as 'silencing,' and the provisionality of knowledge is linked to particular discursive conventions." Then marginalization is not just the act of denying pay, ignoring the needs of a particular group, or taking advantage of them; it is a large-scale social trend that results from a particular social construct. By that I mean to suggest that there are those social constructs – race, social status, gender and so on – that, because of the nature of the construct, generate an "inside" and an "outside" group. The voice of that outside group is paid little attention or is ignored altogether. Given Horner's definition, there are direct connections between one's ability to participate in the social conversation, knowledge, and power. Horner's definition suggests that marginalization is a kind of *exclusion* from the social dialogue. Damnation, if it excludes one from the social dialogue, then, would act as a form of marginalization *by definition*.

It is important to note, however, that those in favor of the labels "saved" and "damned" would likely balk at the suggestion that the damned are marginalized. Aside from tautological assumption that Damnation implies "deserves punishment," there is also the concern that it is not "us" or society that is doing the damning. Quite the contrary, the theist might respond; it is the divine who does the damning. At best, humans can only develop awareness of whom God has deemed damned and whom God has deemed saved. One wonders, then, if the theist can be included in this conversation – a conversation that largely revolves around the consequences of particular kinds of social constructs. Must the theist be relegated to a position of shoulder shrugging and dismissal?

The theist's concerns raised above remain consistent with the conversation if she considers that regardless of if "damnation" itself is a position appointed by the divine, human beings lack epistemic access to who is, in fact, damned and who is not. While it may be that divine revelation is a potential bridge over this epistemic gap, it remains prudent for the theist to recognize that even those who believe they are saved would disagree regarding the "damned" and "saved" status of others. Thus, while the atheist and the theist may disagree regarding the actual ontological status of damnation, they can agree on human limitation regarding knowledge of that status.

If the theist still balks, and asserts that she has access to epistemic certainty regarding the salvation status of others, the conversation cannot continue, as such dogmatism is death to dialogue. As long, however, as both the atheist and the theist remain open to the possibility that they do not know, the question of whether or not society is mistaken when it labels others as damned remains real and concerning. We might then, for the sake of clarity, regard "Damnation" with a capital "D" as that ontological fact in the world about one's damnation whether determined by God or some other truth-making force and "damnation" with a "d" as being that damnation as understood and ascribed by human beings.

It is not unreasonable for the theist to recognize that, without direct access to the judgments made by God, human beings regularly determine for themselves who they believed to be "damned" and as such, develop a social construct of damnation for themselves independent of whatever God's opinion on the matter might be. Thus, for the duration of the paper I will refrain from engaging in an attempt to access the mind of any deity, if in fact there are any. Instead, I will use "Damned" to only indicate the proper name of a group – a group that has been defined as "damned" as part of a social construct, which may or may not be in alignment with God's opinion on the matter.

With all of these caveats in mind, then, we can return to the question of the Damned as marginalized. To marginalize, as argued by Horner, indicates a kind of silencing. This silencing might be economic, social, political, educational, cultural, or even literal. It is this understanding of marginalization as a kind of silencing that I find most motivating. Although there are other ways of understanding marginalization, such as social exclusion as discussed by Hillary Silver and as oppression as discussed by Iris M. Young, quick examination of such definitions results in consistent and coherent definitions – as exclusion is a kind of oppression, and so forth. Both marginalization as "social exclusion" and marginalization as "oppression," though, seem to fall under the category of "silencing" if we take silencing to be a figurative term used to indicate actions that ignore the needs, wants, and requests of others. The marginalized, whether through exclusion or oppression, are ignored. The image of Rubens' *The Fall of the Damned* comes to mind. The images of the twisting bodies cast into Hell seek to yell out but cannot be heard – they scream voicelessly.

If we hinge the understanding of marginalization on "voice" in part because it provides a broad umbrella under which to harbor many forms of exclusion, oppression, and exploitation, then we should consider the

work of Carol Gilligan and her text *In a Different Voice*. Gilligan described voice in the metaphorical and literal way understood above. She states,

> By voice I mean voice. Listen, I will say, thinking that in one sense the answer is simple. And then I will remember how it felt to speak when there was no resonance, how it was when I began writing, how it still is for many people, how it still is for me sometimes. To have a voice is to be human. To have something to say is to be a person. But speaking depends on listening and being heard; it is an intensely relational act. (1993, p. xvi)

And again the connection to voice brings to mind not only the literal exclusion from social dialogue that may be experienced by those deemed "damned," but also the image of those crying out for release from the flames of perdition to no avail.

Consider the purely literal sense, however; can it be said that the Damned are marginalized? I suggest, "Yes," if we take marginalized to mean the denial of voice. This concept that the voice is denied to Others provides a far richer understanding of marginalization than if one only considers its consequences. Yes, the marginalized are often denied full participation in society, harmed physically, and ignored – those, however, are consequences. The heart of marginalization is the denial of personhood through the denial of voice. Consider a clarification by Gilligan:

> [B]y voice I mean something like what people mean when they speak of the core of the self. Voice is natural and also cultural. It is composed of breath and sound, words, rhythm, and language. And voice is a powerful psychological instrument and channel, connecting inner and outer worlds. Speaking and listening are a form of psychic breathing. This ongoing relational exchange among people is mediated through language and culture, diversity and plurality. For these reasons, voice is a new key for understanding the psychological, social, and cultural order – a litmus test of relationships and a measure of psychological health (1993, p. xvi).

Simply, denial of voice is the excising of the Other from the social relationship. In this way, Gilligan's own concept of person as one who is heard comes into synonymy with personhood as described by Mary Anne Warren as meaning a "member of the moral community" (Warren, 1973). Thus, one quickly realizes that damnation, as an affliction that

also indicates one's supposed immorality, may very quickly relieve one of one's personhood not only insofar as the damned person is denied voice, but insofar as she is deemed too immoral to be a genuine participant in the moral community.

What one comes to realize is that damnation is a particularly forceful kind of marginalization. Marginalization may mean – as Horner suggests – the denial of voice, which, as Gilligan argues, is the excising of one from the relational exchange "among people." It also, means, however, that one is not just excised or ignored because of some socially-constructed "disability" such as race, gender, or IQ, but that the excision from the relational exchange is due to the immoral status of the damned person. Thus, the Damned are completely bereft of personhood, in both voice and worth. Moreover, they are *deserving* of that condemnation, and, so, any concern for mistreatment of the damned is particularly unwarranted because they are not persons and *deserve* to be not persons. It may well be the case that non-human animals fare better than the Damned – at least insofar as the denial of personhood is based on those things we believe to be beyond their control and thusly eliciting some sympathy. The Damned, however, receive no such solace.

I suggest this lack of sympathy for the Damned may explain, as a brief caveat, our particular distaste for atheists in the United States. A 2012 study by Will Gervais at the University of British Columbia concluded that not only do the religiously oriented tend to trust atheists less, but so do those who have no religious affiliation. Moreover, some of these studies even suggest that atheists are among the least desirable persons to have in a son or daughter-in-law, and that atheists have slimmer job prospects. Simply, such distrust may be in part due to the undercurrent of belief that those who do not believe in God are Damned – thus they are morally unreliable. If damnation, as we construct it, means that Others are both voiceless and worthy of voicelessness, then it is easy to see why they are undesirable as potential mates for our children and as employees – they are morally tainted.

In fact, I cannot help but wonder if invoking the atheist is somewhat detrimental to my case. If part of the purpose of this work is to elicit some level of sympathy for the Damned as marginalized, then surely I risk any possibility of sympathy by associating them with atheists. I mean, simply, that while one may feel that the Damned are tainted, and thus worthy of damnation, one might also believe that some damned souls are such because of unfortunate circumstances, crimes of passion, or tragically flawed character. Atheists, however, are unlikely to receive any such consideration, as one might believe that they are those who

have chosen to reject God, and, thusly, are more worthy of Damnation than anyone else. They could not be considered the unfortunate marginalized, denied personhood as the result of some uncontrollable "ailment" – rather, they are those who have chosen to be on the outside, rejecting membership of the moral community, which they could have but do not want.

Note also that Gilligan and Warren's idea of "person" is not a biological category, but, rather, a socially-constructed one. This makes the concept of damnation as a social construct perhaps even a more clearly understood as a construct than race, gender, and disability which all supposedly have biological grounding. Damnation, however, is generally not discriminated by biology. Thus, the concept of personhood is similar to the concept of damnation as personhood is also social and not biological. Human corpses, for example, are human but not persons. Moreover, it has not been uncommon to define some humans as "not persons" or not as full persons. For example, persons cannot be property, if to be a person means to be a genuine member of the moral community as an agent who can both recognize and be recognized by others in the community. Note that, again similar to each other, both personhood and damnation have been ascribed to biology when it suits those in power as is found in the case of treating blacks as if they are black because of the Mark of Cain thus making them both less than persons and damned.

Consider the treatment of women as property through human history: such "ownership" indicates that women have not been treated as persons (or at least as full persons) – they were not entitled to full membership in the moral community. Personhood requires recognition by the community and requires that the community be willing to consider one's thoughts and needs – hence one must have the metaphorical voice. Without that voice, one – at least from the perspective of the community – is no different from any *thing* or piece of property. Thus, if the Damned are not true persons, then one need not concern oneself with their welfare and voicing.

Damnation denies voice. Consider the overwhelming number of examples in which human beings have been determined to be damned, unclean, unwanted, or sentenced by God in some way and thus have been either exiled or executed. Instances of the Inquisition, witch trials, and Crusades immediately come to mind.

Consider, however, a more recent example: Mormonism through the 1960s was criticized heavily for its treatment of blacks. Some have argued that the treatment of blacks by the Mormon Church was the result of the belief that blackness is the result of the "Mark of Cain" – in

essence that being "black" means to be marked and burnt by hellfire. To quote the King James Bible, "And the LORD said unto him, Therefore whosoever slayeth Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold. And the LORD set a mark upon Cain, lest any finding him should kill him" (Gen 4:15). This particular statement, of course is itself translated, and having been translated numerous times, has been interpreted in many ways. Of interest is the fact that the Mark of Cain was used, not only by Mormonism but also by protestant faiths, to justify the exclusion of blacks, both socially and spiritually.

"The Mark of Cain" has often been interpreted to mean that Cain was cursed, his damnation revealed for the world to see by the mark. Note then, even in this extremely early narrative about damnation, that damnation is also marked by exclusion. Cain is cast out to live a nomadic life, not so dissimilar from Adam and Eve's expulsion from Eden and Lucifer's expulsion from Heaven. To be damned seems to be not only conceptually indicative of exclusion, but its Judeo-Christian narrative history defines it as such.

To be excluded from society, to be denied the ability to participate, is to be marginalized. Thus, it is certainly not a stretch to suggest that damnation, as an exclusionary act, is a denial of voice, and thus a form of marginalization. Certainly, as mentioned above, there are numerous instances in which we can see the way the label or inference that a human is damned has led to their exile and execution. That label, that the Damned are somehow marked by God, justifies the act of exclusion. Thus, even if the damned entities are not forced to leave society completely, they are likely to be ostracized. The Saved avoid association with them for fear of suffering a similar curse. The fact that the damnation of the Other also often brings economic benefit and makes the Saved feel special would just be considered happy side-effects.

To mark someone else as "Damned" is to often mark oneself as "Saved." After all, such labeling is not a neutral act. One is unlikely to suggest that the other is damned without feeling saved. Rather, damnation suggests that one is either similarly damned – and thus recognizes the "mark" – or that one is Saved, and thereby holy enough to recognize the damnation of the other. In essence, *Saved* implies *person*, if *person* is taken to mean *member of the moral community*; *Damned* would then imply *nonperson*.

2 Damnation as othering

Whatever criteria are used, it becomes quickly evident that the notion of personhood is a notion that requires that some agents be "persons" and

some agents be "other than persons." This "Otherness" is what enables "persons" to own, subjugate, and oppress "non-persons." The summation of genocide, slavery, and oppression enacted by humanity revolves around the absolution granted by the determination that a particular entity is not a person: *it* is an Other, and, thereby, regardless of its protestations, it can be treated the way any *thing* in the world can be treated. Certainly, these acts of genocide as a result of othering are commensurable with the treatment of the Damned. Those agents considered to be unloved by God or marked by sin are often the subjects of violence.

Although the potential groups to which marginalization can be directed is infinite, the act of marginalization itself connects all of the marginalized in their "Otherness." The notion of the "Other" is one that has been developed and explored by numerous thinkers such as Simone de Beauvoir, Frederick Nietzsche, Jean-Paul Sartre, Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault and Susan Bordo. I suggest, largely inspired by Beauvoir and Derrida, that "Otherness" is a linguistic social construct that results from the binaries generated in language. Specifically, "Otherness" is generated when a society creates a "category," which itself is defined as being juxtaposed to its opposite. Derrida argued that this binary creation is a function of language itself: "Open" means to be "not closed." "Right" means to be "not left," and so on.

Derrida (2004) noted the strong tendency to treat one component of the binary as the norm and the other as the less favorable inferior. Notions such as "blackness," "femaleness," and "disability," for example, are all understood through their opposition in binaries: "black/white," "female/male," "disabled/abled" – as is "Damned/Saved." As such, there is a tendency to understand one component of these socially-constructed binaries as the norm and the other as the "Other" – best understood as the "Not." Tellingly, the label "disabled" is even defined as *not able*. The act of marginalization both generates and capitalizes off of the "Other" construct through the act of exclusion, favoring the inside group and ostracizing the "Othered" group. This is certainly the case of the binary "Damned/Saved."

It is important to note that this act of "Othering" is often a means by which of affirming that the "Othered" is lacking. The "norm" has something that the Other does not. Hélène Cixous (1997), in her work "The Laugh of the Medusa," explains how this binary device functions as a means by which to subjugate women. Women are understood in the English language as "not the default." This explains why it is common, for instance, for sports teams to add the qualifier "Lady" to their team names in order to indicate their Otherness, the non-normal status of

the female athletes. Similarly, it is not uncommon for people to say the "lady judge" "girl cop" or "female doctor" in order to indicate that the judge, cop, or doctor is not what one would assume as the default – male. Thusly, by virtue of being the non-default, the female is lacking. She is understood, as Cixous argues, as lacking a penis rather than having a vagina. Simply, she is *lacking* maleness rather than *having* femaleness, by virtue of being understood as the "Other" rather than as the default.

One sees that damnation summons a similar "not" qualifier, but the category is interestingly different from the otherness of women – the Saved are not necessarily the default. It is not hard to find those who believed the saved are few and far between. Thus, if the Damned are the majority, can they truly be said to be the Other? It is clear that marginalization and Othering are not just a numbers game. A smaller group can marginalize a larger group, though it may be difficult to maintain the act of oppression for fear of mass revolution. However, the treatment of the lower classes throughout history, as well as the treatment of non-human animals, both suggest that a very large group can be oppressed by a much smaller, empowered group.

In the context of damnation and otherness, Cixous' definitions still apply, regardless of the fact that the Saved may not be the default (at least here on Earth). While this statement seems to require that I abandon the conjunction of Damnation with Otherness as defined by Cixous, it does not for the following reason: "Saved," if not the default, still implies a heavy connotation of "should be." What I mean is that even for those who believe that there are very few Saved and even those who believe very few can be saved, "savedness" assumes that others should want and strive for being saved. Thus, the key concept of Cixous', that the Other is "lacking," is maintained in the notion "Saved." The Damned lack the Saved's acceptance, recognition, forgiveness, or the love of God and *should* be dismayed by this prospect.

Damnation takes on a very powerful and somewhat unique connotation then in the case of Othering as described by Cixous – the category of what I term the "normative default." The Saved may not be the default in number, but the definition of "Saved" suggests they are the normative default – they are the "should be's" that the Other should seek to mimic and become. While the Othering of women and other marginalized groups is heinous, the Othering of the Damned is made, perhaps, especially heinous because of the additional force of the normative content. This is not to say that "woman" does not also connote a normative default. As Cixous argues, it clearly suggests a lacking that could only be fixed by becoming "man." Damnation is especially lacking as defined

in opposition to the Saved because it is not just the penis that is lacking (which may well be something we are supposed to pity women for as there is little they can do about that fact), but they are lacking personhood as granted by the Divine itself – again we see *they deserve to be the Damned*. Thus, the Damned could have been (in many faiths), and *should* have been, saved; but, due to their own failures, rather than the failures of biology, they are not.

It is in this way that we can make a distinction between the Othering of those who are damned and those who are Othered for a reason beyond their control. Those Othered by constructs such as race, gender, and disability are often pitied and patronized. I do not suggest that this makes their experience of Othering better; if anything it may make othering based on biology even more dehumanizing as it suggests that they cannot be "fixed." What I am suggesting, however, is that the Othering of those who are seen as rejecting the normative default may justify additional violence and harm as the Damned are blamed for their own Othering.

Consider the contemporary treatment of homosexuals, as well as the treatment of the poor in countries such as the U.S. In both cases, we see that they are denied voice and personhood *and* are often in special danger for their lives. The homosexual community is in constant danger of physical harm, as are the homeless, perhaps due in part to the belief that they deserve that harm because of the belief that homosexuals have chosen to be gay and that the poor have chosen to be lazy – thus, metaphorically (and often some believe literally) they are damned. There is, of course, a good deal more to say here, as blacks, women, the disabled and many other groups that are deemed the biological Other are in constant danger of physical harm as well, but the somewhat hazy distinction drawn here is only that damnation also takes on the dubious distinction of *meriting* harm.

While it is unlikely that anyone will say that non-human animals *deserve* harm – though it is true that we do them tremendous harm – it is incredibly common to hear that an American infidel deserves harm or that a Muslim heretic deserves harm. I suggest, then, that the distinction between biological Othering and damnation is not in *amount* of harm and violence done, but instead whether that harm and violence is considered merely justifiable *or earned*. Moreover, I suggest that, in the cases where the treatment of the biologically-defined Other takes on the tenor of deserved harm (as is a current trend on women-hating websites in the U.S.), it also takes on the connotation of damnation. Reviewing the hate-blogs of these "man-proponent" websites reveals the belief

that women deserve to be harmed, not just because of their supposed biological inferiority to men, but because they inappropriately entice men and wrongfully reject men. Thus, women then take on the mantle of "sinner" and "wrong-doer" – they are damned.

Significantly, the "Othered" in language is often also used as a derogatory device. For example, it is not uncommon in the United States for the word "woman" to be used as an insult, and "damned" as a condemnation. A man might say to another man, or even to a woman, "Don't be such a woman." Similarly, one may be "damned to Hell" by one who wishes to see harm done. Note then the difference, again: to call one a "woman" is to suggest a kind of helpless biological inferiority on the part of the Other, while recognition of damnedness or condemnation to damnedness is a recognition of the wrongness of the Other and the rightful condemnation by the Saved. This is presumably understood, though not justified, by the understanding of the Other as lacking: to indicate that someone is a member of the othered group is to indicate that one is lacking – and in the case of the Damned, deserving of the lack.

Similarly, it is common to use the terms used to identify Othered groups as insults, as is the case with "gay," "retarded" and "Jew." Not long ago in the States it was very common to hear someone call something stupid by saying, "That's so gay," make fun of someone's unwise actions by calling them "retarded," or accuse them of miserliness by identifying their "Jewishness." This is all further evidence that our understanding of othered agents assumes a failure or lacking their parts, so much so that it is considered insulting to be identified as a member of that group. Thusly, the Other is further marginalized because self-identification is often denied them without ridicule, and, so, they are silenced. This presumably explains why it is not uncommon for marginalized groups to attempt to take ownership of terms that are used to demean them, in part as a means by which to invert the binary such that they are identified as the insider.

Damnation, however, is so reviled that one cannot self-identify without seeming utterly insane, as in the case of the atheist. Notice that the accusation that one is an atheist is not uncommonly used to insult those of differing spiritual beliefs, but also marks the Other, whether a self-identified atheist or not, as deserving of ridicule and likely unworthy of hearing. This is not just because of some supposed biological inferiority but because it is, in fact, dangerous to even listen to the damned atheist as her immorality may infect and damn the Saved. Here again, we see in the notion of voice play a central role in marginalization and denial of personhood.

The damned, whether Satanists, atheists, or criminals, are ignored, not just in metaphorical contexts or in contexts of, "Oh that's cute; they are trying to participate in the dialogue," but utterly reviled and denied participation in voicing. This is exemplified in the denial of voting rights for felons in the U.S. Even to attempt to argue that in a full democracy everyone – including felons – should have the right to vote would seem somewhat heretical. Our defining of criminals as a kind of damned immoral Other makes it impossible for the inside group to let them vote without risking the contamination of society by their vote. One wonders what heinous apocalypse is prevented by denying felons their voting rights – perhaps they would band together to legalize murder? This seems unlikely (though we do seem to have no compunctions about legalizing killing as long as it is some Othered damned group). The justification of denial of those rights, we realize, is a punishment. They are denied their voice because they have done wrong and no longer deserve full recognition as members of the moral community. Like atheists, they cannot be trusted.

Interestingly, as of early 2015, there is surprising legislation being passed by the Orange County School Board. Due to the fact that some have been vying to pass out Satanist texts to public school students, the District has legislated that no religious texts can be distributed to students in public schools. Of course, there are those who are deeply bothered by this, as they wish to be able to pass out their own religious texts. The concern, though, on the part of the school board, is that the danger of passing out Satanic texts is so great that it is better to bar all religious texts entirely. In some ways, this seems to be a good sign if our concern is Othering and marginalization of Satanists. The law seems to recognize that barring only Satanic texts would be an unjustifiable Othering; showing preference to a particular religion that cannot be rationalized in a nation that supposedly separates church and state.

What is particularly interesting, though, is that the motivation for this school board legislation was the recent introduction Satanic texts, and not the Christian ones that have been circulating for years. Similarly interesting is the fact that the school board has already stated that if it comes down to it, if religious leaders find a way to overturn that legislation due to its marginalization of religion, they will simply ban the passing out of *all* non-school related materials by any group, whether it be the Girl Scouts or the YMCA. This is all to say that our concern that children are endangered by those who chose Damnation (which, in this case, is the result of choosing to reject God and accept Satan) is so great that it is better to ban all non-school texts all together.

The idea of infection is one of the special connotations of damnation. I suggest that the Othering as damnation often includes the danger of infection: those who are damned are a danger to society. We see this again in the case of homosexuality. Many believe that homosexuals choose to be homosexual, thus homosexuals are often treated not as biological others but as damned Others. They reject the normative default and choose to do that which is reviled by the divine. Notice that our treatment of homosexuals in the U.S. includes, not just the belief that they often deserve harm, but the belief that they are dangerous to society – that, by adopting children, they may infect society with their homosexuality and, in some cases, that even by touching heterosexuals are somehow dangerous to them, as if their "gayness" is catching.

3 Knowledge, moral responsibility, and the Other

Finally, and briefly, here I will note the particularly problematical connection between knowledge creation, the damned Other, and justification for violence. Michel Foucault (1980) famously argued that the very notion of "knowledge" itself is determined by the privileged, and thereby acts as a means by which to discriminate – to *literally* distinguish – the Other. Participation in dialogue that further establishes the domain of knowledge is also an action that marginalizes others; simply, to establish definitions and an academy is by its very nature exclusive.

Foucault's critique of the generation of knowledge as a means by which to marginalize others is particularly clear when considering the treatment of the disabled. Disability, like all other binaries, is a social construct. This construct, developed and imposed by those with the power necessary to define knowledge, is not an epistemic certainty. We've already established how certainty regarding the nature of knowledge is ever elusive. Thusly, we see the way disability has been redefined and revised over the course of human history. Although it is not uncommon to assume that disability is a fact and those who are disabled are clearly demarcated and separate as such, this is not the case. There has been no uniform consensus regarding the definition of disability over time, nor regarding who counts as disabled. Certainly, there has been no consensus regarding the treatment of those who are defined as disabled. Indeed, we have even seen homosexuality defined by the medical community as a kind of mental illness in the past, a "disability." Similarly, until 2012, being transgendered was considered to be a mental disability by the American Psychiatric Association.

It, then, is those with the power to define knowledge who can distinguish who is the disabled Other. Perhaps the clearest example of the Foucaultian understanding of knowledge as a power practice is the treatment of homosexuality in much of the world. Again, those in power define disability and often apply its definition to homosexuals. Notice that the homosexual Other is often marginalized, excluded from participation in the rights and privileges of the norm. If the homosexual community, though, elicits enough pity, then they are treated as a disabled other. This explains the frequent campaigns to "fix" homosexuality through therapy, religious ceremony, and medical treatment. Similarly, the previous definition of transgendered individuals, as having a "Gender Identity Disorder," stands as testament to Foucault's thesis. When homosexuals are not defined as disabled, they are often the object of violence and ridicule – they are damned. If the Other is determined as fixable or sufficiently person enough to warrant pity – they are disabled. If they are not classified as "disabled," they are excised from the moral community entirely as potentially infectious. Simply, othering based on biological "facts" is the mark of disability, and othering based on the supposed choice of the Other as the mark of damnation. Note, however, that these two categories may be occupied by one entity who is treated as disabled because of her damnation or is damned because of some disabling character flaw.

What is of particular concern, once the Foucultian power concept is brought to bear on damnation, is the realization that it is the empowered, "saved" group that decides who is damned and they are the category that defines "saved" in the first place. So, it may well be that the Saved can generate any distinction they see fit to define the damned Other, who then *deserves* to be marginalized, if not exterminated. Of course, because marginalization denies one voice, the Damned have no say in the definition process and are ignored – or worse, believed to be infecting the Saved with their dangerous words while attempting to advocate for themselves.

Due to the fact that damnation is defined as being worthy of harm and marginalization, and because it is those in power, the Saved, who determine who is Damned, there is a great deal of reason to be very concerned by the binary Saved/Damned. I say this, not only because of the treatment of homosexuals as damned, the treatment of atheists as damned, and the treatment of any religious group we decide is a problem as damned, but because human beings seem to have a deep need to do violence and due to the social constructs of morality, must find ways to do *justifiable* violence.

Rene Girard (1977), in his text *Violence and the Sacred,* argues that sacrifice – both literal and metaphorical – acts as a means by which for humanity to meet its need to do violence while also justifying it. Violence against she who commits the crime is not always possible or rational, thus the need for sacrifice:

> Violence is frequently called irrational. It has reasons, however, and can marshal some rather convincing ones when the need arises. Yet these reasons cannot be taken seriously, no matter how valid they may appear. Violence itself will discard them if the initial object remains persistently out of reach and continues to provoke hostility. When unappeased, violence seeks and always finds a surrogate victim. (p. 2)

Girard's work seems to hinge, not necessarily on a biological need for violence and *schadenfreude,* which I believe both to be the case, but on a need for retribution and revenge that – while not hinging on guilt either – often has its origin in a need for retribution and revenge – the need to do violence because violence has been done. Thus, the need for sacrifice becomes evident.

Girard writes,

> As I see it, the relationship between the potential victim and the actual victim cannot be defined in terms of innocence or guilt. There is no question of "expiation." Rather, society is seeking to deflect upon a relatively indifferent victim, a "sacrificable" victim, the violence that would otherwise be vented on its own members, the people it most desires to protect. (p. 3)

Simply, violence is infectious and, if left unchecked, will begin to consume members of society itself. Thus, especially in cases in which retribution is not possible, a sacrifice is necessary to stop the cycle. One recognizes that if violence is done to those who have done violence, there is likely more violence done by their family in response, and so on *ad infinitum*. However, if an innocent victim is chosen as a justifiable sacrifice, the violence can stop there and the need for blood is met.

I believe the Damned to fall into the role of sacrificial victim. The function of the Damned is not as a directly guilty party. They, themselves, have not necessarily committed a direct crime against us specifically:

> In order for a species or category of living creature, human or animal, to appear suitable for sacrifice, it must bear a sharp resemblance to the

> *human* categories excluded from the ranks of the "sacrificable," while still maintaining a degree of difference that forbids all possible confusion ... What we are dealing with, therefore, are exterior or marginal individuals, incapable of establishing or sharing the social bonds that link the rest of the inhabitants. (Girard, 1977, p. 12)

Surely the damned, whether as criminals, homosexuals, atheists, and so on meet this requirement all in different ways. It is even somewhat soothing when the felon who has not done *me* harm is punished, as it acts as a form of retribution for all those who have done me harm and gotten away with it. The criminal is not just being punished for his crime, but for all crimes committed to the "law-abiding" who cannot do anything about the mugger who isn't caught, the hit and run driver, and the multitude of others who do us harm on a daily basis.

Girard argues that it is especially helpful when the sacrifice is one commanded by God. "Men can dispose of their violence more efficiently if they regard the process not as something emanating from within themselves, but as a necessity imposed from without, a divine decree whose least infraction calls down terrible punishment" (p. 14). I believe that Girard's statement – that the violence emanates from within the self – is a touch under-emphasized, Girard largely addressing violence as causing a cycle of more violence. Rather, I suggest that Girard is correct, but that there is also the emanation of violence from the self *ex nihilo*. Our films, video games, books, sports, all seem to suggest that we *enjoy* violence and are in constant need of absolution for that enjoyment – whether it is through legalized hunting, legalized violence in sports, or through legalized killing and raping in video games (many humans gain a great deal of satisfaction from video games). We might assert that it is because we feel a need to see justice done and thus enjoy seeing a an "evil" man caught and killed in a film because we want to see, as Girard suggests, and end to the violence, while at the same time meet the call for blood. Here is where I disagree. Rather, I believe that seeing the evil man done violence is especially satisfying not so much because have a need for justice, but because we have a need for violence and then, because of social stigma, a need to absolve ourselves for that *schadenfreude*.

This is not to say that I do not believe that humans and other animals do not feel a strong drive for retribution for harm done. Quite the contrary – that seems, observationally, to be quite true. Rather, I am suggesting that one of the reasons we now shy away from innocent victims as sacrificable for the guilty is specifically to absolve ourselves. As Girard contends, we have a judicial system that can control and engage

in "fairness" by limiting violence but also by providing specific and supposedly justifiable instances of it to meet our need for blood. That, however, is not enough to meet our general enjoyment of violence. Thus we need games, films, and sports to help us maintain the equilibrium required by that very judicial system.

Thus, damnation also acts as a means by which to meet that enjoyment not just of violence, but also of the suffering of others in a real, rather than imaginary or virtual way. One cannot simply push another down a stairwell for fun without (1) fear of reprisal and (2) possible judicial consequences. Despite fear of consequences, and the pacification of our need for violence provided by the justice system, the need for violence remains and it is met, in part, through the harm done to the Damned. In essence, all that I am adding to Girard's analysis is *schadenfruede*. Violence, as Girard discusses, is largely in a social and literary context a social drive caused, propelled and mitigated by more violence. The enjoyment of the suffering of others, though, is now generally deemed a bad thing, perhaps as a result of a need to justify the judicial system as not only a means by which to stop violence, but a justification for (occasionally) rehabilitating criminals which may result in them being better off in the end. Our system recognizes that the enjoyment of the suffering of others is likely to lead to random and unnecessary violence that will then require reprisal, and so on. Thus, it is best to recognize such *schadenfreude* as bad in order to protect the members of society. The irrational need for *schadenfreude*, however, remains and is far less justifiable than a need for violence because of harm done to oneself.

Simply, the need for violence is often understood by society in the context of harm done. We can respect and empathize with those who want to harm others who have harmed them. We can even empathize with others who wish to do general harm because they have been harmed. If one says, "I'm just so angry I want to punch someone," we are wary, yet also understand. However, if I say, "I want to see someone tortured," listeners are revolted. We can only understand it if it is followed by a "because of what he did to my child." Then, suddenly, the cycle of and need for justice is rationalizable. That desire to see and enjoy the suffering seems to be evidenced, however, in the human animal. Reality TV, tabloids, and shows like America's Funniest Home Videos, all are evidence of our *schadenfreude*. We enjoy the suffering of others, and need both outlets and forgiveness for that suffering.

Thus, we come to realize the function of the Damned. Unlike the disabled Other, the Damned provide an opportunity to enjoy suffering.

Whether it is because the Damned are Muslims who have done us harm and we wish to see them writhe in pain, or they are homosexuals who threaten society and are killed for it, or are even the atheists who have chosen to reject God and therefore must be shunned by society, the Damned provide a ready *and* deserving outlet for our *schadenfreude*. Moreover, the othering and harm done to the Damned enables society to engage *schadenfreude* and violence without the need for an innocent sacrifice. To enjoy the suffering of the Saved would be unforgivable, but he who is damned is already condemned to suffering by the Divine, is not a person, and lacks voice *because he has chosen marginalization for himself* and thus; we can enjoy imagining them suffer eternally in the fires of Hell. Any concern for the cycle of violence or retribution is mitigated by the belief that any who retaliate on the part of the Damned are similarly Damned and must also be punished or killed.

Worrisomely, and often, we see that we are willing to entertain that self-soothing thought of the torment of the Damned as punishment for evil, meeting our need for violence and murder while at the same time enjoying it tremendously. Note that, perhaps more so than any other form of binary Othering, the distinction between Saved and Damned must be maintained at all cost: without it, the Saved, if they lose the Foucaultian power of self-definition, might well become the damned – those who enjoy suffering and violence *unjustifiably* and are thus themselves worthy of Hell. As long as the binary is maintained there will always be a ready source of Others to ostracize, torture, and kill for pleasure without guilt.

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10

Whom We Resist: Subjectivity and Resistance at the Infernal Periphery

S. Jonathon O'Donnell

Introduction: an angel's question

In the ninth canto of Dante's *Inferno* an angel poses a question. He poses it to the demons guarding the gates of Dis; and the question, though its form shifts with time, is one that continually haunts the discourse of demonology. The question occurs in a brief speech the angel delivers. Barred from entering Dis and jeered at from its walls, Dante and Virgil set up camp and wait for divine intervention – the angel eventually appears, opening the gates with mere a tap of its wand, and then addresses the demons who barred the poets' entry:

> "O you contemptible race, hunted from heaven,"
> So he began, on that horrific threshold,
> "Why does this insolence persist in you?
> Why are you so recalcitrant to that will
> Which cannot ever fail of its objective,
> And which has more than once increased your pains?
> What use to run your head against the fates?" (IX.90–6)

The question is one of power, and of freedom. At its heart, this question is simply "Why do you rebel?" More specifically, it is "Why do you continue to rebel against a being which, being omnipotent, you cannot ever hope to overcome?" The question is alluded to in Book I of Milton's *Paradise Lost*, when Beelzebub refers to God as "our conqueror (whom I now/Of force believe almighty" (I.143–4) – an aside implying he once doubted divine omnipotence, and has since reconsidered.

But initial ignorance does not address the persistence of demonic insolence. Why would a resistible force faced with an immovable object persist in its attempts to move it? The *Inferno*'s angel does not wait for response, and the narration does not consider the question. It hangs in the fetid air of the marsh that borders Dis's walls. Several theologians have indirectly attempted answers throughout Christianity's history, often while wrestling with the possibility of demonic redemption. One answer, taken by Thomas Aquinas in *De Malo* was that, having fallen, demons were locked into rebellion. Since, Aquinas argued, God held immutable free choice both before and after choosing, and humans held mutable free choice both before and after choosing, angels occupied a middle space – having free choice *only* before a decision was taken (2003, p. 470). He concluded that:

> ... angels are immutable in either good or evil after their first choice, since the condition of wayfarer is ended for them. And so it does not belong to the nature of God's wisdom to infuse more grace to recall them from the evil of their first turning away from him, in which they persist irrevocably. And so, although they choose various things by free choice, they still sin regarding everything they choose, since the force of their first choice abides in their every choice. (p. 472)

Aquinas was here countering extrapolations drawn from other theologians, including Origen, Anselm, John Chrysostom and Augustine, through which one might argue the continued free choice of fallen angels, or at least that they might be turned from sin by God's grace (pp. 467–70). Origen's belief that the Devil might be saved was roundly condemned as heretical, but Aquinas found it possible to read similar errors in other theologians. Satan "sinneth from the beginning" (1 John 3:8), and, as Aquinas noted, Augustine interpreted this to mean that he "sins forever from the beginning of his sin" (2003: 470). One answer to the angel's question might thus simply be that they *cannot not* rebel.

This paper is not so much an answer as an exploration of the angel's question. It focuses on demonic subjectivity, analyzing how the demon as subject – conceived in line with Michel Foucault as both "subject to someone else by control and dependence, and tied to his own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge" (2000, p. 331) – is formulated in relation to the theological structures of divine power against which they struggle. This struggle is almost always figured through their performance of "evil," often figured theologically as a thwarting or opposition

to God's plan for his creation. However, while this paper addresses this "evil," it does not do so primarily as part of a theodicy or discussion of the reality of radical evil as such. I treat the demon mainly as a literary/theological figure rather than a reality, and "demonology" broadly as a discursive structure – that is, a set of cultural, linguistic, and ideological practices that systematically constructs the object(s) of which it speaks (Foucault, 2002, pp. 49–51). For demonology, this object is the demon, and demonology acts to identify, locate, codify, comprehend, and control this object. My treatment of "evil" in this discourse refers primarily to a structural relationship between the demon and the sovereign God that it opposes, in which "evil" refers mainly to a strategy of discursive resistance – to the demons' persistent recalcitrance before a power it cannot overcome or escape.

My exploration of the demon's fragile subjectivity plays out in two parts. The first of these takes its cues from Neil Forsyth's claim in *The Satanic Epic* (2003) that Milton's Satan embodies, and in some sense inaugurates, modern ideas of subjectivity through its exploration of his "Hellish interiority," his sense of himself as a "troubled 'I'." Drawing on the narrative of *Paradise Lost*, I explore this complex selfhood in relation to traditional alignments of the demon with ideas of nothingness, as an absence opposing God as the font of sovereign power and the fullness of being. I then turn to the works of Michel Foucault, who contrasted traditional models of sovereign power with new forms of polyvalent power relations. By using Foucault's concept of power and resistance as producing subjectivity itself, I analyze the demon as a figuration of not only a modern subjectivity categorized by alienated interiority but a postmodern subjectivity inextricable from complex and shifting relations of power.

1 Evil, subjectivity, and nothingness

Within the narrative of *Paradise Lost*, Hell is both a periphery and a prison. A place of fiery torment with neither rest nor hope, "eternal justice had prepared [it]/For those rebellious" – a "prison ordained/In utter darkness, and their portion set/As far removed from God and light of Heaven/As from the centre to the utmost pole" (I.70–4). This sense of removal is reiterated throughout Book I of the epic, mainly through the back-and-forth between Satan and Beelzebub: Hell is as far from God as it is conceivable to be, yet while this distance is in part their punishment it is also their opportunity. The speech containing what is perhaps Satan's most famous declaration contains a number of statements and

reasonings pertaining to Hell's situatedness with regards to God and Heaven, and is worth quoting at length:

> Is this the region, this the soil, the clime,
> Said then the lost archangel, this the seat
> That we must change for heaven, this mournful gloom
> For that celestial light? Be it so, since he
> Who now is sovereign can dispose and bid
> What shall be right: furthest from him is best
> Whom reason hath equalled, force hath made supreme
> Above his equals. Farewell, happy fields
> Where joy forever dwells: hail horrors, hail
> Infernal world, and thou profoundest hell
> Receive thy new possessor: one who brings
> A mind not to be changed by place or time.
> The mind is its own place, and in itself
> Can make a heaven of hell, a hell of heaven.
> What matter where, if I be still the same,
> And what I should be, all but less than he
> Whom thunder hath made greater? Here at least
> We shall be free; the almighty hath not built
> Here for his envy, will not drive us hence:
> Here we may reign secure, and in my choice
> To reign is worth ambition though in hell:
> Better to reign in hell, than serve in heaven. (I.242–63)

While the last lines are perhaps the most famous portions of this speech, it is the other lines that I wish to concentrate on. Hell is herein located in both a literal and symbolic periphery. The contrasts between joy and mourning, light and gloom are evident, but more important is Satan's rationale for self-sovereignty and freedom from the tyranny of Heaven: "Here at least/We shall be free" he proclaims, "the almighty hath not built/Here for his envy, will not drive us hence:/Here we may reign secure." A lack of divine oversight creates the possibility for self-governance: Hell is figured as an unclaimed wilderness, a place where the exiles might settle and reign secure.

Yet there is a problem with Satan's claim to self-governance, and this is in the other function Hell possesses: that of prison. Ideas of Hell as a place of punishment, common in the public imagination, might seem at odds with Satan's declarations of self-governance and the building of the demonic city that follows them. However, Hell's carceral aspects

in *Paradise Lost* are in many ways more psychological than physical. The epic's opening refers to Hell's "adamantine chains and penal fire" (I.48), but these chains are primarily figurative: Hell is a place of "doleful shades," a plain "forlorn and wild," "void of light" except the visible darkness cast by the "livid flames" of its fiery sea (I.62–4,180–2). The demons' punishment stems from their profound alienation rather than any palpable torments, and the "geographic" distance of Hell from the Heavenly center mirrors the demons' interior alienation. This interior sense of Hell emerges fully in the speech Satan makes upon Mount Niphates. The narration describes him thusly:

> ... troubled thoughts, and from the bottom stir[s]
> The hell within him, for within him hell
> He brings, and round about him, nor from hell
> One step no more than from himself can fly
> By change of place. (IV.17–23)

Later, Satan himself addresses this:

> Which way I fly is hell; myself am hell;
> And in the lowest deep a lower deep
> Still threatening to devour me opens wide,
> To which the hell I suffer seems a heaven. (IV. 75–8)

Wrestling with Satan's blending of interiority with Hell, literary scholar Neil Forsyth has linked the existential bleakness Satan exhibits at Niphates back to Christopher Marlowe's depiction of Mephistopheles in *Doctor Faustus*, and the demon's answer to Faustus' query as to why he is out of Hell roaming the world: "Why this is Hell nor am I out of it," the demon declares, elaborating that "Thinkst thou that I, who saw the face of God,/And tasted the eternal joys of Heaven,/Am not tormented with ten thousand Hells" (in Forsyth, 2003a, p. 5)? Forsyth traces this hellish interiority through a discussion of Shakespeare, often credited with the literary creation of the interior subject, even – in Harold Bloom's words – "the invention of the human," to what he views as its grandest realization in the Miltonic Satan (2003a), and in his monograph *The Satanic Epic* (2003b) Forsyth draws a direct correlation between Milton's portrayal of Satan's "Hellish interiority" and ideas of modern subjectivity. Through his exploration of his own inner Hell, Forsyth argues, the Miltonic Satan reflects a distinctly modern consciousness; the Devil is the true "hero" of the epic, his five soliloquys revealing an interior

dramatization that bring Satan close to the audience – "God may be right," Forsyth declares, "and Satan seems to say so, but the reader has, or believes himself to have, an inner self like Satan's, and experiences the split self as Satan does. God may be right, but it is Satan with whom we sympathize" (2003b, p. 152). He goes on to claim that this radical interiorization of Satanic consciousness called to the later Romantics who declared themselves of the Devil's party as much as his rebellion against God's authority inspired their own counter-cultural aspirations. The Devil's explorations of the self-destructive tendencies in human nature became reflected in characters of later literature: Byron's Cain and Manfred, the monster of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* or the bitter, isolated narrator of Dostoyevsky's *Notes from the Underground*, among others. Forsyth summarizes his idea of Satan as the pioneer of modern subjectivity in the following passage:

> Milton makes his Satan discover/invent this modern state of subjectivity through becoming a subject. He is a "subject" in our contemporary theoretical sense (the "humanist subject"), and certainly his troubled "I" is prominent in the poem. But he is a "subject" also in the more literal, root sense of the term (*sub iectus*, thrown under): he discovers at the moment of his rebellion just what it means to be subject to God. Subjection is the origin of his subjectivity. And he doesn't like it at all. The result is that he is thrown out and down and under, into Hell, and it is as he emerges from there that he also emerges into full subjectivity in the Niphates speech, a dramatic soliloquy in the tragic Shakespearean mode. He explores himself, and finds he is exploring what it means to be in Hell, down and under. God and Heaven are what is high and unitary, while "depth" is that "profoundest Hell," and himself. The oppositional war with God continues in these new terms, and this depth is now not only his refuge, but also the site of the battle he now wages: he appeals to Eve's own inner image of herself, and when he succeeds, Adam and Eve join him in this newly invented, Hellish interiority. (Forsyth 2003b, pp. 150–1)

Yet, while Forsyth points here to the dual meaning of the subject, much of his analysis focuses on Satan's "troubled 'I'" rather than the emergence of his subjectivity through subjection: on the resultant selfhood, his Hellish interiority, rather than the conditions of its possibility. In this section I focus on this troubled selfhood, turning my attention to the conditions of its formation in the next.

Satan, like Mephistopheles before him, carries Hell with him. His prison is not (only) a place but a state of being, an absence where once there was plenitude. This sense of alienation is bound up with historic alignments of evil with the concept of nothingness, defined primarily through a lack or absence of goodness and (therefore) of being. This is a long tradition, extending in the Western canon back to the Socratic dialogues but in Christianity itself, the "absence" of evil is chiefly associated with Augustine. One of the foremost scholars of Satan, Jeffrey Burton Russell summarized Augustine's view with the pithy statement that "nothing is by nature evil, and nothing is by nature evil. Both meanings of the phrase apply. Evil is lack of good" (Russell, 1981, p. 199). Ontology and morality merge, with God posited as both absolute good and absolute being. All other beings diminish in both until at the bottom of this great chain of being lies an evil categorized mainly through intrinsic absence.

Forsyth draws out a dilemma implicit in a schema that equates nothingness and evil and also gives place to the figure of the Devil, who represents an embodied and active force of evil: "The theory can not account for malice," he writes, "which all of us sense to be active in many cases, not simply indifferent" (2003a, p. 3). Simona Forti has synthesized this dilemma in what she terms the "Dostoyevsky paradigm" of evil. This conception of evil is coded as a will to nothingness, as "the will to infinite power, as an abyssal freedom that turns into hatred for being and for creation, and that therefore devastates, annihilates, and destroys" (2015, p. 134). In Forsyth's analysis of Satan's subjectivity that subjectivity is tied up with privation, a loss of Heavenly unity that leaves him alone in the abyss of his own self. He manifests this inner nothingness as "malice," as an endeavor to bring others into the same Hell(ish interiority). Satan's declaration, which I consider further below, that "Evil, be thou my good" (IV.110) symbolizes his will to embody this nothingness and perform it in the world. He, himself, is Hell, and by engineering original sin he spreads this Hell first to humanity and, through them, to all creation. For Forti, this idea of evil is a "kind of power that ultimately makes destruction not only a means to an end, but the end in itself, and that elevates nothingness to the ultimate goal of its action" (2015, p. 53). These begin to tease out the contradiction central to the formulation of evil as "the nothing:" by reinscribing evil, not as (only) the absence of being but as a will to that absence, they grant to it a kind of quasi-being or quasi-autonomy defined through its opposition to a sovereign celestial center. Nonetheless, while they are partially true, I believe both Forsyth and Forti miss the inextricably structural quality of

the demonic performance of evil. This performance cannot be separated from its relationship to the center, to the power of the sovereign God that they oppose.

This relationship relates to the conditions of possibility for Satan's subjectivity as outlined by Forsyth – that "Subjection is the origin of his subjectivity" (2003b, p. 150). This and his troubled ego correspond to what Foucault identified as the two meanings of "subject" that condition the formation of subjectivity by and within power relations. The subject is produced as both "subject to someone else by control and dependence, and tied to his own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge" (Foucault, 2000, p. 331). Forsyth does not explore this sense of subjectivity in depth, rather using it as a ground for his analysis of Satan's inner Hell and the destructive impulses that flow from it. In the following section, I wish to subject this subjected subjectivity to further analysis, drawing on Foucault's reconceptualizations of power and (through it) resistance.

2 A mechanics of (celestial) sovereignty and (infernal) resistance

Satan's subjectivity emerges through his subjection. His defeat in Heaven births his sense of self. His early declarations that he has "A mind not to be changed by place or time," and "The mind is its own place, and in itself/Can make a heaven of hell, a hell of heaven./What matter where, if I be still the same" (I.253–6) ultimately ring hollow. Satan's mind *has* changed: just as the original sin he provoked changed humanity, the indelible wound of his separation from God marks Satan's selfhood. In responding to Beelzebub's puzzlement over the demons' continued existence and apparent lack of incarceration, Satan proclaims that "To do aught good never will be our task,/But ever to do ill our sole delight,/ As being the contrary to his high will/Whom we resist" (I.159–62). This represents more than a mere shift in combat tactics. Where once he warred for the center, Satan now occupies the periphery; he has gone from attempting to occupy Heaven's throne to being defined by his opposition to it. The tactical shift in Satan's "eternal war," from open conflict to guerrilla warfare, belies the change in his being. Yet, while he is deluded in his claim to unchanging continuity, the change itself – his reduction to the other half of a binary opposition between good and evil, presence and absence, something and nothing – bears closer analysis. As noted above, Satan's nothingness is in many ways an active rather than a passive "nothingness;" he enacts his "Hellish interiority"

in the exterior world through his corrupting influence. This demonic performance of non-being is both a resistance to and a realization of their subjection, and it is this that I wish to analyze in the remainder of this paper. To explore the ways demonic non-being operates as resistance-realization, I take recourse in Foucault's reconceptualizations of power and the place of resistance.

Foucault's ideas of power are sometimes opaque, primarily because they rely on a radical overturning of traditional top-down notions of sovereign power (the very concept on which demonic subjection seems to depend). He saw sovereignty as highly reductive, based around the idea of a sole, unitary foundation that imposed power unilaterally from a central point, and upon questions of law and legitimacy that he saw as having been either replaced or at least complicated in modernity. For Foucault, sovereignty "presupposes the subject; its goal is to establish the essential unity of power, and it is always deployed within the pre-existing element of the law" (2005, p. 44). It thus assumes the existence of three "primitive" elements, which exist naturally in the world: "a subject who has to be subjectified, the unity of the power that has to be founded, and the legitimacy that has to be respected – Subject, unitary power, and law" (2005, p. 44). This model of power is distinctly theological in origin, based on a model of God as supreme sovereign; the earthly ruler, and later the sovereign state itself, are figured as mimeses of deity in their unity, their totality, and their solitude. As Jean Bodin, perhaps the first to theorise concepts of sovereign unity, argued: "Just as God, the great sovereign, cannot make a God equal to Himself … so we can say that the prince, whom we have taken as the image of God, cannot make a subject equal to himself without annihilation of his power" (1992, p. 50). He expanded on this principle at several points, noting that "he is absolutely sovereign … who does not recognise anything higher than him after God" (in Baranger, 2010, p. 49), and extrapolating to the questions of law and the division of sovereign and subject: "The first prerogative of sovereignty is to give the law to subjects", he writes, then asking: "But who will be the subjects and who will obey if they also have the power to make law? And who will be able to make law if he is himself constrained to receive it from those to whom he gives it" (Bodin, 1992, p. 92)? The relation between absolute sovereign and the subjects he subjects is present in the narrative of *Paradise Lost* and in other Christian myths of Lucifer's fall. Satan, for all the force he musters among the rebel angels, is confronted with the total and absolute power of the sovereign. He fails and is subjected to punishment, a sentence of exile to the periphery and interior torment. In I.143–4 and I.246–9 Beelzebub and

Satan acknowledge God's sovereignty, even as they continue plotting their rebellion, and so the unity of Heavenly sovereignty is maintained even, and perhaps especially, in the minds of its chief opponents.

In contrast to this sovereign model of power, Foucault reconceptualized power as something polyvalent: "power is everywhere because it comes from everywhere," he writes in his *History of Sexuality* (1998, p. 93). Rather than power being localized in the sovereign or sovereign state, the sovereign – in as much as it exists at all – is a localization of power itself. As Saul Newman writes,

> Power, for Foucault, is not a function of the institution; rather the institution is a function, or an effect, of power. Power flows through institutions, it does not emanate from them. Indeed, the institution is merely an assemblage of various power relations. It is, moreover, an unstable assemblage because power relations themselves are unstable, and can just as easily turn against the institution which "controls" them. (2001, p. 78)

Additionally, just as sovereign institutions like the state were effects of a polyvalent and diffuse network of power relations, so too were subjects themselves. Rather than being a pre-given entity that the mechanisms of power acted on, Foucault held that the individual was in reality produced *by* power; the individual, "with his identity and characteristics," he writes, "is the product of a relation of power exercised over bodies, multiplicities, movements, desires, forces" (1988, pp. 73–4). This relates closely to the dual meanings of "subject," that a subject is "subject to someone else by control and dependence, and tied to his own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge" (Foucault, 2000, p. 331). The subject emerges here as an effect, a production, of power itself: "The individual is in fact a power-effect, and at the same time, to the extent that he is a power-effect, the individual is a relay: power passes through the individuals it has constituted" (2005, p. 30). This means that, for Foucault, there is no outside to power (Allen 2013; Simons 2013), but the individual is not trapped – instead, resistance to power must arise from within the structures of power itself: "where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power" (Foucault, 1998, p. 95). The two imply one another, and are bound together in an endless, agonistic struggle, a perpetual conflict based on a relationship of mutual provocation (Newman, 2001, p. 79; Patton, 2013, p. 184; Simons, 2013, p. 309). In opposition to the sovereign model, which conceived of the subject as something inert, a passive object onto which power might be

deployed, Foucault situated a concept of the subject as fluid, mutable, and produced by the process of subjection itself. As Amy Allen clarifies:

> Whereas the [sovereign] model of power presupposed "an individual who is naturally endowed … with rights, capabilities, and so on" … and then asks under what circumstances it is legitimate for such an individual to be subjected to the power of the state, Foucault [views power relationships] as fundamentally productive rather than merely repressive. (2013, pp. 345–6)

The individual subject is one the main productions of Foucault's reconceptualization of power. Rather than being an object of power-relations, a "naturally endowed" person who pre-exists power and is subjected to it, the subject is created and serves as a conduit for power (Foucault, 2005, p. 30). Subjection manufactures the subject as such (2005, p. 45), much as – for Forsyth – Satan's "troubled 'I'" emerges through his fall: "he discovers at the moment of his rebellion just what it means to be subject to God. Subjection is the origin of his subjectivity" (Forsyth, 2003b, p. 150).

Forsyth held that it was Satan's interiority, as much as his wilful rebellion, that drew the sympathies of the Romantics and later writers. When the anarchist thinker Mikhail Bakunin referred to Satan as "the eternal rebel, the first free-thinker and the emancipator of worlds" and reinscribed original sin as a political message of liberation (in Booker, 1997, p. 41), he was tying into Satan's figuration as what Ruben van Luijk termed the "archetypal embodiment of rebellion" (2013, p. 45). Bakunin, however, as an anarchist, was working with a model of power that was centralized, and thus deposable. With such emancipatory reconfigurations it is important to understand that Satan is ultimately a failed rebel. He does not vanquish God. He does not seat himself upon Heaven's throne. He fails, and falls; "Hurled headlong flaming from the ethereal sky/With hideous ruin and combustion down/To bottomless perdition," as the opening of Milton's epic informs us (I.45–7). Satan does not win; he cannot win – his enemy is omnipotent. The structural impossibility of his victory rests at the climax of every traditional apocalyptic narrative, and it is this impossibility that prompted the angel's question.

But, while Satan's ultimate victory is an impossibility, he and those demons who followed him do not wholly submit to their subjection, or rather they take that first form of subjection – "subject to someone else by control and dependence" – and transfigure it into the second – one "tied to his own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge" (Foucault,

2000, p. 331). Just as their subjection to power conditions their emergence as true subjects, so their resistance to that power is inextricable from that power. This is perhaps clearest in Satan's declarations that "To do aught good never will be our task,/But ever to do ill our sole delight,/As being the contrary to his high will/Whom we resist" (I.159–62), and then again, in his speech upon Mount Niphates:

> So farewell hope, and with hope farewell fear,
> Farewell remorse: all good to me is lost;
> Evil, be thou my good; be thee at least
> Divided empire with heaven's king I hold
> By thee, and more than half perhaps will reign;
> As man ere long, and this new world shall know. (IV.108–13)

Here, Satan's challenge is not his initial goal – to seize the sovereign throne and reign unitarily from it – but to contest that unity by inaugurating a new, dualistic paradigm, through which he transforms the non-being, the Hell, which he has embodied through the mechanisms of his exile, into an active force. Satan switches here from revolution to resistance, and his resistance is inextricable from the power it opposes – he who "Sole reigning holds the tyranny of Heaven" (I.124). Demonic resistance manifests primarily as "active evil" – that is, as a force of absence or non-being, which acts to disrupt God's plan for the world. Forsyth termed it "malice" (2003a, p. 3), while Forti described it as "the will to infinite power, as an abyssal freedom that turns into hatred for being and for creation, and that therefore devastates, annihilates, and destroys" (2015, p. 134). However, it is my belief that reducing this demonic "evil" to malice, nihilistic impulses, destruction – or even to a symbol of radical evil in general – misses a fundamental attribute of its symbolic potential: demonic evil is inextricably structural, existing as an impossible resistance to the totalizing structures of divine power. It does not exist outside this power, but exists only in relation to it; and it is only through this that its resistance, its insolence and recalcitrance in the face of inevitable defeat, has any meaning.

Conclusions: to wage eternal war

In drawing this paper to a close, I wish to return to the angel's question. It addressed both power and freedom: Why does Satan, and demons generally, persist in rebelling against a power that, being omnipotent, they cannot ever overcome? Aquinas' answer was that they could not *not*

rebel: that their first choice bound them into a cycle of perpetual opposition. In a sense this might be true, though certainly not as Aquinas envisioned it. The demonic subject was birthed through the consequences of that first choice – that failed revolution – only emerging as an effect of the structures of divine power. In this way that initial choice is immutable, for without it the demon-as-subject would not exist. Forsyth believed that through his "Hellish interiority" the Miltonic Satan embodied the complex inner subjectivity viewed as encapsulating the modern subject. With this I do not necessarily disagree; however, in this paper I have put forward a sister reading of Milton's Satan as embodying not just a modern, but a postmodern, conceptualization of subjectivity, one whose emergence is inextricably bound up with the mechanics of subjection. While Forysth took Satan's subjection as the originating moment in his campaign of active evil, the expansion of his inner Hell beyond the confines of his selfhood to encompass all creation, bringing evil and its alienating interiority on first humanity and then the world, I turned my attention to the emergence of that selfhood, analyzing not (only) Satan's "troubled 'I'" but its conditions of possibility.

Hell is both periphery and prison. As periphery, it is eternally defined through absence, through its removal from the center. As prison, it is the place that reconditions the selves of its inmates in relation to the society from which they are excluded. The demons that occupy Hell are defined entirely through lack. When Satan declares, first in Hell and then on Mount Niphates, that their future actions will be a campaign of disruption and disorder, he defines himself entirely through what he is not: evil, not good; Satan, not God; subject, not sovereign. He does not hold the tyranny of Heaven, but inhabits a Hell that is now the condition of his existence, and while he declares he will "wage by force or guile eternal war" (I.121) his tactics default to the latter. By inscribing himself on the opposite side of a binary opposition, Satan cements his dependency on the structures he opposes. In this play of subjection and resistance, the figure of Satan, and of demons generally as subjects in Hell, come to embody a postmodern as well as modern subject. Produced by divine power, demons can only resist that power from inside its totality; demonic resistance to divine omnipotence cannot occur from an outside, and neither can it occur with any hope of victory – that is, of revolution, of a radical overturning that would invert the divine–demonic polarity and see Satan enthroned while God is exiled to the periphery. This merely replicates the structures of power; the system simply endures under new management; there is still a Heaven and a Hell, a center and a periphery, and those who occupy both. There will

still be subjects subjected to Hell, subjects in Hell. And perhaps one day, as they struggle on with hope of neither victory nor escape, power will ask a question of them:

> "Why does this insolence persist in you?"

Perhaps it will even wait for an answer.

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11

Eternal Damnation as Exploitation's Last Defense: Marx, Religion, and the Concept of Hell

Jeffrey Ewing

Karl Marx stands as one of history's most notable materialists and atheists, and while his critiques of capitalism and advocacy for classless society form his primary intellectual and revolutionary projects, the critique of religion (Judeo-Christian religions in particular) remains an important element of his thought. Marx saw religion simultaneously as (1) an oppressive human invention that degrades and alienates humanity in the service of the dominant class(es), and (2) the "sigh of the oppressed creature," a source of meaning and solace for the subordinated and exploited. The latter functions of religion, its provision of hope via promises of possible justice-in-this-world from a loving God (and guaranteed justice for believers in an afterlife of eternal bliss), are treated in a complex manner by Marx – their role in assuaging the pain of the oppressed is recognized, but their obscuring of real-world solutions is lamented. On the other hand, perhaps the ultimate Christian guarantor of class society is subject to far less discussion by Marx himself or later commentators – the threat of facing eternal damnation in Hell for transgression against central religious precepts. In this chapter, I revisit Marx's critique of religion as a guarantor of class society and, despite Marx's own silence on the concept of Hell, use his critique of religion to analyze the role of Hell in the reproduction of class relations.

1 The Debate on Marx and Religion

Scholarly discussion of Marx's exact perspective on religion admits significant complexity (and often, divergence). Scholarship on the subject is united regarding Marx's evident materialism and atheism. Marx conceives of the religion as the realm where "the products of the human brain" falsely appear as "autonomous figures endowed with a life of their own" (Marx, 1990a, p. 165). Indeed, Marx:

> did not doubt that religious belief claims are false. He was a thoroughgoing atheist. From his earliest to his latest writings, he proclaimed an absolute denial of the existence of God [...] Marx rejected not only particular forms of theism but also any reference whatever to a transcendent reality. (Turner, 1991, p. 322)

Denial of the existence of God has in this vein been described as "one of the main cornerstones of Marx's outlook" (Lobkowicz, 1964, p. 318). This summarizes a number of aspects of Marx's stance on religion, but leaves unanswered several issues pertaining to his stance on (1) possible alternative forms of spirituality, (2) the relation of different forms of spirituality and religion to class society, and (3) the more complex elements of Marx's critiques of religion. On the one hand, you have claims that Marx's atheism is not merely a fact *beside* his advocacy of classless society (or a historical accident), but rather that atheism is *necessary* in the construction of a free society, such that "if Marx's whole project is to help revolutionize the social world with the effect of having people act in accordance with laws we produce from ourselves, then, from his point of view, the whole project makes sense only on the premise of atheism" (Schuller, 1975, pp. 336–7). By contrast, other thinkers have argued that "Marx was a prophet whose work was religious in both method and aim" (Parsons, 1964, p. 52), whose atheism is "not a denial of a Supreme Being; it is only the rejection of the transmundane God of Western religion" (Gilman & Saeger, 1973, p. 13) or alternately that Marx's real distinction is between "spiritual forces" and their "religious form" (Brien, 2009, p. 104). In this vein, various thinkers have claimed possible affinity between humanistic Marxism and Gnosticism (Gilman & Saeger, 1973), Buddhism (Brien, 2006), and Neopaganism (Lundskow, 2005). Navigation of this contentious debate is not the focus of this chapter, but it serves well to illustrate the possible variety of interpretations regarding Marx's exact critique of religion.

In order to investigate the complex territory of Marx's approach to religion, a chapter on Marx's view of any specific topic within the realm of metaphysics or religion can usefully start by bracketing the stronger claim that (1) the empirical falsity of religion and (2) the ideological uses of religion (i.e. the ontological status of metaphysical claims versus the instrumental uses thereof) are so necessarily connected for Marx that "atheism is an essential premise of his whole theory" (Schuller, 1975, p. 332). To be certain, Marx himself found metaphysically grounded religious beliefs to be empirically false, and stood among such materialist luminaries as Darwin and Freud in challenging the premises of metaphysically oriented systems of belief at a fundamental level. Simultaneously, Marx's belief in the empirical falsity of metaphysical religious claims is *analytically* separable from his concrete critiques of the uses of metaphysical beliefs to uphold class society (at least such that, regardless of interpretation, they can be held minimally as two separate "moments"). Analytical separateness aside, since Marx argues that "*Man makes religion,* religion does not make man" (Marx, 1992b, p. 244), the "criticism of religion is the prerequisite of all criticism" (243). For Marx, religion does not reflect metaphysical reality but, rather, is the product of human invention, and thus part of the critique of the social order (in all its political, economic, and social or ideological aspects) consequently involves the critique of the metaphysical assumptions that ideologically "explains," legitimates, and supports it.

Marx recognized the explanatory role of religion as "general theory of this world, its encyclopedic compendium, its logic in popular form, its spiritual *point d'honneur*, its enthusiasm, its moral sanction, its solemn complement and its universal basis of consolation and justification" (1992b, p. 244). A thorough exploration of Marx's critique of religion involves the examination of a number of these individual critical claims – but suffice to say at this point that Marx recognized both (1) the explanatory aspects of religion – its capacity to translate and render meaning to a diverse array of the facets of human experience (albeit on false premises), and (2) its potential capacity to be a point of both "consolation" (providing solace for the suffering) and "justification" (justifying the causes of suffering, centrally among them hierarchical social relations, class relations forming the particular focus of Marx's analysis). In order to explore this more fully, it will be necessary first to situate Marx's commentary on religion in general within his wider insights into ideology and its relation to class society.

2 Marx and materialist theory of history

The central thread of all Marxian criticism is the central premise that "what is rightfully man's end in life – the fulfillment of his species-life, his life activity – comes to be dominated by the means of existence, physical existence itself, and the individual life of egoistic cravings" (Parsons, 1964, p. 54). The potential of humanity as free self-creators with developed all-sided being (encompassed in interrelations with both other individuals and non-human nature) is replaced by stunted self-creation, alienated self-development, exploited labor, antagonistic relations between the self, others, and nature, and a focus on having rather than being. The "basic cause" of these circumstances is "the system of production – a system which men make but in which men are caught between the social process of production and the private appropriation of the products of such production" (1964, p. 54). Thus, prior to a discussion of Marx's conception of the natures of religion and Christianity (and their relations to classes and production processes), we first need to ground the social relations of production themselves as central to Marx's lifelong theoretical and revolutionary project. Marx and Engels' perception of the significance of productive processes to wider social processes forms the core of the theory of society whose development they explicitly pioneered – historical materialism.

Central to Marx and Engels' thought is the role of the "metabolism" between humanity and non-human nature via social labor. Marx argued that the concept "labour" significantly refers to "the entire productive activity of man, through which his metabolic interchange with nature is mediated" (Marx, 1990b, p. 954), and the "labour-process" particularly referenced:

> Purposeful activity aimed at the production of use-values. It is an appropriation of what exists in nature for the requirements of man. It is the universal condition for the metabolic interaction [Stoffwechsel] between man and nature, the everlasting nature-imposed condition of human existence, and it is therefore independent of every form of that existence, or rather it is common to all forms of society in which human beings live. (Marx, 1990a, p. 290)

The importance of metabolic processes (and thus labor and its productive role in the maintenance of humanity and their embodied human lives) explains Marx and Engels' emphasis in *The German Ideology* on the centrality of labor and production processes in society, as "the first

premise of all human existence and, therefore, of all history [...is] that men must be in a position to live in order to make history" (Marx & Engels, 1998, p. 47): that is, from the level of either an individual life or the continuation of society in general, survival is a prerequisite of other activities and priorities. As expressed in the *1844 Manuscripts*, "*Man* is directly a *natural being* [...] as a natural, corporeal, sensuous, objective being he is a *suffering*, conditioned and limited being [...] the *objects* of his drives exist outside him as *objects* independent of him; but these objects are objects of his *need*, essential objects, indispensable to the exercise and confirmation of his essential powers" (Marx, 1992d, pp. 389–90). Class power, as power over the means by which needs get met and ends are realized, allows remarkable control over other social processes and institutions because it allows control over the resource prerequisites of both survival, and of other institutions and social processes need for their success and continuity.

3 Production and reproduction as the foundations of society

The centrality of "metabolic" activity performed via labor in the process of social production forms the rationale for Marx's attribution (influentially, albeit rarely, used by Marx) of the base/superstructure metaphor to the conceptual relation of production and economic processes to other sets of processes and institutions in society. A key brief summary is found in the 1859 Preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, and it will be useful to quote it at length:

> In the social production of their existence, men inevitably enter into definite relations, which are independent of their will, namely relations of production appropriate to a given stage in the development of their material forces of production. The totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which arises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life conditions the general process of social, political and intellectual life. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness. At a certain stage of development, the material productive forces of society come into conflict with the existing relations of production or – this merely expresses the same thing in legal terms – with the property relations within the framework of which

> they have operated hitherto. From forms of development of the productive forces these relations turn into their fetters. Then begins an era of social revolution. The changes in the economic foundation lead sooner or later to the transformation of the whole immense superstructure. (Marx, 1992g, pp. 425–6)

Material processes form the foundation of all other social processes, the more essential having greater ultimate social impact on the lives of individuals and "success" of other institutions. While the 1859 Preface is considered perhaps the most significant summation of historical materialism, its successes as a summary unfortunately leave aside some important details in the theory of historical materialism itself.

Marx and Engels clearly posit a distinction between the *relations of production*, the social relations through which metabolic processes and production in the wider sense are organized, and the *forces of production,* the complex of means available to accomplish such social production that includes both factors like tools, machines, etc., alongside skills, technical knowledge, and the like. It should be noted that, while Marx and Engels commonly highlight the "economic" realm of production, other explanations of their "historical materialist" approach to history identify the reproduction of the species (through the category of "the family" often characterized by a sexual division of labor) as an equally fundamental "base." In his preface to the first edition of *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State*, Engels summarizes the base of society in a succinct yet non-reductionist manner, and it will be useful to quote this formulation as well:

> According to the materialist conception, the determining factor in history is, in the final instance, the production and reproduction of immediate life. This, again, is of a twofold character: on the one side, the production of the means of existence, of food, clothing and shelter and the tools necessary for that production; on the other side, the production of human beings themselves, the propagation of the species. The social organization under which the people of a particular historical epoch and a particular country live is determined by both kinds of production: by the stage of development of labor on the one hand and of the family on the other. (Engels, 1972, pp. 71–2)

Whereas the 1859 Preface implies that the relations and material forces of production are, alone, the foundation of society, Engels explains that both production *and* reproduction are the dual foundations of

society, and consequently society rests on both the economy and "the family."

This elaboration of the base is also not limited to Engels' late works, but is present in their first elaborated formulation of historical materialism in *The German Ideology*. There, Marx and Engels note that the first premises of history are (1) the aforementioned necessity to meet immediate physical needs, (2) the production of new needs as a consequence of (1), and (3) the further need to reproduce, which takes place in "the family" (these three moments taken to be continually and simultaneously occurring and reoccurring). In short, contrary to the traditional interpretation of historical materialism, there are in fact *two* bases of society, which dialectically influence each other (Engels, 1972; Marx & Engels, 1998).

4 Superstructure and the ideological realm

Marx and Engels thus highlight the processes of production and reproduction as the foundation on which other social processes rest, those processes consisting broadly of those in the political and ideological realms. The former consists of the political structure of society, as well as the courts, police, military and the like; while the latter consists of ideologies and institutions such as religion, cultural institutions, and beliefs about the world such as those of morality or the social sciences. As the aforementioned 1859 Preface argues, the "mode of production of material life" conditions "the general process of social, political, and intellectual life" (Marx, 1992g, p. 425). Ideas are not the driving force of history, but are rather the product of concrete human beings – indeed "men are the producers of their conceptions, ideas, etc., that is, real, active men, as they are conditioned by a definite development of their productive forces and of the intercourse corresponding to these" (Marx & Engels, 1998, p. 42). "Ideologies" are thus produced by concrete individuals, who are themselves conditioned by the material influences and social relations of their time.

Marx and Engels argue that "ruling" ideologies serve to justify and perpetuate the dominant relations of production, as "the ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas: i.e., the class which is the ruling *material* force of society is at the same time its ruling *intellectual* force" (Marx & Engels, 1998, p. 67). This justificatory function emerges largely from the ability of ideologies to re-interpret the relations of production, particularly for the exploited classes, and "if in all ideology men and their circumstances men appear upside-down as in a

camera obscura, this phenomenon arises just as much from their historical life-process as the inversion of objects on the retina does from their physical life-process" (Marx & Engels, 1998, p. 42). Though belief by the exploited classes in the "ruling ideologies" is often discussed in terms of "false consciousness," Marx's own perspective on the relation between ideologies and truth or falsity is far more complex, as "he does not think that the acknowledgement of this [class interested justificatory] role precludes truth judgments, and he does not regard those assessments of truth or falsehood as mere expressions of support or opposition directed at the underlying class interests" (Miller, 1991, p. 73). The truth remains far more complicated.

It should be clear that Marx and Engels are not saying any of a number of economistic postulates – i.e. that economic interests directly dominate all intellectual production, that ideologies cannot be sites or tools of struggle, or that production processes exist in some way independently from processes of meaning, signification, or subjectivity. Marx and Engels are rather noting, first, that the ideological justification of existing class relations is central to their reproduction – for "each new class which puts itself in the place of one ruling before it is compelled, merely in order to carry through its aim, to present its interest as the common interest of all the members of society, that is, expressed in ideal form" (Marx & Engels, 1998, p. 68). That is, contrary to claims that Marx and Engels abstract issues of meaning out of the relations and processes of production, they instead affirm that the production of ruling ideologies (class rule-consistent sets of meaning) is *necessary* for the ruling class in order to justify its dominance in the relations of production.

The second point to be made regarding "ruling ideologies" is that the desire of the ruling classes to maintain these sets of ideas and the institutions that perpetuate them is rendered effective due to the material advantages and powers held by those atop the relations of production: that is, "the class which has the means of material production at its disposal, consequently also controls the means of mental production, so that the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are on the whole subject to it" (Marx & Engels, 1998, p. 67). In short, ruling class material dominance tends to allow greater monopolization over the institutions that promote various interpretations of reality, such as news media, educational institutions, religious organizations, and the like.

Thirdly, while Marx and Engels highlight (1) the role of contradictions between the forces and relations of production in the fundamental transformations between modes of production (wherein the latter limit the potential of the former to meet human needs), and (2) the resultant

transformations in ideological and political institutions (and the like) emerging from those struggles, (3) ideological and political structures which developed in the contexts of different and historically prior modes of production (prior not in a teleological sense, but in a temporal and contextual sense) can and often do linger and remain in the new context in some form rather than merely going extinct. Ancient ideologies, themselves a conglomeration of the effects of different classes struggling for ideological dominance, developing new interpretations and ideologies, and continually readapting in their own context, thus remain and add complexity to the ideological realm, though primarily only variants which are compatible with ruling class interests approach the status of "ruling ideologies." In short, historically prior ideologies (sometimes developed in dramatically different contexts) can survive well past the destruction or transcendence of their original conditions of production.

Fourth, the "developed" division of labor (enabled by sufficiently high surplus to allow non-productive specializations in "superstructural" political and ideological institutions) enables the existence of individuals structurally devoted to promoting ideologies that favor the ruling class. The division of labor manifests itself in a separation between mental and material labor such that:

> inside this class one part appears as the thinkers of the class (its active, conceptive ideologists, who make the perfecting of the illusion of the class about itself their chief source of livelihood), while the others' attitude to these ideas and illusions is more passive and receptive, because they are in reality the active members of this class and have less time to make up illusions and ideas about themselves. (Marx & Engels, 1998, p. 68)

Though the existence and development of *ruling ideologies* is a prerequisite of continued rule and *may* be the product of a conscious attempt to ideologically support particular relations of production, the development and adoption of ruling-class justifying ideologies does not *necessarily* stem from an explicit ideological project, nor an active campaign for deception (though either may be true at particular times and places). Rather, the ideological representatives of the ruling class may engage in thought restricted to the "barriers" the dominant class fails to overcome in practice, and thus are "driven in theory to the same problems and solutions to which material interest and social situation drive the latter in practice" (Marx, 1992e, p. 177). Intellectuals may thus accept

or promote the parameters of existing class society, which serves as an ideological boon to the project of justifying class society.

Finally, ideologies are not merely passive products of existing dominant relations of production, but may be and frequently are developed and mobilized in the process of struggle, that is:

> these three moments, the forces of production, the state of society, and consciousness, can and must come into contradiction with one another, because the *division of labour* implies the possibility, nay the fact that intellectual and material activity – enjoyment and labour, production and consumption – devolve on different individuals. (Marx & Engels, 1972, p. 52)

The separation of individuals devoted to "ideological production" from those atop the relations of production increasingly allows flexibility with these institutions as for their alignment with and advocacy of different relations of production. Similarly, as class society is impacted by the class struggle, so too are the "superstructural" factors upholding the dominant class relations sites of class struggle. Thus, though the dominance of "ruling ideas" is upheld by their material supports in the existing relations of production, that very dominance is complicated in practice and riddled with contradiction, as well as being potentially used as a site of struggle by the working class. But, what of the particular ideological set of institutions and beliefs in question – the realm of religion?

5 Marx and religion

As we have seen, among the various institutions in the ideological realm, Marx and Engels spoke of the critique of religious ideas as central to the construction of classless society. Among his earliest works, in his 1843–44 *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, Marx wrote that the "criticism of religion is the premise of all criticism" (Marx, 1992b, p. 41). Why the particular importance of the critique of religion? First of all, while many ideologies beyond religious ideas purport to relate to the world-as-it-is, religions most directly tend to claim to universally explain the world (down to the nature and purpose of earthly existence, and the nature of existence beyond the empirically lived life) from a place of absolute validity and authority. Recall Marx's depiction of religion as the "general theory of this world, its encyclopedic compendium, its logic in popular form, its spiritual *point d'honneur*, its enthusiasm, its moral sanction, its solemn complement and its universal basis of consolation and

justification" (1992b, p. 40). Religions tend to claim greater and more pervasive explanatory powers, with greater impact and authority, than any other ideological institutions.

Secondarily, as part of this universal explanatory range, religious claims extend to interpretations of who human beings are, who they are ultimately capable of becoming, and who they *should* become in all its totality – how they should treat others, the institutions they should embrace, who they should and should not engage in relationships with and what relationships are and are not legitimate, etc. Thus, religion is capable of being more normatively pervasive than competing ideological institutions, and from this wide realm of impact religion can obscure a number of aspects of existence, which blunt the capacity of individuals to diagnose, transform and co-create the conditions of their own existence. Marx and Engels first critique religion as being (1) the (false) product of human invention ("religion does not make man, but rather man makes religion" (Marx, 1992c, p. 88). This false product is (2) composed of an abstract elevation of the capacities and potentials present in humanity, as in religion "man [...] looked for a superman in the fantastic reality of Heaven and found nothing there but the *reflection* of himself" (Marx, 1992b, p. 41), as religion is "the self-consciousness and self-feeling of man who has either not yet found himself or has already lost himself again" (1992b, p. 41) and "*the fantastic realization* of the human essence because the *human* essence has no true reality" (p. 41).

This metaphysical is thus (3) elevated above humanity (in ontological ranking, in moral goodness, and in practical capabilities) as in "the misty realm of religion [...] the products of the human brain appear as autonomous figures endowed with a life of their own, which enter into relations both with each other and with the human race" (Marx, 1990a, p. 165). This (4) thus constitutes an unreal standard against which humanity is found inevitably wanting:

> The enemies of progress *outside* the mass are precisely those *products* of *self-debasement*, *self-rejection* and *self-estrangement* of the *mass* which have been endowed with independent being and a life of their *own*. The mass therefore rises against its *own* deficiency when it rises against the independently existing *products* of its *self-debasement* just as man, turning against the existence of God, turns against his *own religiosity*. (Marx & Engels, 1956, p. 111)

Moreover, (5) wherein service to this abstract and imagined metaphysical order limits and inhibits humanity's capacity for self-creation, stunting

their growth ("The more man puts into God, the less he retains in himself" (Marx, 1992d, p. 324)). Finally, (6) this unquestionably superior metaphysical order is used as a mechanism to explain and justify aspects of existence outside the immediate control of individual believers, such as (a) hierarchical social relations and (b) natural events outside human agency (in Engels' summary, religion is "nothing but the phantastic reflection in men's minds of those external forces which control their daily life, a reflection in which the terrestrial forces assume the form of natural forces" (Engels, 1976, p. 344). Religion thus obscures reality as it alienates humanity from their organic potential as co-creators of their own existence, and has great potential to normatively justify or universalize historically contingent limitations and hierarchies.

Third, the dissolution of the concept of a metaphysically elevated being beyond and above humanity which justifies these hierarchical social relations (and against whom humanity will always be found inferior and wanting) frees humanity to see their own equal potential (providing the groundwork for egalitarian social relations), and to take active control over their own self-creation (providing the groundwork for freedom and self-actualization). Materialism highlights "the original goodness and equal intellectual endowment of man, the great significance of industry, the justification of enjoyment, etc." and thus "necessarily materialism is connected with communism and socialism" (Marx & Engels, 1956, p. 176). Thus, the criticism of religion "disillusions man to make him think and act and shape his reality like a man who has been disillusioned and has come to reason, so that he will revolve round himself and therefore round his true sun" (Marx, 1992b, p. 42), and "ends with the teaching that *man is the highest essence for man*, hence with the *categorical imperative to overthrow all relations* in which man is a debased, enslaved, abandoned, despicable essence" (Marx, 1992b, p. 251).

Marx and Engels exhibit an analysis of religion more nuanced and complex than merely explaining all religion as *merely* false tools of the ruling classes. Marx recognizes that:

> Religious suffering is, at one and the same time, the expression of real suffering and a protest against real suffering. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people. (1992b, p. 244)

As much as the ruling class may want to determine the belief systems of the exploited in a straightforward manner, religious beliefs (like all beliefs) must be voluntarily adopted (at least in appearance and

behavior) by the exploited classes to be useful in maintaining class relations. This may come via exploited classes attempting to *appear* as though they have adopted particular religious ideologies (for example, where supported by coercion or custom) or otherwise actually internalizing said beliefs (the most ideal solution for the ruling classes). Of the myriad potential reasons for adoption of particular systems of religious belief, their promises of positive outcomes for their adherents (if followed correctly) regardless of the suffering in this (exploited) life is a significant "selling point" for believers. That is, even if life is impoverished, alienated, dangerous, meaningless, unjust, etc., religions provide a sense of community, and often a promise of justice, meaning, connectedness, and (Divine) advocacy.

Additionally, *through* those very promises of and claims to community, justice, meaning, connectedness, and Divine advocacy, religion (even Christianity) may become a resource in class struggle. Engels wrote that early Christianity resembled the "modern working-class movement" as "a movement of oppressed people: it first appeared as the religion of slaves and emancipated slaves, of poor people deprived of all rights, of peoples subjugated or dispersed by Rome" (Engels, 1957, p. 316). While religions may be developed and used against injustice and exploitation, Marx and Engels simultaneously maintain that they do so from an illusionary perspective that "misrecognizes" the causes of and solutions to suffering, and thus tend to reproduce alienation (even if in a different form). For example, in the *Communist Manifesto*, Marx and Engels argue:

> Nothing is easier than to give Christian asceticism a Socialist tinge. Has not Christianity declaimed against private property, against marriage, against the State? Has it not preached in the place of these, charity and poverty, celibacy and mortification of the flesh, monastic life and Mother Church? Christian Socialism is but the holy water with which the priest consecrates the heart-burnings of the aristocrat. (Marx, 1992f, p. 89)

Thus, Marx and Engels simultaneously recognize the radical potential of religions as weapons in class struggle *simultaneous* to maintaining a firm critique of the alienating tendencies of transcendent religious beliefs.

Marx and Engels' critiques of religion are thus far more complex than simply believing religions to be empirically false. Religion shares with other ideological institutions its "last instance" subordination to the material prerequisites of continued production and reproduction,

just as it shares a status as a site of class struggle. Religion is unique for the breath, depth, and diversity of its claims – religions take stances on issues such as the nature of reality, the afterlife, absolute right and wrong, and the like. As committed materialists, Marx and Engels critique religion for generating empirically false, illusionary answers, through positing explanations transcendentally beyond the realm of experience. Religion is in their view a product of human invention in which human capacities, goodness, and potential are abstracted into a transcendental realm with entities to which humanity is subject. Religious beliefs are adopted from the needs of the believers – alienated and exploited, they seek solace in a system of beliefs that promises justice, community, and meaning. In Christianity, one central form this takes is in a belief in an absolute, perfect deity dictating humanity's eternal destination – belief and practices send one either to Heaven or Hell.

6 Marx and Engels on Hell

A Marxian analysis of the concept of "Hell" as a unique concept can at this point usefully focus on two aspects – (1) a contrast of the concept of Heaven with the concept of Hell (as the two primary "poles" of traditional Christian afterlife theology, focusing on what distinguishes the latter from the former), and (2) an analysis of the concept of "Hell" in terms of Marx's own explicit critique (of ideology in general and religion in particular). The former will serve as a useful way to move beyond a mere emphasis on Marxian critiques of transcendental afterlife beliefs, and to further allow expansion into a Marxian critique of the aspects of the concept of Hell that are unique to it alone (if any). Both the concept of Heaven and the concept of Hell remain equally subject to rejection by Marx from a variety of factors at face value. Marx would first of all posit, as a materialist, that as transcendental and idealist afterlife-destinations both Heaven and Hell are (1) empirically false, (2) the product of human invention, which emerge and develop over time due to a variety of factors, including (3a) attempts to explain and understand factors outside their control (such as, the facts of suffering and death), and (3b) changes in and struggles over social relations (alternately, as a source of justification or critique of various possible social relations), and which further develop (3c) against the background of pre-existing ideological and material terrain, generating the conditions of the current intellectual struggles. Marx and Engels would thus begin by rejecting both concepts for alienating humanity and obscuring social reality.

7 Heaven and Hell as promises of justice

While belief in *Heaven*, to reiterate our prior discussed themes, would easily be subject to critique for Marx and Engels, they do have sympathy for the suffering of believers. Exploited and alienated, many individuals emotionally need the certainty in the inevitability of justice and meaning that the concept of Heaven provides. Belief in God can serve a complex function in this regard – on the one hand, it can potentially cause strength through belief in a universe governed by the dictates of mercy, love, and justice (which *can* mobilize dissent against power relations, while organizing a community through which dissent can occur). On the other hand, belief in a transcendent God and, in particular, the reality of Heaven can potentially stifle dissent and struggle for reasons beyond the mere possibility that they may support power relations (through the content of associated beliefs directly justifying class relations).

Suffering and exploitation in this world are more palatable if one believes that one may have Divine justice in this life by the hands of a transcendent Deity; or, failing that, that suffering and exploitation will end forever, and be replaced by bliss, absolute welfare, meaning, and connection in the afterlife. Marx and Engels' "critique of Heaven" specifically centers on the illusory nature of that "solution" to the problem of suffering – reliance on other-worldly solutions to real suffering both fails to compensate for real suffering (i.e. if there is no Heaven, there is no other-worldly realm of bliss) and frequently fails to end real suffering (appeasing sufferers with false promises rather than calling them to transform the conditions that cause their suffering). Indeed:

> The abolition of religion as the illusory happiness of the people is the demand for their real happiness. To call on them to give up their illusions about their condition is to call on them to give up a condition that requires illusions. The criticism of religion is, therefore, in embryo, the criticism of that vale of tears of which religion is the halo.
>
> Criticism has plucked the imaginary flowers on the chain not in order that man shall continue to bear that chain without fantasy or consolation, but so that he shall throw off the chain and pluck the living flower. (Marx, 1992b, p. 244)

But, while belief in Heaven serves as the *soul of soulless conditions* – a promise that this world's troubles can be eternally over, and a source of

comfort and a guarantee of happiness in the "next life," what is the role of *Hell* in Marx and Engels' thought?

In contrast to the comfort brought by the concept of Heaven, the concept of Hell provides an object to fear which the believer tries to avoid. There is no personal comfort – merely an active threat against disbelief and the violation of religious imperatives. There is the possibility of Hell providing indirect comfort, through the belief that Hell will provide some level of justice for the wrongs of this world, guaranteed through the hypothesized probability of various transgressions sending individuals to Hell and contributing towards an otherworldly feeling that "justice" will be accomplished. The dual roles of Heaven and Hell towards this feeling of otherworldly justice is clear, for example, in the Second Epistle to the Thessalonians, attributed to Paul:

> God is just: He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you **7** and give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well. This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from Heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. **8** He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. **9** They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might **10** on the day he comes to be glorified in his holy people and to be marveled at among all those who have believed. This includes you, because you believed our testimony to you. (2 Thessalonians 6–10, NIV)

Paul appeals to both aspects of otherworldly Divine justice after this life – God will eternally relieve the suffering of believers and eternally punish those who disobey Him and do not believe in the divinity of Jesus. Thus, belief in Hell can serve the same ideological function as a belief in faith, works, justice, or suffering resulting in a blissful eternity for oneself or others in the afterlife – the believer should rest secure that justice emerges *after* this realm, rather than working to achieve justice in this life. While "abandon attempts towards justice" is not essential to all forms of Christian doctrine, it is a significant tendency in Christian belief to hold justice after this life as God's prerogative rather than a pursuit believers are entitled to, as is found directly in Paul's Epistle to the Romans:

> Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay,"[a] says the Lord. (Romans 12:19, NIV)

This has influenced, for example, the more radical variants of Christian pacifism which would prohibit violent responses to coercion even in the cases of clear self-defense against sometimes extreme levels of violence.

Beyond its contribution towards the "outsourcing" of justice (which it shares as the flip-side of beliefs in Heaven), the belief in Hell simultaneously inspires fear in believers, providing a powerful mechanism of control, which justifies in many instances hierarchical social relations (the *stick* to Heaven's *carrot*). For example:

> Do not allow a sorceress to live." (Exodus 22:18, NIV)
>
> Whoever sacrifices to any god other than the Lord must be destroyed. (Exodus 22: 20)
>
> I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent. (1 Timothy 2:12)
>
> Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord. (Ephesians 5:2)
>
> Slaves, submit yourselves to your masters with all respect, not only to the good and gentle but also to the cruel. (1 Peter 2:18)
>
> In the same way also the men, giving up natural intercourse with women, were consumed with passion for one another. Men committed shameless acts with men and received in their own persons the due penalty for their error. (Romans 1:27)

Each of these quotes easily justifies hierarchical social relations – the first two promoting the Judeo-Christian deity over other systems of belief and spiritual practices; the second two promoting strict patriarchal social relations; and the last often used to justify heterosexism and homophobia. Similarly, the Bible can easily be used to justify existing property relations via the admonitions against theft (to the extent of justifying slavery in the latter):

> You shall not steal. (Exodus 20: 15)
>
> Anyone who steals must certainly make restitution, but if they have nothing, they must be sold to pay for their theft. (Exodus 22:3)

Quotes such as these, while flexible (theft in the abstract being violations against whatever the "appropriate" property relations are), give strong ideological justifications for capitalist property relations, and even debt-bondage and direct slavery.

Thus, belief in Hell, like belief in a transcendent just God and in Heaven, provides a set of false securities that justice is assured without struggle in this life (though, like most ideologies, it has a complex history as a flexible tool in the class struggle), with belief in Heaven and Hell directly promising the possibility of extra-worldly justice in the afterlife. Where dominant variants of religion support hierarchical social relations along a number of axes – as Christianity can be used with relevant flexibility given the diversity of "authoritative" quotes and ambiguity in interpretations – emphases on *either* faith or works can support and mask these hierarchical social relations. Emphases on works require assent to the dominant interpretation of commands, often at least consistent with dominant social relations, while emphases on faith require steadfast acceptance of the authority of the transcendent metaphysical order (and subjection to its dictates by common extension). This allows the concepts of Heaven and Hell to serve as guarantors of these social relations and explanations regarding human potential, agency, justice, and the like, as they are promised rewards for subjection to religious dictates (including said dominant social relations) and threatened punishments for transgressions. Finally, both the belief in Heaven and the belief in Hell alienate humanity by taking the ultimate destiny of humanity firmly out of human hands, limiting its capacity for self-creation and potential command of its own destiny (which Marx saw as central to the definition of human nature).

While the concept of Hell consequently serves many of the same functions of the concept of Heaven as a mirrored version, the portions of religious beliefs to which Marx is sympathetic (its status, for example, as the heart of a heartless world and the soul of soulless conditions), take perverse and debased forms in the concept of Hell. The hopefulness (albeit illusory) present in the idea of Heaven is replaced by (a) *fear* of the idea of Hell and eternal damnation, and (b) potentially debased *hope* that one may attain justice by the eternal damnation (and implied unimaginable suffering) of the "wicked" and those who have wronged one. In short, while both Heaven and Hell serve in a number of ways as guarantors of hierarchical social relations, Hell is uniquely absent any of the positive aspects present in the idea of Heaven (i.e. their psychologically soothing components, even if illusory in Marx's analysis), but replaces the soothing components with a combination of fear and perverted, corrupted "hope," that alienates individuals further from others.

Conclusion

The concept of "Hell" as a particular realm where wicked souls are eternally damned and perpetually suffer emerged in postexilic Judaism, specifically through explorations of the meaning of a "covenant" with the transcendent creator Yahweh (against a background of influence by other religious traditions). As we have seen, the concept of Hell would be subject to critique by Marx and Engels on a number of levels. The concept of Hell in particular is central to Christian theology (though it should be said that many various historical faiths outside the Judeo-Christian traditions have had conceptions of "negative afterlives" of some form, and many critiques of religion and Hell would possibly apply to them as well). Consequently, a final account of Marx and Engels' thoughts on Hell would include critiques of religion, Christianity in particular, and of Hell as a particular belief within the Christian tradition.

In common contemporary Christianity, Hell is the realm to which individuals are eternally damned for either the commitment of particular unrepented sins, or alternately, for unbelief in (1) the divinity of Jesus Christ, (2) His redemptive sacrifice on behalf of a fallen humanity, and (3) other associated and metaphysically central common tenets of mainstream Christian faith. Thus, Hell in Judeo-Christian theology is the ultimate negative guarantor of Christian belief – the "carrot" of Heaven promotes adherence to religious beliefs and tenets, while the "stick" of Hell provokes fear regarding the consequences of failing to do so (alongside a certainty that "sinful" individuals will suffer Hell in the afterlife).

First and foremost, Marx and Engels would argue that Hell and associated conceptual elements that underlie it are all false, and entirely the products of human invention and activity. Thus, there is (1) no transcendent creator Deity to judge humanity for goodness or wickedness, (2) no "sin" as the violation of Divine commandments, (3) no afterlife (positive or negative) to which saints or sinners are sent, and (4) specifically, no abode for eternal damnation. While the question of the relation of Marx to more *immanent* spiritual paths (such as variants of Buddhism or neo-paganism) is still outside the scope of this project (and thus open), Marx rejects any notions of divinity apart from and superior to humanity. In addition to the empirical falsity which Marx consistently attributes to the metaphysical, *religious* alienation separates humanity from their its potential and locks it into subservience – transcendent religion must be rejected.

While Marx and Engels further recognized the instrumental role of religion as a potential (albeit illusory) basis for meaning, connection, solace, and as a site of class struggle (by which individuals can potentially connect and pursue this-worldly justice), the forms of religion that become "ruling" ideas are predominantly consistent in their most popular forms with the "ruling" class relations. Thus, religions, like other forms of ideology, tend to be at least compatible with, if not directly supportive of, dominant relations of production (and often other hierarchical social relations).

Positive and negative sets of normative "rules" are often utilized by ruling classes (and others atop varied social hierarchies to justify said hierarchies); as we have seen, Christianity is no different. In the Judeo-Christian tradition, it is first believed that the hierarchical social relations which exist are directly put in place by a transcendent and perfect creator Deity, thus perfect and absolutely normatively justified; and, secondarily, it is believed that such a perfect Deity has the justification, will, and power to send souls after death to eternal bliss or eternal suffering. This makes humanity believe that their fate is ultimately subject to the control of an external entity, and thus their capacity to build their own selves and circumstances through their own activity (and with others) is significantly stunted and externally determined. In effect, human beings are put into the ultimate master/slave relationship with Yahweh – they exist to please and appease Yahweh for eternal bliss, lest they be tormented, hypothetically, forever. In that regard, belief in the afterlife – Heaven or Hell – serves as the ultimate guarantor of hierarchical social relations, including class relations.

In effect, this means the concepts of Heaven and Hell both normatively reinforce (with ultimate cognitive stakes) all the aforementioned ways in which religions are alienating, ideological, and support hierarchical class relations. The distinction between the concepts of Heaven and Hell, then, lies in the nature of their differences. As a theorized place of absolute bliss and Divine connection, Heaven provides the promise of joy and justice to the good believer in the next life. It consequently provides *de facto* discouragement of the transformation of "real suffering" in this life; but Marx nonetheless recognizes the fact that belief in it results from a psychological need in the oppressed for solace and the promise of justice (and, further, that it can be utilized in the class struggle in some form).

Hell, on the other hand, provides both (1) direct fear, and alternately, (2) indirect hope, but of a perverse kind – it is not hope in improved

condition and justice for oneself or loved ones in this life or the next, but a "hope" in justice via eternal damnation for the "sinful." Engels captures this in his discussions of the biblical Apocalypse and the associated final judgment (particularly the aftermath in which it is promised that the defeated fallen ones, and the persecutors of the people of the Lord, will suffer eternal damnation):

> So here it is not yet a question of a "religion of love," of "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you," etc. Here undiluted revenge is preached, sound, honest revenge on the persecutors of the Christians. So it is in the whole of the book. The nearer the crisis comes, the heavier the plagues and punishments rain from the Heavens and with all the more satisfaction John announces that the mass of humanity will not atone for their sins, that new scourges of God must lash them, that Christ must rule them with a rod of iron and tread the wine-press of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God, but that the impious still remain obdurate in their hearts. (Engels, 1957, pp. 337–8)

In short, while both Heaven and Hell provide support and solace, they do so for different reasons. The former provides hope that a life in accordance with central religious precepts will guarantee the favor of Yahweh, such that Heaven is achieved; while the latter provides no solace, but rather guarantees social relations through fear, and its "hope" comes in the perverse form of the hope that the perceived enemies of oneself or the Divine face torment in the afterlife. Ultimately, the concept of Hell provides the ultimate guarantor of hierarchical social relations and class society – the same falsity and normative justification of false, alienating, and ideological religious beliefs, without the "benefits" of Heaven, replacing them with fear and a darker, perverse variant of "hope."

So, what to do about the concept of Hell? Marx and Engels would argue that a central part of transcending class society, hierarchical social relations, and the alienation that accompanies transcendental religious belief, involves the overcoming of religion in general:

> The enemies of progress *outside* the mass are precisely those *products* of *self-debasement*, *self-rejection* and *self-estrangement* of the *mass* which have been endowed with independent being and a life of their *own*. The mass therefore rises against its *own* deficiency when it rises

> against the independently existing *products* of its *self-debasement* just as man, turning against the existence of God, turns against his *own religiousity*. But as those *practical* self-estrangements of the mass exist in the real world in an outward way, the mass must fight them in an *outward* way. It must by no means consider these products of its self-estrangement as mere *ideal* fancies, mere *estrangements* of *self-consciousness*, and must not wish to abolish *material* estrangement by a purely *inward spiritual* action. [...] But to rise it is not enough to do so *in thought* and to leave hanging over our *real sensual* head the *real palpable* yoke that cannot be subtilized away with ideas. (Marx & Engels, 1956, p. 111)

Overcoming the notion of a transcendent metaphysical order to which we are subject and from which we are separated is a central part of the project towards a new world, a classless society. One of the central doctrines to overthrow, from a Marxian perspective, is the doctrine of Hell, and its instilment of obedience through fear (alongside its associated doctrines, such as the belief in original sin and human fallenness, which darkens one's conception of possibilities).

Insofar as Marx's project centers around (1) discovering those forces which keep humanity from the "fulfillment of his species-life" (Parsons, 1964, p. 54) down-to-the-root, and (2) working to transform them into forces which facilitate that species-life (the capacity for free self-creation and unalienated social and natural relations), it is insufficient to merely try individualist or ideological-level changes against alienating religious traditions. Marx would argue that human liberation requires an active and *real* campaign, simultaneously, against (1) the notion of Hell itself as an illusory chain around human necks, (2) the religious concept of a transcendent and perfect deity/spiritual order as the rule-giver for, judge of, master over human lives, and (3) a concrete and real transformation of the relations of production, state structures, indeed the whole foundation of society, in order to overcome the *real* bases for religious alienation. As Marx argued in his Eighth Thesis on Feuerbach, "All mysteries which lead theory to mysticism find their rational solution in human practice and in the comprehension of this practice" (Marx, 1992a, p. 423) – just as *real* human liberation requires *real* transformations in social relations and human practices, alienating religious traditions require *real* transformations as well – and one concept which would have no place in a liberating and unalienated set of social relations is the concept of Hell, the last guarantor of hierarchical social relations.

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12

(All) politics (Are) from the Devil: Taking Agamben to Hell (and Back?)

Kristof K.P. Vanhoutte

In remembrance of the victims of the Charlie Hebdo massacre

On 8 March 2009, the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben gave that year's first *Conférences de Carême* (lectures held during Lent [*carême*]) at the Parisian Cathedral of Notre-Dame. The title of his lecture was *The Church and the Kingdom*. After having dwelt on St. Paul's understanding of messianic time, Agamben concluded with the following remark: "I say the following with words carefully weighed: nowhere on earth today is a legitimate power to be found; even the powerful are convinced of their own illegitimacy" (Agamben, 2012, p. 40). Although Agamben primarily has the Roman Catholic Church in his aim, his words are, however, of a more general nature: "nowhere *on earth*" (Agamben, 2012, p. 40, emphasis added), Agamben claims, is there power to be found that is legitimate. Not only are his words "carefully weighed," they are also a repetition. In fact, already in "Notes on Politics," a chapter written in 1992 and included in *Means without end. Notes on Politics*, Agamben made a similar statement. He claims there that "[C]ontemporary politics is this devastating experiment that disarticulates and empties institutions and beliefs, ideologies and religions, identities and communities all throughout the planet, so as then to rehash and reinstate their definitively nullified form" (Agamben, 2000, p. 109). But how should these "carefully weighed" claims be understood? According to Agamben the illegitimate power, or the enterprise of emptying and nullifying executed by contemporary politics, is "a secularized parody of the Church's incessant deferral of the Last Judgement" (Agamben, 2012, p. 40). This means basically that contemporary politics has the aspiration for a "complete juridification and commodification of human relations" that culminates in a "legal institution which knows neither interruption nor end"

(Agamben, 2012, pp. 40–1). There is, however, only one concept that covers this operation to perfection: Hell.

Although maybe these "sentences" are somewhat surprising, it has to be said that Agamben is obviously not the first to think something of this nature. A connection between earthly government and Satan's kingdom is already made in the Old Testament and is also present in early Christianity. Already in the *Gospel of John* we find the affirmation that Satan is the ruler of this world (*John* 12, 31; 14, 30; 16, 11) and still in the 17th century Hell is merely a more perverted version of earthly government (this idea was expressed, for example, by the English preacher Thomas Adams). These observations are now generally considered to be absurd, and are swiftly dismissed; but maybe this should not be done so easily. The Irish moral philosopher Gordon Graham has, interestingly and quite convincingly, argued not so long ago that theological concepts such as the Devil (Satan), or demonic possession, should not simply be discharged. They do offer, for example, an explanation of grave moral evil where natural science seems to lack one (is the Holocaust just the result of madness – of the whole German people? – or does the concept of "evil" not offer a better understanding of that horror? (cf. Graham, 2001)).

For as much as Graham's reasoning would be worth discussing, we cannot do this as morality is not the framework of this text. We do, however, follow him in taking seriously the just-mentioned theological concepts: reframing them, however, in another application. In fact, maybe they not only function as possible explanations for moral evil, but could also function as models against which certain contemporary practices can be valued. If a certain practice conforms with a series of qualifications generally considered as belonging to, for example, Paradise, then one could think this particular practice worth following. If this would work for Paradise, then Hell could also be considered. If certain practices share a peculiarly high number of parameters applicable to Hell, then one could expect this practice to be not particularly illuminating or "edifying" for human life.

In what follows, we will confront four fundamental "ideas" present in various works of Agamben that can be considered as similar parameters or "premonitions" of Hell. If we were living in Hell – a thought we will discuss in the conclusion of this text – then these four "ideas" or "premonitions" would be constituent with it. These four parameters or premonitions are: (1) the hidden link between power and potentiality is that power is the isolation of potentiality from its act. This also causes a perversion of means and ends. (2) If some kind of power can already be considered wicked because it separates people from their potentialities,

it becomes even more insidious by affecting our "impotentiality:" that is, our potentiality to not-be. (3) The devil is essentially impotent and the demonic is an inadequate reaction to the possibility of not-being. (4) The idea of eternal government (which is the paradigm of modern politics) is truly infernal.

Before engaging these premonitions of Hell, two final introductory remarks. First, the main focus of this text is the work of the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben. Second, although the readings we propose will mainly focus on the four "premonitions" of Hell, some of the fundamental themes of Agamben's work will also pass in review: so, in the end, this text will offer a broad understanding of the totality of Agamben's philosophy.

1 Potentiality

In his *Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle makes a somewhat peculiar comment regarding the tasks of the political philosopher. The Stagirite states that "[I]t is part of the job of the political philosopher to study pleasure and pain" (Aristotle, 2011, 1152b). That a treatise on ethics should discuss pleasure and pain should not surprise. That this discussing of pleasure and pain should also appertain to political philosophy is, however, rather peculiar. Attempting to discern the reasons for this Aristotelian claim is not in the scope of this text. What is of importance is that Agamben has taken Aristotle's claim very seriously. In fact, according to Agamben, it is precisely in Aristotle's understanding of pleasure that the two categories of potentiality and act lose their obscurity. This becoming transparent of the categories of potentiality and act, albeit just for an instant, will have some very serious implications on the understanding of politics and power for Agamben (cf. Agamben, 1995, p. 71).[1]

By mentioning the categories of potentiality and act we have immediately stumbled upon a fundamental aspect of Agamben's philosophy. As understanding this aspect of Agamben's philosophy will be of great interest for all the "premonitions" of Hell, it seems important to rest with these concepts for a short while.

In his justly acclaimed introduction to the work of Giorgio Agamben, the American scholar Leland de la Durantaye writes that, if Bergson's claim that all philosophers have but one idea truly theirs is correct, then for Agamben that idea would be potentiality (cf. de la Durantaye, 2009, p. 4). Agamben has never made a secret of the fundamentality of this idea for his thinking, nor that it derives from his reading of Aristotle. In a book of essays revealingly entitled *Potentialities*, Agamben states

that "I could state the subject of my work as an attempt to understand the meaning of the verb 'can' [*potere*]" (Agamben, 1999, p. 177). It is, however, not because Agamben is clear about the origin of this subject of his work that the full range of the same is immediately and easily deductable. A closer look is required.

As Agamben explains, in a small chapter entitled "Bartleby" in *The Coming Community*, and as readers of Aristotle know, there are two modes in which potentiality is articulated. There is the potentiality to be, and, secondly, the potentiality to not be (cf. Agamben, 1993, p. 34). Agamben, for his part, is mostly interested in the potentiality to not-be – it is important here that he writes the potentiality to not-be with a hyphen –. That Agamben's interest goes mainly to the potentiality to not-be is because it evinces the peculiar nature of the relation between potentiality and act. In fact, whereas in the first mode (potentiality to be) potentiality is simply articulated in its passage or transition/transformation into act, impotentiality (the second mode in which potentiality articulates itself), or the potentiality to not-be, is more complicated than it being the negation of the simple or first mode of articulation of potentiality. Impotentiality, for Agamben, is not a mere privation or absence of potentiality itself. Impotentiality, the potentiality to not-be, has, in fact, no relation to actualization at all and cannot, as such, be understood in the context of actuality. It is, as Agamben himself explains, "a potentiality that has as its object potentiality itself, a *potential potentiae*" (Agamben, 1993, p. 35). Or, to say it differently, what is at stake in the potentiality to not-be is not the actualization of any potentiality but remaining pure potentiality.

For Agamben, and we (re-)turn now to our inquiry into the first premonition of Hell, the study of pleasure unveils the traditional opacity in which the relation between potentiality and act are covered. What the study of pleasure evinces – besides its being revealing only with reference to the first modality of potentialities articulation (section 2 will focus on the particularity of impotentiality/the potentiality to not-be) – is the "hidden links between power and potentiality" (Agamben, 1995, p. 71). In fact, if, as Aristotle claims, pleasure's form is that which at every moment is fulfilled, perpetually "actualized" [*in atto*] and never takes place in time, then potentiality, which is never "actualized"[2] [*in atto*], is the contrary of pleasure and will basically be pain and duration. Potentiality thus needs to pass into act if it wants its pain to vanish. But, as Agamben claims, there are forces that attempt to halt this passing into act of potentiality. According to Agamben, what is known as power bases itself on these forces. Power is "the isolation of potentiality from

its act, the organization of potentiality. Power bases its authority on the upgathering of pain, it literally leaves the pleasure of man unfulfilled" (Agamben, 1995, p. 71). What gets lost with power's isolation of potentiality from act is, however, not just pleasure. There is something much worse that takes place with power's "monstrous equivocations," namely "[I]n perverting the strict link between means and ends, [...], it mistakes the height of pain – omnipotence – for the greatest perfection" (Agamben, 1995, p. 71). The full scope of this "monstrosity" can only be found in the double meaning of "omnipotence" (something the English language is, unfortunately and contrary to Italian, not able to render explicit). Power, through its perversion of means and ends, not only considers omnipotence the greatest perfection, but, in its perverted form of greatest perfection, aims at the culmination of all potentialities – omni-potentialities (potentiality in Italian is "*potenza*," "*onnipotenza*" omnipotence is thus also omni-potentiality). This means that, at the heights of its omnipotence, power claims that all is potentially possible, but only as long as one does not attempt to put it (all potentialities) into action.

2 Power

"Power is everywhere, [...] it comes from everywhere [...]" claimed the French philosopher Michel Foucault (Foucault, 1978, p. 93). For Foucault, power is, as can be deducted from this statement, not to be primarily understood in the "sovereign" sense. Foucault, however, does not intend to minimize the importance, nor the efficacy, of sovereign power. It is just that sovereign power does not exhaust every possible expression of power (cf. Foucault, 2001, p. 36). If anything it is characteristic of a precedent historical episteme. For Foucault "[P]ower," in fact, "is not an institution, and not a structure; neither is it a certain strength we are endowed with; it is the name that one attributes to a complex strategical situation in a particular society" (Foucault, 1978, p. 93). "Power," as such, "is not a substance. Neither is it a mysterious property whose origin must be delved into. Power is only a certain type of relation between individuals" (Foucault, 1990, p. 83). What is thus called for, according to Foucault, is to break free from the "theoretical privilege of law and sovereignty, if we wish to analyze power within the concrete and historical framework of its operation" (Foucault, 1978, p. 90).

As Leland de la Durantaye so cunningly says: "Agamben listens carefully to this advice – and does precisely the opposite" (de la Durantaye, 2009, p. 210). The historical shift argued for by Foucault, a shift from

sovereign to disciplinary power (and biopolitics), needs to be corrected, according to Agamben (cf. Agamben, 1998, p. 12). Agamben disagrees that disciplinary power (the power, together with biopolitics, typical of our modern society for Foucault) is separated from sovereign power by a historical divide. Just like sovereign power, disciplinary power is as old as (Western) politics. And one of the more worrying signs of our modern democracy – Agamben would qualify it as modern democracy's paradigm[3] – is not the rise of disciplinary power but the existence of a "zone of irreducible indistinction" (Agamben, 1998, p. 12) between sovereign and disciplinary power (and its "twin" biopolitics). As Agamben writes in *Homo Sacer*: "the inclusion of bare life in the political realm constitutes the original – if concealed – nucleus of sovereign power" (Agamben, 1998, p. 11). It is precisely in this context of the indistinction between sovereign and disciplinary power that the second premonition of Hell can be fully grasped – this second premonition, as we stated in section 1, will treat the second modality of potentiality's articulation.

To rapidly resume, the first premonition claimed that power isolates potentiality from its act, enabling, as such, not only omnipotence but also omni-potentiality. Power's operations, however, do not finish here. In fact, if we want to understand in full Agamben's affirmation regarding the illegitimacy of political power, another aspect needs to be confronted. Power, in fact, not only attempts to relate to potentiality (and its act(-ualization)) but also to impotentiality, to the potentiality to not-be. For Agamben this is an even more worrisome aspect of power's techniques in our contemporary societies: as he claims in "On What We Can Not Do," a short text included in the collection of essays entitled *Nudities* (cf. Agamben, 2011, pp. 43–5). In this very short treatise Agamben elaborates the claim, made by Gilles Deleuze in the famous TV series *L'Abécédaire*, that power is wicked as it separates people from their potentialities (cf. Deleuze, 1988).

In this television interview Deleuze argued, almost identically with Agamben's reasoning from the previous section, that joy is everything that consists in fulfilling (a) potency, potentiality, or *puissance*. Sadness (*tristesse*), the contrary of joy, as Deleuze continues, is being separated from one's potencies, potentialities, or *puissance*. There are, in fact, still according to Deleuze, no bad or wrong *puissances* – or potentialities. The only thing that can be considered bad or wrong is the impeding of potentialities. As such, the one thing that can be considered as possibly wrong or bad is power (*pouvoir*). Power is wrong (Deleuze uses the term *méchant* here: that is, wicked) as it always separates people (*le pouvoir*

sépare toujours) from what they are (or could be) able to do. Power is wicked because it separates people from their potentialities.

Although it might seem that we are here merely repeating what has been said earlier, the fact that Deleuze's main source for his discussion on joy in connection with power and potentialities is not Aristotle but the Dutch philosopher Baruch Spinoza makes for a different turn. In fact, for Spinoza the concept of joy was fundamentally related to another concept without which joy itself had little meaning. This concept is resistance, a concept and understanding that re-unites Foucault and Agamben. In fact, for Foucault this was fundamental when describing power (in its disciplinary analysis) in terms of power relations. As Foucault said in one of his last interviews: "[…] in power relations there is necessarily the possibility of resistance because if there were no possibility of resistance (…), there would be no power relations at all" (Foucault, 1997, p. 292).

Also for Agamben, concluding our second premonition, the question of resistance is of fundamental importance. In fact, for as much as Agamben obviously agrees with Deleuze, he goes even further. He states, as anticipated, that there is an even more insidious operation of power possible: namely, separating human beings from their "impotentiality." And it is exactly here that power, ironically defined as democratic, prefers to act (cf. Agamben, 2011, p. 45). That this is the most insidious form of (democratic) power relates to the fact that "nothing makes us more impoverished and less free than this estrangement from impotentiality" (Agamben, 2011, p. 45). With power keeping us separated from what we can do (our potentiality), we would be less free but we could still resist. With power separating us also from our impotentiality this last possible rescue fails, causing us to lose all our capacity to resist (to do … not – to refrain from doing; (cf. Agamben, 2011, p. 45)).

3 The demon/daimon

The third premonition of Hell also starts with happiness/joy. This time, however, happiness is merely a starting point of which we will take immediate leave. *Eudaimonia*, the ancient Greeks' term for happiness, which can be freely translated as the good spirit, the good demon, is this fleeting beginning. We, however, immediately suspend the goodness (the "*eu*") and remain with the *daimonion*, the spirit – the demonic. But who/what is this *daimon* or demon?

As Diotima, a learned woman from Mantinea, taught Socrates in Plato's *Symposium*, Eros/Love is a great *daimon*, an intermediate between a god and a mortal (cf. Plato, 2008, 202e). Eros is, as Diotima continues,

the son of Poros and Penia, power and poverty, and this implies that his nature is "neither that of an immortal nor that of a mortal." As such, "in the course of a single day he will live and flourish [...], then after a time he will start to fade away" (Plato, 2008, 203e). Being bipolar, the *daimon*, the demon, is, however, first inclined toward the negative part of his duplicity. In fact, as Agamben recalls in one of his typically erudite divergences, Aeschylus's Agamemnon presents the demon as the "lacerator of the heart, crouched as a wild beast over the body of the dead man" (Agamben, 1999a, p. 118). And, as Agamben adds including the "positive" aspect: "[O]nly insofar as it is what divides can the *daimon* also be what assigns a fate and what destines" (Agamben, 1999a, p. 118).

It is within this context that we should read the take on the demonic by Agamben. In the short hermetic treatise entitled "Demonic," Agamben wonders why, in Kafka's as well as in Walser's writings – and both are described by Agamben as "this century's two most lucid observers of the incomparable horror that surrounded them" (Agamben, 1993, p. 31) – the demonic is lacking. None of the characters in their oeuvre "would ever figure in a demonological catalogue" (Agamben, 1993, p. 31). If anything, the authors' texts and characters remind us of that tendency, present in certain heretical thoughts, that Satan actually needs our help, should be saved by us. Following Spinoza, Agamben states that, if there is a demonic element present in Kafka and Walser's writings it is in the conviction that the Devil is "the weakest of creatures [...]; essentially impotent" and basically in need of "our help and our prayers" (Agamben, 1993, p. 31). Or, said in a highly allegorical way, "the Devil is nothing other than divine impotence or the power of not-being in God" (Agamben, 1993, p. 31).

Once more we are confronted with the category of impotence: the potentiality to not-be that is so important in Agamben's work. As the demonic, the *daimonion*, is bipolar – it consists of the duplicity that we discovered in the great *daimon* Eros/Love, or in the words of Aeschylus's Agamemnon, where the demon is first the lacerator who divides before he assigns fate –, the Greek *daimon* only becomes the Satan-like devil, who is the source of evil (the great tempter), through an "inadequate reaction when faced with this demonic element" (Agamben, 1993, p. 31). Only when we flee from our impotence, or "when we adopt it as a weapon," does it become the root of evil; evil which consists in the construction of a "malevolent power that oppresses those who show us their weakness" (Agamben, 1993, p. 32). Or, as Agamben claims in a similar short chapter dedicated to ethics: "[T]he only evil consists [...] in

the decision to remain in a deficit of existence, to *appropriate* the power to not-be as a substance and a foundation beyond existence" (Agamben, 1993, p. 44 – emphasis added). As such, we fail "our innermost possibility of not-being," and "we fall away from the only thing that makes love possible" (Agamben, 1993, p. 32).

Following this line of thought, evil – the Devil – is the reduction of the *daimon* Eros/Love to his being the son of Penia, and in a constant state of fading without the possibility of coming fully to life. It is also the reduction of the *daimon* to being just the lacerator of hearts, always and constantly "crouched as a wild beast over the body of the dead man" (Agamben, 1999a, p. 118). The bipolar *daimon*, which is fundamentally related to happiness (*eudaimonia*), is thus reduced to the weakest of all creatures. The reduction of the *daimon* to the Satanic demon consists in the terribly mistaken conviction that creation is "the victorious struggle of a power to be against a power to not-be" (Agamben, 1993, p. 32). But this only leads to the cancelation or destruction of creation – which is obviously the aim of the Devil/Satan. Creation being, in Agamben's words, nothing else than "the impotence of God with respect to his own impotence, his allowing – being able to not not-be – a contingency to be [...] the birth in God of love" (Agamben, 1993, p. 32).

What is at stake in this third premonition of Hell is not the capacity of power to separate us from our impotentiality – this is what was at stake in the previous chapter – but the possibility of a frightening addition to this capacity of power. This *addendum* consists in the possibility of us being tempted (by evil, the Devil) to separate ourselves from our impotentiality, or capacity to do/be ... not. The importance of this aspect, especially in the context of this text, can be fully captured when we ponder the example offered by Agamben in the conclusion of this small treatise. In fact, as Agamben confesses, the extremely worrying model of this abuse of our own impotence is none other than Adolf Eichmann, that "absolutely banal man who was tempted to evil" (Agamben, 1993, p. 32). Hannah Arendt reassumed this problem with cold accuracy: "[T]he trouble with Eichmann was precisely that so many were like him, and that these many were neither perverted nor sadistic, that they were and still are, terribly and terrifyingly normal" (Arendt, 2006, p. 261).

4 Government

Just before Nietzsche tells the famous story about the madman who went looking for God in the marketplace in bright daylight with a lantern – a

story that is obviously an adaptation of the story told of Diogenes the Cynic who, in similar conditions, was looking for an honest man – he gives us another telling and widely known image. It regards the sailor who has burnt all the bridges and the land behind him and is now sailing the oceans. Although this image can be considered an allegory of freedom, Nietzsche cleverly points to the figurative fly in the ointment. True, the ocean does not always roar, but, as is the case in this tale, when all the land is destroyed, only then does one realize that the ocean is infinite. And as Nietzsche remarks: "there is nothing more terrible than the infinite" (Nietzsche, 1974, §124).[4]

The sixth chapter of Agamben's *The Kingdom and the Glory. For a Theological Genealogy of Economy and Government* has the intriguing title "Angelology and Bureaucracy." Contrary to what the concept of bureaucracy coupled with angelology might make one think – that, as Hannah Arendt cunningly described it, bureaucracy is that "form of government in which everybody is deprived of political freedom, of the power to act; for the rule by Nobody is not a no-rule, and where all are equally powerless we have a tyranny without a tyrant" (Arendt, 1969, p. 81) – what is at stake in this chapter mainly regards the question, a true *crux* for medieval writers, of what will happen to the angelic hierarchy after the final Judgment. The wonderfully intricate hair-splitting, so characteristic of mediaeval scholasticism, on the nature and function of the angelic hierarchy after Judgment day – its ceasing in its exercise of an office or ministry and its survival in its glory – is beyond the scope of this text. What is obviously of interest is what remains in its governmental or ministerial executing state: Hell.

As Agamben writes in the closing paragraphs: "[T]he evacuation of the angelic ministries after the Judgment demonstrates that the divine government of the world is structurally limited in time" (Agamben, 2011b, p. 163). Any form of government, understood according to Christian theology, only lasts, just like its concept of history, from the creation to the end of the world after Judgment (cf. Agamben, 2011b, p. 163). There is only one place conceived of by Christian theology that knows no end. In fact, "[T]he principle according to which the government of the world will cease with the Last Judgement has only one important exception [...]. It is the case of Hell" (Agamben, 2011b, p. 163). In fact, following Saint Thomas's pondering on the question to what happens after the final Judgment, Agamben affirms that for the Angelical Doctor, and this against those who think that all functions of government and ministry will cease, "the demons will carry out their juridical function as executors of the

infernal punishment for all eternity" (Agamben, 2011b, p. 164). As such, as Agamben's conclusion goes, "[…], the idea of eternal government (which is the paradigm of modern politics) is truly infernal" (Agamben, 2011b, p. 164).

Agamben's conviction that the idea of eternal government is the paradigm of modern politics is nothing new. Many authors have taken and defended a similar stance before him. In fact, Agamben's particular operation consists, first of all, in the simple fact that he combines what has been said before him, by some of the authors who have had a great influence on his thought, in a simple addition. Secondly, he literally brings together this idea of eternal government and its translation in Christian theology: Hell. We can discover, as parts of this Agambian addition, Walter Benjamin, Simone Weil, and Hannah Arendt – three authors who have had a great influence on Agamben.[5] Benjamin's input relates to his understanding of capitalism as a religion: that is, capitalism being a cult of permanent duration (cf. Benjamin, 2004, p. 288). Simone Weil's participation in the addition can be found in her comments on the exponential strengthening and expansion of political parties in the public space, the clear idolatry of party politics, and their bringing about of a complete reversal between means and ends (cf. Weil, 2013, pp. 23–5). Finally, there is Hannah Arendt, who is a frequently mentioned source for Agamben on various topics. On this occasion, what counts are her considerations on the leeway of the public space in our societies, caused by the failing of the party system as she theorized it at the end of her *On Revolution*, into mere administration (cf. Arendt, 1990, pp. 270–5).

If one does this Agambian mathematics, this simple addition,[6] and translates it into the language of Christian theology, then it is hard to arrive at a different outcome than the one proposed. If this is truly the paradigm of modern politics then "infernal" is the correct word to use. But, as we stated in the introduction, these considerations of Hell and the Devil are now considered absurd and swiftly dismissed. The point is, however, that all this easy dismissal only leads us to the same denunciation, made by Baudelaire's preacher, of who's wisdom even the Devil was afraid: "My dear brothers, never forget, […], that the finest of all the Devil's tricks was persuading you that he doesn't exist" (Baudelaire, 2008, p. 61)! To conclude, it is very intriguing to discover that Simone Weil claims that, if he had organized public life the Devil could not have imagined anything better than it being mainly occupied by party politics (cf. Weil, 2013, p. 33).

5 Conclusion

Before we put the final point which will end this writing, it seems important to briefly rehearse one final question that is probably lingering in the reader's mind. But let us begin with a very short resume. We started by arguing that power not only attempts to isolate every potentiality from its act (separating people from their potentialities), it also attempts to separate people from their impotentialities. This was, however, not all we discovered regarding power's operation. An even more insidious operation of power consists in tempting people to separate themselves from their impotentialities. This is the operation we described as the reduction of the *daimon* to the demon. Finally, we argued that the idea of an eternal government is infernal. We have, furthermore, and following Agamben, argued that all these elements are present in our contemporary political (even democratic) practices, and we have defined these four points as premonitions of Hell. This definition brings us to our final question: "Does Agamben truly believe that modern politics is making us live in Hell? Are we living in Hell?" For us to be able to answer, we have to turn to one final concept, to which we have already alluded, that is of fundamental importance in Agamben's writing: the "example," or the "paradigm."

Agamben has, on various occasions, underlined the singularity of the paradigm and "the paradoxical status of the example." In *The Coming Community* Agamben writes the following: "[N]either particular nor universal, the example is a singular object that presents itself as such, that *shows* its singularity. Hence the pregnancy of the Greek term, for example: *para-deigma*, that which is shown alongside" (Agamben, 1993, p. 10). This leads Agamben to the conclusion that "the proper place of the example is always beside itself, in the empty space in which its indefinable and unforgettable life unfolds" (Agamben, 1993, p. 10). The singularity of the example/paradigm can, however, only be understood through its relation to what it is an example of: that is, the group it exemplifies. In fact, as Agamben writes in a chapter entitled interestingly "What is a Paradigm?:" "If we now ask ourselves whether the rule can be applied to the example, the answer is not easy. In fact, the example is excluded from the rule not because it does not belong to the normal case but, on the contrary, because it exhibits its belonging to it. [...], the example is excluded through the exhibition of its inclusion" (Agamben, 2009b, p. 24). As such, as Agamben concludes, returning once more to the etymological origin of the example, "in this way, according to the

etymological meaning of the Greek term, it shows "beside itself" (*paradeiknymi*) both its own intelligibility and that of the class it *constitutes*" (Agamben, 2009b, p. 24 – emphasis added).

The example/paradigm is thus for Agamben that which constitutes a "group" or a "class" of "normal cases" that is precisely exemplified by the example. "[...] the paradigm," as Agamben writes, "is a singular case that is isolated from its context only insofar as, by exhibiting its own singularity, it makes intelligible a *new* ensemble, whose homogeneity it itself constitutes" (Agamben, 2009b, p. 18 – emphasis added). The Agambian paradigm is thus not to be understood as the paradigm described by Thomas Kuhn. A paradigm, for Agamben, is not that ensemble of common possession or assets that is shared by all the members of a certain group; nor is it a single element that serves as a common example or model (cf. Agamben, 2009b, p. 11). The paradigm is not what we already are, but it is a herald of what is to come. The paradigm, as Agamben explains over and over again, is that which we are tending to: what we are (dangerously) close to becoming.

In conclusion, if we now finally were to answer the question of whether Agamben truly believes we are living in Hell, the answer is obviously: no. However, it is not because something does not (yet) exist. And this is what we have attempted to elucidate, by explaining Agamben's usage of the paradigm, that it cannot come into being (very quickly). If contemporary politics continues its pursuit of the four "premonitions" of Hell we have discussed above, the reduction of the public sphere, or simply public life, into an inferno might come to be. This, however, is not a one-way street, and turning back is possible – although that road is not easy to tread upon as it seems to be against all the good intentions that pave the road to Hell, as the saying goes. A particularly sobering example, given by Agamben in *Remnants of Auschwitz*, renders the idea best. It is the story of a soccer match between members of the SS and representatives of the *Sonderkommando*.[7] During the game "[O]ther men of the SS and the rest of the squad are present at the game; they take sides, bet, applaud, urge the players on as if, rather than at the gates of Hell, the game were taking place on the village green" (Agamben, 1999b, p. 25). Agamben comments: "[T]his match might strike someone as a brief pause of humanity in the middle of an infinite horror. I, like the witness, instead view this match, this moment of normalcy, as the true horror of the camp" (Agamben, 1999b, p. 26). For Agamben "[...] that match is never over; it continues as if uninterrupted. It is the perfect and eternal cipher of the "grey zone" which knows no time and is in every place." Even we, "without knowing how, are spectators of that match,

which repeats itself in every match in our stadiums, in every television broadcast, in the normalcy of everyday life." As Agamben concludes: "[I]f we do not succeed in understanding that match, in stopping it, there will never be hope" (Agamben, 1999b, p. 26).

Notes

I wish to express great gratitude to my friend in philosophy, Lance Kirby, who has so carefully proofread this text.

1. It is not without importance that this argumentation is found in a chapter entitled "The Idea of Power."
2. I have slightly changed the translation on the two occasions I mention *actualized*. Michael Sullivan and Sam Whitsitt's translation states, respectively, "perpetually taking place" and "never enacted" whereas the Italian text reads: "*perpetuamente in atto*" and "*mai in atto*." I have chosen *actualized* as it remains faithful to what is at stake in this text, namely the nature of and relation between potentiality and act.
3. Agamben has a very unique understanding of the concept *paradigm*. For the moment, I will not comment on this peculiar understanding. I will come back to this in my conclusion.
4. I have changed the translation of the German *Furchtbareres*, from awesome to terrible. The element of "awe" included in the German word tends more to the awe-full than the awesome, as most translations state.
5. Although Simone Weil is generally not mentioned in the series of authors that have had an influence on Agamben's thought, it should not be forgotten that Agamben wrote a dissertation, which has remained unpublished, on Simone Weil.
6. That this addition contains not only political but also economic issues (Benjamin's referral to capitalism) is related (and justified) by our present political situation: be it what is called neo-liberalism or simply liberal democracy.
7. The *Sonderkommando*, the "special team," consisted of deportees who were responsible for managing the gas chambers and crematoria with everything that was related to that – everything from washing the corpses, extracting the gold teeth, cutting the (dead) women's hair, emptying the crematoria, and the dispersal of the ashes of the dead (cf. Agamben, 1999b, pp. 24–5).

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