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Issuant Views of Hell in Contemporary Anglo-American Theology





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ISSUANT VIEWS OF HELL IN CONTEMPORARY
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ABSTRACT

This problem of hell is a specific form of the problem of evil that can be expressed in terms of a set of putatively incompatible statements:

1. An omnipotent God could create a world in which all moral agents freely choose life with God.
2. An omnibenevolent God would not create a world with the foreknowledge that some (perhaps a significant proportion) of God's creatures would end up in hell.
3. An omniscient God would know which people will end up in hell.
4. Some people will end up forever in hell.

Since the late twentieth century, a number of British and North American philosophical theologians, inspired by C.S. Lewis, have developed a new approach to answering the problem of hell. Very little work has been done to systematize this category of perspectives on the duration, quality, purpose and finality of hell. Indeed, there is no consensus among scholars as to what such an approach should be called. In this work, however, I call this perspective *issuantism*.

Starting from the works of a wide range of *issuantist* scholars, I distill what I believe to be the essence of *issuantist* perspectives on hell: hell is a state that does not result in universal salvation and is characterized by the insistence that both heaven and hell must issue from the love of God, an affirmation of libertarian human freedom and a rejection of retributive interpretations of hell. These *sine qua non* characteristics form what I have labeled basic *issuantism*. I proceed to show that basic *issuantism* by itself does not provide an adequate answer to the problem of hell. The *issuantist* scholars themselves, however, recognize this weakness and add a wide range of possible supplements to their basic *issuantism*. Some of these supplemented versions of *issuantism* succeed in presenting reasonable answers to the problem of hell.

One of the key reasons for the development of *issuantist* views of hell is a perceived failure on the part of conditionalists, universalists and defenders of hell as eternal conscious torment to give adequate answers to the problem of hell. It is my conclusion, however, that with the addition of some of the same supplements, versions of conditionalism and hell as eternal conscious torment can be advanced that succeed just as well in presenting answers to

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the problem of hell as those advanced by issuantists, thus rendering some of the issuantist critique of non-issuantist perspectives on hell unfounded.

ABSTRAKT

Helvetets problem är en specifik form av ondskans problem som kan uttryckas med hjälp av följande till synes oförenliga påståenden:

1. En allsmäktig Gud skulle kunna skapa en värld där alla moraliska varelser frivilligt väljer att leva i gemenskap med Gud.
2. En fullständigt god Gud skulle inte skapa en värld där Gud redan på förhand vet att somliga (kanske rent av en stor andel) människor kommer att hamna i helvetet.
3. En allvetande Gud skulle veta vilka människor som kommer att hamna i helvetet.
4. Somliga människor kommer att hamna för evigt i helvetet.

Sedan slutet av 1900-talet har ett antal brittiska och nordamerikanska filosofiska teologer, inspirerade av C.S. Lewis, utvecklat ett nytt sätt att nalkas helvetets problem. Våldigt lite forskning har ägnats åt att systematisera den här sortens uppfattningar om helvetets varaktighet, beskaffenhet, ändamål och slutgiltighet. Forskare har inte ens kunnat enas om vad detta sätt att nalkas problemet ska kallas. I denna avhandling har jag valt att kalla det för *issuantism*.

Med utgångspunkt i en mängd *issuantist*ers skriftliga källor har jag renodlat vad jag betraktar som *issuantismens* kärna, nämligen att helvetet är ett tillstånd som inte leder till universell frälsning, och som kännetecknas av övertygelsen om att både himmel och helvete måste ha sitt ursprung i (*"issue from"*) Guds kärlek, i en libertariansk definition av mänsklig frihet och i en avvisning av alla tolkningar av helvetet som vedergällning. Dessa absolut nödvändiga egenskaper bildar tillsammans vad jag kallar *"grundläggande issuantism"*. Jag går vidare och visar hur den grundläggande *issuantismen* på egen hand inte lyckas ge en tillfredsställande lösning på helvetets problem. *Issuantistiska* forskare inser dock själva denna svaghet och stärker sin teori med ett antal möjliga tillägg. Några av dessa stärkta versioner av *issuantism* lyckas ge hållbara lösningar på helvetets problem.

En av huvudanledningarna till *issuantismens* utveckling har varit att somliga har upplevt att företrädare för *konditionalismen*, *universalismen* och helvetet som oändligt straff i medvetet tillstånd inte har lyckats ge tillfredsställande lösningar på helvetets problem. Det är emellertid min slutsats att *konditionalister* och forskare som försvarar helvetet som oändligt straff i medvetet tillstånd med hjälp av samma tillägg kan utveckla teorier som

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löser helvetets problem lika bra som de olika issuantistiska teorierna. En del av issuantisternas kritik mot icke-issuantistiska uppfattningar om helvetet framstår därmed som ogrundad.

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Churchill once famously said, “When you’re going through hell, keep going.” It was good advice for Brits suffering through the Second World War, and it is good advice for researchers in the throes of writing a doctoral dissertation.

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Finally, I dedicate this work to two people who will probably never read it. To my wife Kay and son David - life with you has been heaven when I've spent so much time thinking about hell.

Ramon Baker
Stockholm
31 December 2013

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1

INTRODUCTION

I am persuaded that the phrase ‘child abuse’ is no exaggeration when used to describe what teachers and priests are doing to children whom they encourage to believe in something like the punishment of unshriven mortal sins in an eternal hell. – *Richard Dawkins*¹

How can Christians possibly project a deity of such cruelty and vindictiveness whose ways include inflicting everlasting torture upon his creatures, however sinful they may have been? Surely a God who would do such a thing is more nearly like Satan than like God... – *Clark Pinnock*²

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. – *Bertrand Russell*³

I believe that endless torment is a hideous and unscriptural doctrine which has been a terrible burden on the mind of the church for many centuries and a terrible blot on her presentation of the gospel. I should indeed be happy if, before I die, I could help in sweeping it away. – *John Wenham*⁴

[T]he image of saints delighting in the sufferings of the damned is misguided and might reasonably be equated with a sadist watching a cat squirm in a microwave. – *William V. Crockett*⁵

¹ Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2006), 318.

² Clark H. Pinnock, “The Destruction of the Finally Impenitent” *Criswell Theological Review* 4 (1990): 246-247.

³ Bertrand Russell, *Why I Am Not a Christian* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1957), 12.

⁴ John W. Wenham, “The Case for Conditional Immortality” in Cameron 1992, 190.

⁵ William V. Crockett, “Response to Clark H. Pinnock” in William Crockett (ed.), *Four Views on Hell* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 171.

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These quotes illustrate some of the strong reactions the doctrine of hell or eternal punishment generates all along the philosophical and theological spectrum. Some atheist critics of religious faith find the doctrine of everlasting torment in a conscious state of mind as both illogical and immoral.⁶ Even within the Christian community, there is no consensus on the duration, quality, purpose and finality of hell. Some scholars like John Walvoord⁷ and Robert Vincent⁸ defend belief in a literal hell with real fire where the ungodly⁹ will suffer unending conscious torment. Others like Robert A. Peterson¹⁰ and J.I. Packer¹¹ defend belief in unending torment in a conscious state of mind, but view the biblical images of unquenched fire and undying worm as symbolic of a spiritual reality that is more horrid than the physical descriptions. A number of authors like Thomas Talbott¹² and Robin Parry¹³ follow Origen in emphasizing the purifying or rehabilitating nature of hell with a hope of final restoration for all. At the same time, an ever-

⁶ Of course atheists like Russell and Dawkins are not alone in these concerns. Most of the various theories of hell presented in this dissertation have been developed at least partially in response to the challenges of harmonizing God's love, justice, foreknowledge and omnipotence with the potential suffering of free moral agents in hell.

⁷ John Walvoord, "The Literal View" in Crockett 1992, 11-28.

⁸ Robert Vincent, *The Mitigation of Hell* (Greenville SC: Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Bob Jones University, 1999).

⁹ Fully aware of the difficulties in such as designation, I shall use the term the ungodly to signify those people who will end up in hell. I believe that this term succeeds at overcoming most of the pitfalls of alternative terms. For instance, to speak of "the damned" or "the condemned" is incompatible with issuant views of hell. Likewise, "The unregenerate" is an unsatisfactory term for certain confessions where all the baptized are regenerate. The terms godly and ungodly refer respectively to those who end up in heaven or in hell, regardless of the conditions under which they reach their final destinations.

¹⁰ Edward William Fudge and Robert A. Peterson, *Two Views of Hell: A Biblical and Theological Dialogue* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 147. Robert A. Peterson, *Hell on Trial: The Case for Eternal Punishment* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1995).

¹¹ "... the mistake is to take such pictures as physical descriptions, when in fact they are imagery symbolizing realities ... far worse than the symbols themselves." J.I. Packer, "The Problem of Eternal Punishment" *Crux* 26/3 (1990): 25.

¹² Thomas Talbott, *The Inescapable Love of God* (Salem, OR: Willamette University / Universal Publishers, 1999).

¹³ Robin A. Parry and Christopher H. Partridge (eds), *Universal Salvation: The Current Debate* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2003). Parry has also published several books under the pseudonym Gregory MacDonald (after two famous universalists Gregory of Nyssa and George MacDonald). These are *The Evangelical Universalist* (London: SPCK, 2008) and *All Shall Be Well: Explorations in Universal Salvation and Christian Theology from Origen to Moltmann* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2010).

increasing number of Anglo-American, Protestant, evangelical scholars are publicly questioning interpretations of biblical texts which regard the destiny of the ungodly as unending punishment in a conscious state of mind. These, like John Wenham,¹⁴ John Stott,¹⁵ Clark Pinnock¹⁶ and Edward William Fudge,¹⁷ have come to espouse a view of postmortem punishment that can be called conditionalism – the idea that eternal life for the blessed is conditional and that the natural end of the ungodly is ultimate annihilation. Others like Jerry L. Walls,¹⁸ Jonathan Kvanvig¹⁹ and Richard Swinburne²⁰ defend the possibility of an unending hell, but question whether the nature of hell is retributive or simply the consistent end of the free choices a person makes in life and in death.

Definition of Terms

There is a great diversity of opinion on the exact nature and purpose of the postmortem fate of the ungodly. David J. Powys²¹ presents a helpful taxonomy in which twelve major views are delineated based on the answers one provides to a number of underlying questions related to duration, quality, purpose and finality: Is one's existence in hell unending or is there the prospect of final destruction? Once the human soul comes into existence, is it immortal? Do the sufferings of hell have a physical as well as a spiritual dimension? What is the purpose for one's consignment to hell? Is consignment to hell a judgment meted out by God or is it somehow the choice of free moral agents who choose an existence separated from God? Is there opportunity for an eventual escape or release from hell?

¹⁴ John W. Wenham, *The Enigma of Evil* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1985) previously published under the title *The Goodness of God* (London: InterVarsity Press, 1974).

¹⁵ David L. Edwards and John Stott, *Essentials: A Liberal-Evangelical Dialogue* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1988), 312-329.

¹⁶ Clark H. Pinnock, *A Wideness in God's Mercy* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992); Clark H. Pinnock, "The Conditional View" in Crockett 1992.

¹⁷ Edward William Fudge, *The Fire that Consumes* (Lincoln, NE: iUniverse.com, 1982, 2001).

¹⁸ Jerry L. Walls, *Hell: The Logic of Damnation* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992).

¹⁹ Jonathan Kvanvig, *The Problem of Hell* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

²⁰ Richard Swinburne, "A Theodicy of Heaven and Hell" in Alfred J. Freddoso (ed.), *The Existence and Nature of God* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983).

²¹ David J. Powys, "The Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Debates about Hell and Universalism" in Nigel M. de S. Cameron (ed.), *Universalism and the Doctrine of Hell* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1992), 93-138.

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Powys' taxonomy of twelve modern positions on the fate of the unrighteous is as follows.²²

1. Unrighteous will suffer everlasting physical punishment
2. Unrighteous will suffer everlasting mental punishment
3. Unrighteous will survive death but then be annihilated
4. Unrighteous will undergo discipline and correction after death
5. Unrighteous will be eternally separated from God
6. Unrighteous will have continuing freedom and potential for repentance
7. Unrighteous will be resurrected to learn their error and then suffer natural consequences – death
8. Unrighteous will be resurrected for physical punishment, then die
9. Unrighteous will be resurrected for mental punishment, then die
10. Unrighteous will neither survive nor rise from death
11. Unrighteous will survive death but not rise from death, suffering a hell of their own creation
12. Unrighteous will be raised to eternal life.

This taxonomy however is not wholly without problems. Some of the categories are not mutually exclusive, such as alternative 5, which can be combined with 1 and 2. One can regard separation from God as the cause of the greatest mental suffering, without necessarily denying the reality of physical suffering.²³ Alternative 6 – the prospect of possible repentance and release from hell – can also be combined with a number of other positions, such as conditionalism in the case of Clark Pinnock or eternal conscious torment in the case of Charles Seymour.²⁴

In this work, unless further precision is warranted, I shall use the following broad categories: eternal conscious torment, annihilationism, conditionalism, universalism and issuantism.

The *eternal conscious torment view* (ECT) of hell (alternatives 1 and 2 above) is the idea that the ungodly dead will suffer an unending, conscious

²² Powys 1992, 95.

²³ Evangelist Billy Graham comments in an interview: “The only thing I could say for sure is that hell means separation from God. We are separated from his light, from his fellowship. That is going to be hell. When it comes to a literal fire, I don’t preach it because I’m not sure about it. When the Scripture uses fire concerning hell, that is possibly an illustration of how terrible it’s going to be – not fire but something worse, a thirst for God that cannot be quenched.” Quoted in Fudge and Peterson 2000, 20.

²⁴ Pinnock 1992a; Charles Seymour, *A Theodicy of Hell* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2000).

punishment in hell. Some advocates of this view call this perspective the “traditional view” or “traditionalism.”²⁵ Some scholars who critique ECT reject the term traditionalism on the grounds that other theories of hell such as universalism, conditionalism and annihilationism also have precedents throughout the history of Christian thought.²⁶ The main idea behind ECT is that hell is a state in which the ungodly suffer unending punishment in a conscious state of mind. Hell has at least a mental dimension (*poena damni*) in the soul’s eternal separation from God. It may also be accompanied by physical suffering (*poena sensus*) rooted in the concept of the resurrection of the body.

Traditionalists generally accept the immortality of the human soul. Once the human soul comes into existence, it will continue to exist sempiternally: experiencing after death either the blessings of eternal life with God or the torment of unending punishment in hell from which there is no possibility of release or escape.

The term *annihilationism* has sometimes been applied to believers in conditionalism for their belief in the ultimate extinction of the ungodly.²⁷ Kendall S. Harmon writes of this confusion:

Perhaps most confusing of all, Edward Fudge does not want to be described as an annihilationist but a conditionalist, whereas John Stott makes clear that he is an annihilationist not a conditionalist –

²⁵ Fudge and Peterson 2000; Powys 1992, 98. Since apologists for ECT use the term *traditionalist* to describe their view, I shall use the term in its adjectival form and as a designation for scholars who hold this perspective. Jonathan Kvanvig uses various terms to label this view, including “the strong view” of hell in Kvanvig 1993 and the “punishment model” in Jonathan L. Kvanvig, “Hell” in Jerry L. Walls (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Eschatology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 413-427.

²⁶ Considerations from church history are valuable primarily for showing the breadth of opinion on the nature and duration of postmortem punishment. Their value is limited because much of the evidence from the patristic period is inconclusive. In general, the post-apostolic fathers followed the language and imagery of the Bible itself in their descriptions of the postmortem fate of the ungodly. In many cases, the fate of the ungodly was often either taken for granted or not considered as important as the major issues of soteriology and christology. While certain historical precedents can be found for most of the contemporary perspectives on conditional immortality and universalism, proponents of these views were generally a minority within Christendom and were often marginalized by the mainstream of Western Christianity due to these (or other) views that did not square with Western Christian orthodoxy.

²⁷ This is even true of John Stott, who himself leans strongly towards conditionalism. Edwards and Stott 1988, 316. The terms annihilationism and conditionalism are also used nearly synonymously in Fudge and Peterson 2000.

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yet in terms of the ultimate end of the wicked Fudge and Stott are both arguing for the same view!²⁸

Donald A. Carson explains the objection some conditionalists sense towards the term annihilationism.

Many ‘annihilationists’ object to the term ‘annihilation,’ holding that it puts the emphasis on the wrong place and betrays a platonic worldview. They are annihilationists in the sense that they hold that there is finally a cessation of existence, but they are uncomfortable with the term because it sounds to them as if God is destroying what would otherwise have endured forever – and this they deny. They prefer an expression such as ‘conditional immortality’ – i.e., men and women are not ‘naturally’ or constitutionally immortal, but become immortal under certain conditions.²⁹

In this work I will define annihilationism as the view that the souls of the ungodly cease to exist at the death of the physical body (alternatives 3 and 10 in Powys’ taxonomy) whether by divine fiat where God brings an end to the otherwise immortal soul (alternative 3) or as a natural quality of the mortal human soul which cannot survive apart from the physical body (alternative 10).

Conditionalism is the name for a variety of ideas (alternatives 7, 8 and 9) that have in common the notion that the human soul only has conditional immortality. That is, the human soul has a beginning and will have an end unless it receives eternal life through the gift of faith in God. In contrast to the annihilationist perspective (Powys’ alternative 3) where God confiscates the natural immortality of the ungodly person’s soul, conditionalists emphasize that immortality is a gift that God confers on people who exercise faith. Although annihilationists also reject the inherent immortality of the soul, conditionalists emphasize the possibility of attaining eternal life through faith in God.

Harmon, in his critique of conditionalist Edward William Fudge, outlines two different understandings of individual eschatology that both reject the inherent immortality of the soul: conditionalist uniresurrectionism and conditionalist eventual extinctionism. Conditionalist uniresurrectionism is the view that “man is naturally mortal and immortality is given through the gospel only to the righteous in the next life; the wicked who do not respond to

²⁸ Kendall S. Harmon, “The Case Against Conditionalism” in Cameron 1992, 198-199.

²⁹ Donald A. Carson, *The Gagging of God* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 516.

Christ are not resurrected since death is their judgment.”³⁰ This is the view I have labeled as annihilationism (Powys’ alternative 10). Conditionalist eventual extinctionism is the view that “both the wicked and the good are resurrected, and that the wicked suffer God’s judgment until they are finally extinguished, the punishment being proportionate to their sin.”³¹

Harmon states that part of the confusion of terminology stems from Stott’s failure to distinguish between conditionalist uniresurrectionism and conditional eventual extinctionism.³²

This view of conditionalism (or conditionalist eventual extinctionism) has traditionally best been represented by Seventh-Day Adventist theologians,³³ but in recent years has been espoused by a number of high-profile evangelical Protestant theologians.³⁴ There is a divergence of opinion among conditionalists as to many details concerning the destiny of the ungodly: the nature of the intermediary state, the timing of the final annihilation, purpose (or lack thereof) of possible postmortem punishment and the “porosity of hell” i.e., the possibility of repentance or conversion after physical death.

Universalism is the view that all of humanity will eventually be restored and will finally enjoy eternal life with God. Powys only delineates one form of universalism (alternative 12) based on the universalists’ answers to his questions regarding the duration, quality, purpose and finality of hell. There are nonetheless a number of forms of universalism in Christian theology that stem from differences in emphasis and historical context.

First, there is a form with roots in nineteenth century liberal Protestant theology, where the fallenness or sinfulness of humanity is generally downplayed or denied. Rowell writes of the influence of Darwinism and utilitarianism in the growth of universalism in nineteenth century England.

[T]he eschatology which nineteenth-century Christianity inherited was an eschatology of the immortality of the soul, though alongside this there had also developed a secular eschatology of the progress of the world. The notion of progress had also been taken up into

³⁰ Harmon 1992, 197.

³¹ Harmon 1992, 197.

³² Harmon 1992, 198n.

³³ L.E. Froom, *The Conditionalist Faith of our Fathers* (Washington: Review and Herald, 1965, 1966).

³⁴ Wenham 1974; Wenham 1985; John Stott in Edwards and Stott 1988; Michael Green, *Evangelism through the Local Church* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1990), 69-70; Philip E. Hughes, *The True Image: The Origin and Destiny of Man in Christ* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989).

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some of the thinking concerning immortality, where the destiny of man was conceived as an unending progress rather than an arrival at a static perfection. ... It was an immortality of self-realization, rather than an immortality of salvation, to which man looked forward...³⁵

Richard Bauckham concurs:

This widespread belief [in the possibility of repentance and conversion after death] was certainly influenced by the common nineteenth-century faith in evolutionary progress. Hell – or a modified version of purgatory – could be understood in this context as the pain and suffering necessary to moral growth. In this way evolutionary progress provides the new context for nineteenth-century universalism, replacing the Platonic cycle of emanation and return which influenced the universalists of earlier centuries.³⁶

Because of the inherent goodness of humanity and God's great love for creation, all human souls will eventually enjoy the blessing of salvation made possible through Jesus Christ.

A second form of universalism relates to religious pluralism and seems to be endorsed by scholars like Ernst Troeltsch and the later works of John Hick.³⁷ It is the idea that every person – regardless of religious affiliation or lack thereof – will ultimately receive the salvation or its equivalent that is the goal for one's striving. Pluralism does not necessarily entail universalism. It is possible that a person within any faith tradition could fail to achieve salvation or its equivalents. Nor does universalism presuppose religious pluralism; the reconciliation of all humanity with God may take place through the universal scope of Christ's atoning death and resurrection.³⁸

The hope that the universal scope of Christ's atoning death on the cross and the ultimate irresistibility of God's love and grace can be expressed in a number of forms of inclusivistic universalism. Several well-known representatives for this perspective include Paul Tillich,³⁹ John Macquarrie,⁴⁰

³⁵ Geoffrey Rowell, *Hell and the Victorians* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974), 14-15.

³⁶ Richard Bauckham, "Universalism: A Historical Survey" *Themelios* 4/ 2 (1979): 51.

³⁷ John Hick, *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness* (London, 1988); Ernst Troeltsch, *Die Absolutheit des Christentums* (Tübingen: Verlag J.C.B. Mohr, 1929).

³⁸ Ray Baker, "Att känna på en elefant: John Hicks religiösa pluralism" *Keryx* 3 (2013): 52-61.

³⁹ "From the point of view of human nature, the doctrine of a twofold eternal destiny contradicts the fact that no human being is unambiguously on one or the other side of divine judgment. ... The doctrine of the ambiguity of all human goodness and of the dependence of

the early writings of John Hick,⁴¹ John A. T. Robinson,⁴² Jürgen Moltmann,⁴³ Hans Urs von Balthasar,⁴⁴ Hans Küng,⁴⁵ Kallistos Ware,⁴⁶ and Sergei Bulgakov.⁴⁷

Finally, a growing number of conservative Protestant scholars are looking at the Scriptures with new eyes.⁴⁸ Scholars like Thomas Talbott,⁴⁹ Robin Parry⁵⁰ and Jan Bonda⁵¹ conclude that in light of divine goodness and sovereignty, God's purposes for all humanity will be fulfilled when God shows mercy to everyone (Romans 11:32) so that all should come to

salvation on the divine grace alone either leads us back to the doctrine of double predestination or leads us forward to the doctrine of universal essentialization." Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology* III (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), 408.

⁴⁰ "[W]e utterly reject the idea of a hell where God everlastingly punishes the wicked, without hope of deliverance... Rather, we must believe that God will never cease from his quest for universal reconciliation." John Macquarrie, *Principles of Christian Theology* (London: SCM, 1977), 366. See also John Macquarrie, *Christian Hope* (Oxford: Mowbray, 1978).

⁴¹ John Hick, "Universal Salvation" chapter 13 in *Death and Eternal Life* (Louisville KY: Westminster / John Knox Press, 1994), 242-261. This book was originally published in 1976.

⁴² J.A.T. Robinson, *In the End, God* (London: James Clark, 1950).

⁴³ Jürgen Moltmann, "The Logic of Hell" in Richard Bauckham (ed.), *God Will Be All in All: The Eschatology of Jürgen Moltmann* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001), 43-47.

⁴⁴ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Dare We Hope "That All Men Be Saved"?* David Kipp and Lothar Krauth, trans., (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1988).

⁴⁵ "Individual New Testament texts, which are not balanced by others, suggest the consummation of a reconciliation of all, an all-embracing mercy." Hans Küng, *Eternal Life?* (London: Collins, 1984), 175.

⁴⁶ "Hell exists as a final possibility, but several of the Fathers have none the less believed that in the end all will be reconciled to God. It is heretical to say that all *must* be saved, for this is to deny free will; but it is legitimate to hope that all *may* be saved. Until the Last Day comes, we must not despair of anyone's salvation, but must long and pray for the reconciliation of all without exception. No one must be excluded from our loving intercession." Kallistos Ware, *The Orthodox Church* (London: Penguin, 1991), 262.

"Our belief in human freedom means that we have no right to categorically affirm, 'All *must* be saved.' But our faith in God's love makes us dare to *hope* that all will be saved." Kallistos Ware, *The Inner Kingdom* (Crestwood NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2000), 214-215.

⁴⁷ Sergius Bulgakov, *Unfading Light: Contemplations and Speculations*, Thomas Allen Smith, trans., (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 435.

⁴⁸ Millard J. Erickson, "Is Universalistic Thinking Now Appearing among Evangelicals?" *United Evangelical Action* (1989): 4-6.

⁴⁹ Talbott 1999.

⁵⁰ Parry and Partridge 2003. See also Parry's books published under the pseudonym Gregory MacDonald: MacDonald 2008 and MacDonald 2010.

⁵¹ Jan Bonda, *The One Purpose of God: An Answer to the Doctrine of Eternal Punishment* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998).

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repentance (2 Peter 3:9) and experience the justification that brings life to all (Romans 5:18).

*Issuantism*⁵² is the term I shall use to designate a three-fold conception of hell where the end is not universal salvation. The first characteristic of issuantism is the belief that there is a fundamental inconsistency in claiming that heaven or eternal fellowship with God “issues” from (or is an expression of) God’s love while hell or eternal separation from God “issues” from God’s righteousness. For proponents of issuant views, both heaven and hell must “issue” from the same divine character quality, namely God’s love. The term *issuantism* takes its name primarily from this characteristic.

The second characteristic of issuantism is the belief that humans have metaphysical libertarian freedom. Scholars who emphasize this aspect of issuantism sometimes call their perspective “the choice model of hell.”⁵³

A third characteristic of issuantism is the view that hell is non-retributive in nature. Rather, it is the natural consequences of the choices that free human beings make in life. Scholars who emphasize this aspect of issuantism sometimes call their perspective the “natural consequence” theory.⁵⁴

Although the term *issuantism* has its origins in the first of these three trademarks, issuantism is not limited to or defined exclusively in terms of the love of God as divine motivation for both heaven and hell. In the present work I shall use the term *issuantist* rather than any of the alternatives sometimes found in the relevant literature. My purpose in doing this is not in any way to give precedence to the first characteristic, the conviction that both heaven and hell must issue from the love of God. Rather, I make this choice for two reasons. First, issuantism is a term that is sometimes used by issuantists themselves without limiting the scope of issuantism to the single question of divine motivations for heaven and hell. Be that as it may, it would

⁵² In addition to the titles “the choice model” and “the natural consequence model” of hell, issuantism is sometimes called “the separationist view of hell.” Charles Seymour, “Hell, Justice and Freedom” *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 43/2 (1998): 69-86 and Seymour 2000. In contrast to Kvanvig’s term “the strong view of hell” for ECT, Lindsey Hall calls issuantism “the weak view of hell” in Lindsey Hall, *Swinburne’s Hell and Hick’s Universalism: Are We Free to Reject God?* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), 12. Eric Reitan calls issuantism the “progressive understanding of hell” in Eric Reitan, “Human Freedom and the Possibility of Eternal Damnation” in Parry and Partridge 2003, 125-142.

⁵³ Jonathan Kvanvig, “Heaven and Hell” in *A Companion to Philosophy of Religion*, edited by Philip L. Quinn and Charles Taliaferro, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), 562-568; Kvanvig 2008, 413-427; Jonathan L. Kvanvig, *Destiny and Deliberation* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2011).

⁵⁴ Michael J. Murray, *Reason for the Hope Within* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 294-302. Justin D. Barnard, “Compatibilism, ‘Wantons,’ and the Natural Consequence Model of Hell” in Joel Buenting (ed.), *The Problem of Hell* (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2010), 65-77.

seemingly be better to use one readily acknowledged term (among many) than to coin a new term for the view such as agapeic views of hell. My second reason is stylistic; it is much more convenient to write of issuant perspectives and the work of issuantist scholars than to use unwieldy phrases like “defenders of non-retributive theories of hell” or “natural consequentialist scholars”. Moreover, it is well known that the term *libertarian* can rightly be applied to many scholars who do not have an issuant view of hell.

Powys relates the rise of issuant views to the revolution in penal theory associated with people like Jeremy Bentham.⁵⁵ How could retributivism, a practice that came to be regarded as barbaric and unenlightened in a modern society, still be attributed to a loving, good God? In the spirit of nineteenth century utilitarianism, one could legitimately question the value of hell as a punishment when it apparently does not succeed in deterring sin.

That God honors the free choices people make does not deny that one’s existence in hell is a horrendous experience. When one rejects God, one also rejects the good for which God is responsible: life, beauty, love, pleasure, friendship, security, etc. Proponents of issuant views of hell do not necessarily deny that a person will suffer in hell, only that the suffering is meted out by a putatively loving God. The sufferings of the ungodly are the natural consequences of one’s rejection of God.

The Problem of Hell

The question of the duration, quality, purpose and finality of hell is really a specific case-in-point for the wider question of the problem of evil.⁵⁶ The classic formulation of the problem of evil is that an omnipotent God could do something about evil, an omnibenevolent God would do something about evil, but since evil exists, then God must either be limited in power, limited in goodness, limited in both power and goodness, or not exist at all.

In a similar way, one could criticize the Christian doctrine of hell with a reformulation of the classic problem of evil called the soteriological problem of evil⁵⁷ or the problem of hell. According to the problem of hell, there is a perceived inconsistency between the following statements:

1. An omnipotent God could create a world in which all moral agents freely choose life with God.

⁵⁵ Powys 1992, 118.

⁵⁶ Marilyn McCord Adams, “The Problem of Hell: A Problem of Evil for Christians” in Eleonore Stump (ed.), *Reasoned Faith* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993), 301-327.

⁵⁷ David Basinger, “Divine omniscience and the soteriological problem of evil: is the type of knowledge God possesses relevant?” *Religious Studies* 28 (1992): 1-18.

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2. An omnibenevolent God would not create a world with the foreknowledge that some (perhaps a significant proportion) of God's creatures would end up in hell.
3. An omniscient God would know which people will end up in hell.
4. Some people will end up forever in hell.

A satisfactory answer to the problem of hell must seek to explain the duration, quality, purpose and finality of hell in ways that harmonize with these four premises. This may be done by showing how all four statements form a coherent whole, or by redefining or rejecting at least one of the premises. The problem of hell may present a greater problem for Christian theology than does the related problem of evil, since one popular solution to the problem of evil states that suffering in this life can be justified by belief in a final justice after death. Another difference between the problem of evil and the problem of hell is that while there is little question that the existence of evil is empirically verifiable, the existence of hell has not been empirically verified despite certain mass-market religious publications where the author claims to have visited hell.

Purpose Statement

As a relatively recent conception of the duration, quality, purpose and finality of hell, little systematic work has been done in defining issuantism *vis-à-vis* other perspectives on hell. Indeed, some authors carelessly fail to distinguish issuantism from ECT.⁵⁸ Even the lack of consensus as to the terminology used to describe what in essence is the same perspective on the duration, quality, purpose and finality of hell is indicative of the fact that further research is warranted.⁵⁹

In this present work, I shall first distill from the published works of a wide range of issuantist scholars what I believe to be the three *sine qua non* trademarks of basic issuantism. I shall then show that basic issuantism by itself does not provide a satisfactory solution to the problem of hell. Because of the tacit failure of basic issuantism to solve the problem of hell, issuantist

⁵⁸ David Guevara, *Hell, Belief and Justice* (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation. University of Utah, 2003). Likewise, David Basinger calls Jerry Walls a traditionalist in Basinger 1992, 5.

⁵⁹ Indeed, as I was putting the finishing touches on this manuscript, a new book on hell was released where the author presents a thorough comparison of ECT, conditionalism and universalism. Issuant views of hell and their main representatives are glaringly absent from the book. Steve Gregg, *All You Wanted to Know About Hell: Three Christian Views of God's Final Solution to the Problem of Sin* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2013).

scholars generally add one or more supplements to basic issuantism. I shall then show that while the addition of these supplements may succeed to varying degrees as solutions to the problem of hell, the addition of the same supplements to non-issuantist views of hell may succeed equally well in providing coherent answers to the problem of hell, thus rendering some of the issuantist critique of non-issuantist perspectives somewhat misguided.

Methodological Considerations

As the queen of the sciences, theological discourse has its own unique starting points and strategies. In contrast to the natural sciences, where discoveries made just a few decades ago have in many cases already become obsolete, theologians must often relate their theories and interpretations to several millennia of cumulative reflection and systematization in the creeds, councils and confessions of the church.

Systematic theology is not an exact science. Nonetheless, systematic theologians have at their service a number of methodologies that can contribute to the scientific study of religion as a phenomenon and theology as a systematization of religious belief. These tools are to be used carefully, however, because even the choice of methodology will have a great impact on the results of the study.

In this work, I shall not present an empirical study of the numbers of people who believe in hell or the numbers of theologians who represent the varying perspectives on hell. Nor is the perceived decline in belief in ECT or its impact in the lives of people the object of this study.

Another possible methodology open to the theologian is historical in nature. The application of historical methodology in theological research would include questions of the historical development of a religion as a whole or of the ideas, organization or praxis of a religion. A historical approach could also compare the diachronic development of different religions or examine the role of a central figure within a religion to its historical development. The historical method may also be used to provide causal or teleological explanations for the development of a religion or religious idea, organization or praxis within historical, cultural, social or socioeconomic contexts.⁶⁰

Questions of how the doctrine of hell has developed historically from its origins in the cultures of the ancient Near East are certainly both interesting and important fields of inquiry. Although my purpose is not to ignore the

⁶⁰ Carl-Henric Grenholm, *Att förstå religion: Metoder för teologisk forskning* (Lund: Studentlitteratur, 2006), 110-113.

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past, I choose not to apply a historical methodology since it plays very little role in the methodologies employed by the Anglo-American issuantists who are the focus of this study.

Rather, in this work, I shall apply a systematic methodology whose purpose is “to describe and clarify contemporary ideas and forms of expression within a specific religion.”⁶¹

The purpose for my choice of methodology is to approximate as closely as possible the methodology employed by the issuantist scholars themselves. One element of this methodology is the clear definition of terms, especially (but not limited to) what is meant by “issuant views of hell.” Another major part of this methodology is the interpretation and clarification of texts written by issuantist scholars, wherein I shall systematize and evaluate their contributions to the doctrine of hell. By these means I hope to test the logical consistency of issuantism against other beliefs that are part of the issuantists’ larger belief systems.

Although it is by no means necessary for a researcher to share the methodological considerations of the scholars who are the objects of study, I shall nonetheless attempt to follow as closely as possible the methodology employed by issuantist scholars. As such, it would be fitting to mention a few basic assumptions made by the issuantists themselves. The first key assumption is the truth of Christian theism as a worldview and belief system. The issuantists under study share a belief in an omnibenevolent, omnipotent, omnipresent, omniscient personal God who is worthy of worship and obedience. Second, the issuantist scholars assume a grammatical-historical hermeneutic whereby texts are understood in light of the natural meaning of words as used in the historical context in which the texts were written, including authorial intention. This entails the rejection of reader-response and intuitive hermeneutics that are not intersubjectively testable. A third basic belief is a form of critical realism, whereby there is an external, objective reality whose existence and nature are independent of human consciousness. This critical realism recognizes at the same time that one’s perceptions of reality are also to a large degree formed by other factors such as experience, language, gender, race, socioeconomic status, culture and worldview.

In this endeavor, the correspondence theory of truth is of limited usefulness. We simply don’t know which theories of hell most closely correspond to the external reality of hell’s duration, quality, purpose and finality. As such, I shall place greater emphasis on the coherence of

⁶¹ Grenholm 2006, 113. My translation.

issuantism as an answer to the problem of hell and within the broader framework of Christian theism.⁶² Coherentism is not, however, without limitations of its own. Coherence theory can first of all give us a basis for belief without necessarily showing a proposition or set of propositions to be true. Secondly, there may be more than one coherent system, a conclusion which I intend to show weakens the issuantist critique of non-issuantist views of hell.

A theologian does not undertake such a task without a certain number of risks. Systematic theology is not an exact science and both biblical texts and the works of contemporary scholars are open to interpretation that begins with the choice of what information and quotes to include in summaries and systematic presentations.

Another central problem is the role the researcher's perspectives and assumptions play in interpreting texts. Joseph Ratzinger writes, "The elimination of the observer, never fully possible even in natural science, now becomes a mere chimera."⁶³

Here one must admit that bias is always a risk, all the while striving for objectivity in sometimes allowing representatives to speak for themselves even at the risk of providing too little analysis.

Although admitting that bias is always a risk, scholarly discussion is not mortally flawed and useless; we are able to strive for objectivity by using scholarly reasoning. By this scholarly reasoning, we can attempt to transcend our internal, subjective perspectives to one that is open to intersubjective testability. By this means, the systematizations, analyses and conclusions made by one scholar are open to confirmation or rejection by others. This type of striving for objectivity makes it possible to broaden our knowledge about reality.

Limitation of Scope

The choice of methodology presents some natural limitations to the scope of the present work. Patristics scholars would doubtless like to see me relate these contemporary theories of hell to the writings of the church fathers. Experts in second temple Judaism would likely wish to see greater emphasis on the Jewish cultural background of early Christianity as the doctrine of hell took shape in the early church. Perhaps exegetes would prefer to see a deeper

⁶² Indeed, this is the major theme of Swinburne's now classic work *The Coherence of Theism* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1995).

⁶³ Joseph Ratzinger, *Eschatology: Death and Eternal Life* (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1988), 22.

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analysis of the relevant biblical texts. Philosophers of religion may prefer to see more of an analytic approach to the material. In my systematic approach, it is my purpose to examine and evaluate issuant solutions to the problem of hell presented by contemporary, Anglo-American philosophical theologians.

Although issuantist scholars are not always clear as to their methodology, most do not place much emphasis on exegesis of the biblical material. Scholars like Walls and Kvanvig nonetheless make a nod to exegesis when they maintain that the view presented is at least consistent with the biblical material, if not directly derived from it.

Walls writes, “[T]his is neither a historical nor an exegetical essay, although I intend the conclusions I defend to be compatible with the results of careful biblical exegesis as well as other standards of historic orthodoxy.”⁶⁴ He expounds his thinking further by saying that since the biblical material cannot be interpreted in a theological or philosophical vacuum, theology should develop in the interplay of exegesis, experience, and theological and philosophical reasoning.⁶⁵

Kvanvig presents a similar idea.

Does the philosophical account mesh well with the language of scripture, or does this account present yet another example of the conflict between reason and the faith of historical Christianity? I argue that the composite view is consonant both with the language of scripture and with the overall thrust of the eschatological dimension of Christianity as presented in the Bible.⁶⁶

As such, in my evaluation of issuant perspectives on hell, I shall not criticize issuantist scholars for lack of exegesis, since it is not part of their chosen methodology.⁶⁷ I shall only present exegetical support for the various views of hell insofar as it is presented by representative scholars themselves.

⁶⁴ Walls 1992, 15.

⁶⁵ Walls 1992, 158.

⁶⁶ Kvanvig 1993, 153. The composite view to which Kvanvig makes reference in this quote is Kvanvig’s perspective on hell that combines basic issuantism with the supplements of the Middle Knowledge Thesis and the possibility of eventual annihilation for the ungodly.

⁶⁷ Works that focus on exegesis of the relevant biblical passages include Jean Cruvellier, *La notion de châtement éternel d’après le nouveau testament* (Aix-en-Provence: Unpublished thesis, Licencié en Théologie, 1953); Fudge 1982, 2001; Walter Moberley, “Perdition: Some Reflections on a Difficult Doctrine” *Anvil* 3/1 (1986): 49-65; Pinnock 1990; Hans Scharen, “Gehenna in the Synoptics, Part 1” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 149/3 (1992): 454-470; Millard J. Erickson, “Is Hell Forever?” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 152/607 (1995): 259-272; Glenn Peoples, “Fallacies in the Annihilationism Debate: A Critique of Robert Peterson and Other Traditionalist Scholarship” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 50/2 (1997): 329-347; Bonda 1998; Trevor P. Craigen, “Eternal Punishment in John’s Revelation” *The Master’s Seminary Journal* 9/2 (1998): 191-201; Richard Mayhew, “Hell: Never, Forever, or Just for Awhile?” *The Master’s*

One could say that issuantism is a fairly recent development in theological thinking on the doctrine of hell. Although no theological innovation takes place in a vacuum, one of the driving forces behind the development of issuantism is what issuantists believe to be the unsatisfactory answers to the problem of hell presented in the history of Christian theology.

This being the case, I shall only refer to historical precedents as they are presented by issuantist scholars themselves as an integral part of their theories.

I shall thus not give extensive consideration to the historical development of the doctrine of hell either in its ancient Near Eastern context nor within the Christian church.⁶⁸ Nor shall I pay much attention to the many monographs that examine the doctrine of hell as it was understood and expressed at specific points of history.⁶⁹ Likewise, an analysis of why

Seminary Journal 9/2 (1998): 129-145; Hans Scharen, "Gehenna in the Synoptics, Part 2" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 155/1 (1998): 324-337; Ralph G. Bowles, "Does Revelation 14 Teach Eternal Punishment? Examining a Proof-text on Hell" *The Evangelical Quarterly* 73/1 (2001): 21-36; J. Gregory Crofford, *The Dark Side of Destiny: Hell Re-examined* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2013); Martin Woodier, "Eternal Punishment?" *Evangel* 21/1 (2003): 2-10; Gregg 2013; Kim Papaioannou, *The Geography of Hell in the Teaching of Jesus: Gehenna, Hades, the Abyss, the Outer Darkness Where There is Weeping and Gnashing of Teeth* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2013); R. Baker, "Vår Gud är en förtärande eld: den bibliska grunden för konditionalism, *Theofilos* 1 (2014), forthcoming.

⁶⁸ Several outstanding books have become standard works on the historical development of the doctrine, including Georges Minois, *Histoire des enfers* (Paris: Fayard, 1991); Alan E. Bernstein, *The Formation of Hell: Death and Retribution in the Ancient and Early Christian Worlds* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993); Herbert Vorgrimler, *Geschichte der Hölle* (München: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1993); and Alice K. Turner, *The History of Hell* (London: Robert Hale, 1993). See also Richard Bauckham, "Early Jewish Visions of Hell" *Journal of Theological Studies* 41 (1990): 355-385; Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Shape of Death: Death and Immortality in the Early Fathers* (New York: Abingdon, 1961); Bernhard Lang, *Himmel und Hölle: Jenseitsglaube von der Antike bis Heute* (München: C.H. Beck, 2009) and Bengt Ankarloo, *Helvetet: döden och de eviga straffen i Västerlandets kristna tradition* (Lund: Historiska media, 2003).

⁶⁹ Philip C. Almond, *Heaven and Hell in Enlightenment England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Jonathan M. Butler, *Softly and Tenderly Jesus Is Calling: Heaven and Hell in American Revivalism, 1870-1920* (Brooklyn: Carlson, 1991); Piero Camporesi, *Fear of Hell: Images of Damnation and Salvation in Early Modern Europe* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990); Jean-Paul Duviols, *Enfers et damnations dans le monde hispanique et hispano-américain* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1996); Rowell 1974; Nicholas J. Tromp, *Primitive Conceptions of Death and the Nether World in the Old Testament* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1969); Jürgen Tubach et al. (eds) *Sehnsucht nach der Hölle? Höllen- und Unterweltsvorstellungen in Orient und Okzident* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2012); D.P. Walker, *The Decline of Hell: Seventeenth-Century Discussions of Eternal Torment* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964); Michael Wheeler, *Heaven, Hell and the Victorians* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); and Ricky H. Willis, *Torments of Hell: Conditional Immortality and the Doctrine of Final Punishment Among 17th Century English*

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traditional understandings of the doctrine of hell have become less common in the Western Christian church⁷⁰ lies outside the scope of this present work.

Issuant views are largely unknown among Continental theologians and among Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox scholars, who to the degree they address the issue of hell at all, generally emphasize the existential-kerygmatic intention of the biblical texts on hell rather than interpreting them as descriptions of the duration, quality, purpose and finality of hell.⁷¹ That is to say, one may legitimately ask what role the doctrine of hell plays within the wider context of Christian life and praxis.

Whereas the church fathers were very keen both to anchor theology in the life of the church and to see practical outworkings of theology in the lives of believers, much of the contemporary discussion in philosophical theology has relegated pastoral considerations to a position of secondary importance. The anchoring of theology in pastoral considerations is perhaps clearer in Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox theologies where the biblical texts on hell serve more as an incentive to live a life of devotion than as a warning to those who persist in their sin.⁷² Avery Cardinal Dulles summarizes the view of Karl Rahner on this point: “The discourses of Jesus on the subject appear to be

Baptists (Fort Worth: Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1995).

⁷⁰ Martin E. Marty, “Hell Disappeared. No One Noticed. A Civic Argument” *Harvard Theological Review* 78 (1985): 381-398; John Blanchard, *Whatever Happened to Hell?* (Durham: Evangelical Press, 1993); Vincent 1999.

⁷¹ Henri Blocher, “Everlasting Punishment and the Problem of Evil” in Cameron 1992, 291. This, along with the stated focus of this present work on Anglo-American theology, is the main reason for the preponderance of English-language source material.

⁷² Although it does not present a complete issuant view of hell, the current *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1994) does include in §1861 this clear statement of the Self-Determination Thesis as it relates to hell: “To die in mortal sin without repenting and accepting God’s merciful love means remaining separated from him for ever by our own free choice. This state of definitive self-exclusion from communion with God and the blessed is called ‘hell.’”

The hortatory emphasis of the Roman Catholic Church’s teaching on hell is seen in §1036: “The affirmations of Sacred Scripture and the teachings of the Church on the subject of hell are a call to responsibility incumbent upon man to make use of his freedom in view of his eternal destiny. They are at the same time an urgent call to conversion: ‘Enter by the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is easy, that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard, that leads to life, and those who find it are few.’”

Joseph Ratzinger expresses a similar hortatory sentiment: “For the saints, ‘Hell’ is not so much a threat to be hurled at other people but a challenge to oneself. It is a challenge to suffer in the dark night of faith, to experience communion with Christ in solidarity with his descent into the Night.” Ratzinger 1988, 217-218.

admonitory rather than predictive. Their aim is to persuade his hearers to pursue the better and safer path by alerting them to the danger of eternal perdition.”⁷³ As such, the contributions by Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox theologians to the current discussion of the doctrine of hell also lie generally outside the scope of the current dissertation. Of course no rule is complete without exception. In the course of my study I shall consider the contributions of Roman Catholic scholars like Eleonore Stump, Andrei Buckareff and Peter Kreeft and Orthodox believer Richard Swinburne.⁷⁴ In various ways these scholars have all made significant contributions to the formation and defense of issuantism within contemporary Anglo-American theology.

Finally, although much can be written about Satan and demons,⁷⁵ I do not intend to address these issues here since the question of Satan is not raised by the issuantists who are the focus of this present study. Moreover, the question of Satan is only relevant to the doctrine of hell if one accepts extra-biblical notions of Satan as lord of the chthonic realms.

Overview of the Present Work

In the next chapter I shall highlight the main forms of non-issuant conceptions of hell. Special attention will be given to ECT, conditionalism and universalism. In each case I shall give special emphasis to the unique issues that have led to the formulation and/or defense of each position. This chapter is necessary to provide a framework for better understanding the critiques against these views raised by the proponents of issuant views.

Although C.S. Lewis does not fulfill my criterion of contemporaneity, his extensive reflections on the nature of hell have been an undeniable inspiration to many of the scholars highlighted in this work, in particular to

⁷³ Avery Cardinal Dulles, “The Population of Hell” *First Things* 133 (2003): 36-41.

⁷⁴ Admittedly, most of Swinburne’s work on the doctrine of hell was done while he was still a communicant in the Church of England. In many ways, his belief in purgatory and his emphasis on the separation of the ungodly from God as expressed in *poena damni* are at odds with the teaching of Orthodox theologians like Kallistos Ware, John Romanides, Hierotheos Vlachos, Aristotle Papanikolaou and George Metallinos who claim that no one is ever separated from the love of God, but that God’s love can be perceived as extremely painful by the ungodly who resist God’s love and grace.

Ware writes that “it is not possible for us to speak in any detail about the realities of the Age to come.” Kallistos Ware, *The Orthodox Way* (Crestwood NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1986), 178.

⁷⁵ Gregory A. Boyd, *Satan and the Problem of Evil* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2001); Elaine Pagels, *The Origin of Satan* (NY: Vintage Books, 1996); T.J. Wray and Gregory Mobley, *The Birth of Satan* (NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

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proponents of issuant views. As such, I would be remiss in not including chapter three, in which I present his thought by way of background to the contemporary discussions of the duration, quality, purpose and finality of hell.

Later issuantists generally do not place Lewis' reflections on hell in a historical context showing how his ideas were influenced by or developed within a political, religious, cultural or socioeconomic context. Rather, to the extent that they interact directly with Lewis at all, they employ a systematic methodology to glean Lewis' ideas from a wide range of texts that encompass both fictional and non-fictional works. With this starting point, they are then able to analyze and critique Lewis' contributions to our understanding of the duration, quality, purpose and finality of hell as they relate to an answer to the problem of hell. This shall also be my methodology in this chapter.

In chapter four I shall give a detailed presentation of basic issuantism, a view that seeks to answer the problem of hell by explaining how a possibly everlasting hell can be defined in terms of the harmonization for God's motives for both heaven and hell in the love of God, a libertarian definition of human freedom, and a rejection of the Retribution Thesis. In this chapter I shall also contend that basic issuantism by itself does not succeed in solving the problem of hell.

This should not, however, be construed as a gratuitous swipe at a straw man. Fully cognizant that no issuantist scholar believes only in basic issuantism, I shall show in chapter five how issuantist scholars strengthen basic issuantism with any number of supplements whose purpose is to provide a better solution to the problem of hell.

In chapter six, I shall give several examples of non-issuantist scholars who supplement ECT and conditionalism with the same types of supplements as are used by issuantists to strengthen basic issuantism. I shall show that with the addition of these supplements, traditionalists and conditionalists can provide solutions to the problem of hell that are just as reasonable as those provided by supplemented issuantism.

I shall conclude this work in chapter seven with some final reflections on the relative merits of issuantism and supplemented non-issuant theories of hell at presenting reasonable answers to the problem of hell.

2

NON-ISSUANT VIEWS OF HELL

It is conceivable that the doctrine of hell is a mythologized projection of the worst side of human beings, of human beings in their most vindictive and intolerant depths. Telling us nothing about a supernatural Being, the doctrine of hell perhaps reveals the most imperfect side of the human species.¹

[T]he feelings that make people want conditionalism to be true seem to me to reflect, not superior sensitivity, but secular sentimentalism ... – *J.I. Packer*²

[P]eople hold to this teaching about hell for pragmatic and not biblical reasons – hell is the ultimate big stick to threaten people with. – *Clark Pinnock*³

Conditional immortality is wishful thinking by those who want to escape the problem of hell by maintaining it is a doctrine not taught in the Bible. – *John F. Walvoord*⁴

Even though emotions sometimes run high in the debate over the duration, quality, purpose and finality of hell, it is important to bear in mind that theologians do not formulate their conceptions of the afterlife based on emotion. In spite of occasional accusations to the contrary, traditionalists do not develop their interpretation of hell as eternal conscious torment because of feelings of vindictiveness. Conditionalists do not arrive at their conclusions based on a sentimental desire to mitigate the harshness of unending punishment. Nor do universalists find their hope of the final reconciliation of all creation with God on some naive optimism. These careful scholars

¹ J.E. Barnhart, *Religion and the Challenge of Philosophy* (Totowa NJ: Littlefield, Adams, 1975), 126-127.

² J.I. Packer, “Evangelicals and the Way of Salvation: New Challenges to the Gospel – Universalism and Justification by Faith” in Kenneth S. Kantzer and Carl F. H. Henry (eds), *Evangelical Affirmations* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 126.

³ Clark Pinnock, “Response to John F. Walvoord” in Crockett 1992, 39.

⁴ John F. Walvoord, “Response to Clark H. Pinnock” in Crockett 1992, 170.

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arrive at their varying conclusions because of what they perceive to be the best understanding of the biblical material along with sound theological reasoning. Nonetheless, these theologians believe that one's emotions can play a minor role in providing existential confirmation to conclusions that are drawn from careful exegesis and theological reflection.

In this chapter I shall examine the most common non-issuant views of hell. I define non-issuant views of hell as any view of hell that rejects at least one of the three main trademarks of basic issuantism. Although the term *issuantist* refers specifically to the question of divine motivations for heaven and hell, in this work I use the term in a broader sense to designate any non-universalist view of hell that is characterized by what I believe to be the three *sine qua non* trademarks of issuantism: the conviction that both heaven and hell must issue from the love of God, a libertarian definition of human freedom and a rejection of the Retribution Thesis. A non-issuant view of hell is thus not limited to a rejection of the idea that hell is an expression of the love of God. Indeed, as we shall see in chapter four, the love of God as divine motivation for hell is a necessary but not adequate characteristic of issuantism, while its rejection is adequate but not necessary for non-issuant views of hell.

The non-issuant views of hell under consideration in this chapter include ECT, conditionalism and universalism. I shall not present a structured critique of any of these positions at this point, as issuant views of hell were largely developed as an alternative to what issuantists perceive to be the inherent problems of non-issuant views.

Eternal Conscious Torment (ECT)

The key element of ECT is the idea that the ungodly dead will suffer an unending, conscious punishment in hell. Kvanvig lists four theses that define what he calls the strong view of hell.⁵

(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;

⁵ Kvanvig 1993, 19. Kvanvig himself does not ascribe to ECT. Rather, he begins with ECT as a starting point because of its dominant position in Western Christian theology. Kvanvig's terms for ECT include "the strong view" in Kvanvig 1993 and the "punishment model" in Kvanvig 2008, 413-427.

(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.

Apologists for ECT or traditionalists may have different views concerning certain details, such as whether the fire is real or metaphorical, whether there is active torment or whether the punishment is primarily a deprivation of good things like the presence of God. Proponents may also have differing views on whether hell entails physical suffering (*poena sensus*) in addition to mental anguish (*poena damni*) and whether all people in hell receive the same punishment or not.

Exegetical Considerations for ECT

One major consideration for traditionalists is exegesis of the biblical material. Traditionalists hold that theological reasoning divorced from the clear teaching of Scripture is of little value.

John F. Walvoord comments:

[T]he nature of hell, its eternity, and its punishments can only be determined by what the Bible teaches. ... If the Bible is verbally inspired and accurate, and if it is the only revelation we have concerning life after death, we have no alternative to what it reveals – and that is to acknowledge that eternal punishment for the wicked will last forever. No one really knows enough about the future to deny what the Bible teaches.⁶

In a similar vein, Crockett writes:

Opinions on the nature of final judgment will always be with us, and it would be presumptuous to say that I know precisely what hell is going to be like. I do not, of course, and no one else does either. When it comes to the afterlife, only the dead know for sure. Yet we do have revelation from the Lord of the living and the dead, and that revelation – the Scriptures – must be our guide. If it is not, we will find ourselves at sea, driven largely by the winds of the moment.⁷

Without exception, contemporary advocates of ECT accept a grammatical-historical hermeneutic where the interpretation of biblical texts is guided by

⁶ Walvoord 1992b, 170.

⁷ William V. Crockett, “The Metaphorical View” in Crockett 1992, 45.

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the presumed intention of the author and the understanding of the original recipients of the texts within their historical context.

Some of the verses that traditionalists highlight include:

Isaiah 66:22-24 – “For as the new heavens and the new earth that I make shall remain before me, says the Lord, so shall your offspring and your name remain. From new moon to new moon, and from Sabbath to Sabbath, all flesh shall come to worship before me, declares the Lord. And they shall go out and look on the dead bodies of the men who have rebelled against me. For their worm shall not die, their fire shall not be quenched, and they shall be an abhorrence to all flesh.”

Daniel 12:1-2 – “At that time shall arise Michael, the great prince who has charge of your people. And there shall be a time of trouble, such as never has been since there was a nation till that time. But at that time your people shall be delivered, everyone whose name shall be found written in the book. And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.”

Matthew 18:6-9 – “It is better for you to enter life crippled or lame than with two hands or two feet to be thrown into the eternal fire. ... It is better for you to enter life with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into the hell of fire.” Robert A. Peterson comments on this passage that even though the text does not specifically say what will happen to the damned in hell, in combination with other New Testament texts, the message is clear. “The New Testament need not specify every time it uses the imagery of fire in connection with hell. It specifies many times and uses shorthand in others.”⁸

Matthew 25:31-46 – In the pericope of the sheep and goats judgment, there is a clear symmetry between the fate of the blessed and the fate of the damned. “Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. ... And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”

Mark 9:42-48 – This text is a parallel to Matthew 18 with the addition of the quote from Isaiah 66. “It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into hell, where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched.”

2 Thessalonians 1:5-10 – “This is evidence of the righteous judgment of God ... God considers it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you ... when the Lord Jesus is revealed from

⁸ Fudge and Peterson 2000, 140.

heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might....”

Jude 7 – Sodom and Gomorrah “serve as an example by undergoing a punishment of eternal fire.”

Jude 13 – “the gloom of utter darkness has been reserved forever” for the ungodly.

Revelation 14:9-11 – “If anyone worships the beast and its image and receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand, he also will drink the wine of God's wrath, poured full strength into the cup of his anger, and he will be tormented with fire and sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever....”

Revelation 20:14-15 – “Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.”

Although ECT-scholars may have differing opinions regarding the extent to which a grammatical-historical hermeneutic demands a literal interpretation of the fire and the worm,⁹ the consensus among traditionalists is that a plain reading of these and other biblical texts leads to the conclusion that hell is an unending punishment in a conscious state of mind.¹⁰

The Traditionalist Interpretation of αἰώνιος and its Derivatives

Closely related to questions of hermeneutics is the interpretation of key terms in relevant verses. One such term is αἰώνιος and its related term αἰών.

⁹ See for instance the difference between John F. Walvoord and William V. Crockett's positions in Crockett 1992.

¹⁰ It should be noted here that traditionalists, conditionalists and universalists can all point to Bible verses that would appear to give *prima facie* support to their view of hell. Each of these non-issuant views of hell is also challenged by other Bible passages that at first glance seem to call that interpretation of hell into question. Regardless of one's perspective on hell, one must give interpretive precedence to one set of verses and interpret the rest in light of those whose meaning one takes to be most clear. Whether one's foundational beliefs about the nature of God, hell and humanity guides the choice of which set of verses receives interpretive precedence, or whether one's perceptions of the plain meaning of the biblical material forms one's beliefs about the nature of God, hell and humanity is a bit like asking whether the chicken or the egg comes first.

As the purpose of this present work is neither to defend nor critique any non-issuant view of hell, I shall simply present an overview of the verses commonly heralded as support for each non-issuant view without delving into a detailed exegesis or critique, a task which would take me too far afield from my stated purpose.

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Traditionalists maintain that the natural understanding of these terms is quantitative. *Eternal, forever, everlasting, for ever and ever* and other translations of these terms evoke a sense of unending or infinite time.

Traditionalists sometimes point to Augustine's understanding of the importance of the symmetry in verses like Matthew 25:46 for our understanding of the meaning of αἰώνιος.¹¹

Then what a fond fancy is it to suppose that eternal punishment means long continued punishment, while eternal life means life without end ... If both destinies are "eternal," then we must either understand both as long-continued but at last terminating, or both as endless. For they are correlative, – on the one hand, punishment eternal, on the other hand, life eternal. And to say in one and the same sense, life eternal shall be endless, punishment eternal shall come to an end, is the height of absurdity. Wherefore, as the eternal life of the saints shall be endless, so too the eternal punishment of those who are doomed to it shall have no end.¹²

Even if one concedes that αἰώνιος may have a qualitative as well as a quantitative element (as conditionalists maintain), Carson insists that "αἰώνιος more commonly has temporal or eternal overtones, rather than qualitative force. Even when it has the latter, the temporal sense is rarely forfeited."¹³

The Traditionalist Interpretation of ἀπόλλυμι and its Derivatives

Another important group of words is ἀπόλλυμι and its derivatives. Since conditionalists emphasize the promise of destruction as part of the fate of the ungodly, traditionalists find it imperative to show that ἀπόλλυμι and its derivatives do not entail the cessation of existence. The word group is also used in the sense of "waste" or "useless." In Luke 15:8, the word is used of the "lost" coin. In Matthew 9:17 it describes the "ruined" wineskin. Likewise, the disciples thought that ointment used to anoint Jesus was said to be "wasted" in Matthew 26:8. In none of these cases is cessation of existence presupposed.

Carson concludes that the use of ἀπόλλυμι and its derivatives does not necessarily prove ECT, but it does disarm one argument for conditionalism.

None of this response so far demonstrates that the words in the New Testament for destruction, found in the context of perdition, necessarily refer to something eternally ongoing. The only point so

¹¹ Robert A. Peterson in Fudge and Peterson 2000, 120.

¹² Augustine, *City of God*, Marcus Dods, trans. in Philip Schaff (ed.), *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Vol. II*. (Buffalo: The Christian Literature Company, 1887), XXI:23.

¹³ Carson 1996, 523.

far is that they do not militate against such a view, and therefore the issue itself must be decided on other grounds.¹⁴

Historical Precedents of ECT

Although there have been advocates of conditionalism and universalism throughout church history, ECT has clearly been the most common perspective. Although he does not apply a historical methodology, Peterson presents eleven key figures from the history of theology who believed in ECT: Tertullian, Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, Martin Luther, John Calvin, Jonathan Edwards, John Wesley, Francis Pieper, Louis Berkhof, Lewis Sperry Chafer and Millard Erickson.¹⁵

As Peterson writes in his defense of ECT,

I don't believe in eternal punishment merely because these eleven figures do. Rather, I believe in it because I am convinced that Scripture teaches it. Nevertheless, it is to our advantage to consider the witness of church history; we can learn from devout and wise persons who have preceded us.¹⁶

It is significant, then, that in spite of their great diversity in place, time and tradition, these theologians agree on the subject of hell's duration. Their writings constitute the majority report of the church historic.¹⁷

While it is clear that ECT has historically been the dominant position among Roman Catholic and Protestant theologians, appeals to church history are ultimately unconvincing. Traditionalist Walvoord writes,

It is possible to provide almost endless quotations from the early Fathers up to modern theologians who believe in eternal punishment and who do not. Though a study of these opinions is informative, it really proves nothing except that there has been a diversity of opinion from the beginning.¹⁸

Desert and Justice

According to the problem of hell, the four theses that constitute ECT form an inconsistent set given certain plausible assumptions about the nature of God

¹⁴ Carson 1996, 522.

¹⁵ My purpose in the present work is not to critique ECT, conditionalism or universalism except as these non-issuant views are critiqued by issuantists. No issuantist questions that ECT has been a dominant understanding of hell in the history of the Western church. As such, Peterson's list is uncontested by issuantists.

¹⁶ Fudge and Peterson 2000, 118.

¹⁷ Fudge and Peterson 2000, 127.

¹⁸ Walvoord 1992a, 14.

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and what type of actions are open to such a God. An omnipotent God could create a world in which all moral agents freely choose life with God, an omnibenevolent God would not create a world with the foreknowledge that some (perhaps a significant proportion) of the creatures would end up in hell. If some people are ultimately consigned to hell, then God must be somehow limited in power, limited in goodness, or both. Some solutions to the problem of hell entail a modification to our understanding of God. Others propose a modification to our understanding of hell.

Not willing to amend either their conception of God or their understanding of hell as ECT, traditionalists must try to reconcile God's goodness, justice, omnipotence and omniscience with the divine decision to consign some people to an endless hell. According to ECT, all people deserve hell, and some people will ultimately be consigned there because God's justice demands it. The two related questions for the traditionalist are thus desert and justice.

People are morally responsible for their actions. To deny their responsibility is to take away part of their dignity as a person – it is to treat the person as morally or mentally inferior. To take away people's responsibility for their actions is to treat them as puppets or animals – something less than human. They can't control themselves because they are simply following their impulses or because of other factors outside their control.

Carson points out how issues of desert and justice are integrally connected to other key components of Christian theology. "But such an attitude overlooks how central *retributive* punishment is in the Bible. At stake is the issue of justice. If we do not get this matter straight, it will radically affect how we view the cross, and thus the gospel."¹⁹

Traditionalists maintain that if people are not held morally responsible for their actions, there would be no need for Christ's substitutionary death on the cross since just law is a prerequisite of mercy. To abolish justice and substitute it with mercy is to force a kindness upon people at their great expense (the expense of their human dignity).

Of course this raises questions about the sense of proportion. How could the finite sins that one may commit during a fleeting human lifetime of at most 100 years warrant unending conscious torment in hell? Traditionalists present four major defenses of the proportionality of finite sins and everlasting punishment: the argument from duration, the Continuing Sin

¹⁹ Carson 1996, 533.

Defense, the argument from the proportionality of heaven, and the status principle.

An Argument from Duration

First, some traditionalists point to Augustine, who answered this objection by drawing a parallel with the judicial system.²⁰ Laws do not regulate the duration of the punishment based on the duration of the crime committed.

Nor is there any one who would suppose that the pains of punishment should occupy as short a time as the offense; or that murder, adultery, sacrilege, or any other crime, should be measured, not by the enormity of the injury or wickedness, but by the length of time spent in its perpetration.²¹

Augustine goes on to justify the proportionality of everlasting punishment to temporal sin by focusing not on the particular sins committed by individuals, but on the complicity of all humanity in the sin of Adam.²²

Justice does not demand that the duration of a punishment not exceed the duration of the crime. It does however demand that the punishment be proportionate to the crime committed.²³ As such, Augustine's parallel with the judicial system fails to save ECT from the charges of injustice based on the disproportionality between finite sins and infinite punishment.

The Continuing Sin Defense

A second, perhaps more compelling, attempt at reconciling an unending punishment in hell with temporally limited sins is the Continuing Sin Defense, the idea that the ungodly deserve infinite punishment in hell because they continue to commit an infinite number of sins even while they are in hell.²⁴

Carson quotes Revelation 22:10-11 – “Let the evildoer still do evil, and the filthy still be filthy, and the righteous still do right, and the holy still be holy.”

²⁰ Oliver Crisp, “Divine Retribution: a defense” *Sophia* 42/2 (2003): 35-52.

²¹ Augustine, *City of God*, XXI:11.

²² Augustine, *City of God*, XXI:12.

²³ Seymour 1998, 71.

²⁴ The Continuing Sin Defense was probably first developed by Thomas Aquinas. John Lamont, “The Justice and Goodness of Hell” *Faith and Philosophy* 28/2 (2011): 155. It was also promoted by Leibnitz, who wrote: “Since the damned remained wicked they could not be withdrawn from their misery; and thus one need not, in order to justify the continuation of their sufferings, assume that sin has become of infinite weight through the infinite nature of the object offended, who is God.” G.W. Leibnitz, *Theodicy: Essay on the Goodness of God, the Freedom of Man, and the Origin of Evil*. E.M. Huggard, trans. (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1952), 290.

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He reasons that ECT is justified not by any sins people commit during their lifetime here on earth, but because they never stop sinning.

What seems hard to prove, but seems to me probable, is that one reason why the conscious punishment of hell is ongoing is because sin is ongoing. ... If the holy and those who do right continue to be holy and to do right, *in anticipation of the perfect holiness and rightness to be lived and practiced throughout all eternity*, should we not also conclude that the vile continue their vileness *in anticipation of the vileness they will live and practice throughout all eternity*?²⁵

Philosopher William Lane Craig concurs:

We could agree that every individual sin that a person commits deserves only a finite punishment. But it doesn't follow from this that *all* of a person's sins taken together as a whole deserve only a finite punishment. If a person commits an infinite number of sins, then the sum total of all such sins deserves infinite punishment. Now, of course, nobody commits an infinite number of sins in the earthly life. But what about in the afterlife? Insofar as the inhabitants of hell continue to hate God and reject Him, they continue to sin and so accrue to themselves more guilt and more punishment. In a real sense, then, hell is *self-perpetuating*. In such a case, every sin has a finite punishment, but because sinning goes on forever, so does the punishment.²⁶

Taken by itself, Carson and Craig's suggestion that unending punishment is warranted for unending rebellion against God fails to rescue ECT from the charge of injustice. For this type of finite but ending punishment to be just, the person in hell would have to be free to repent, cease rebelling against God and be released from hell. It is on these grounds that Kenneth Einar Himma rejects the Continuing Sin Defense of scholars like Carson and Craig. "If it is either logically or metaphysically impossible to escape hell, then it can't be a person's contingent behaviour that accounts for her not leaving hell."²⁷

The possibility of postmortem repentance and release from hell is not one that Carson admits, even though both Carson and Craig could claim that the person in hell is still morally responsible despite internal and external factors that limit which choices are practically open for him. Carson and Craig could claim that the fixed character of the ungodly in hell would make it at least

²⁵ Carson 1996, 533.

²⁶ William Lane Craig, *On Guard* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2010), 273.

²⁷ Kenneth Einar Himma, "Eternally incorrigible: the continuing-sin response to the proportionality of hell" *Religious Studies* 39/1 (2003), 63.

practically impossible for them to repent. An appeal to the Fixed Character Thesis²⁸ still fails to explain why a person in hell could not repent. A fixed character does not mean that people are unable to act in ways that run contrary to their character. A virtuous person may sometimes act in a mean or selfish manner. Likewise, an evil person may sometimes be moved to acts of kindness. However, in the absence of God's common grace in hell, it is difficult to see what would motivate a hell-hardened sinner to want to repent.

An Argument from the Disproportionality of Heavenly Reward

As a third response to the problem of proportionality between finite sins and everlasting punishment, some traditionalists point to Thomas Aquinas, who argued that since the reward of heaven is out of proportion to the finite goodness of a virtuous life, the question of proportions should not be a problem for the doctrine of hell. If it is acceptable to reward finite goodness with infinite heaven, then it cannot be morally objectionable to punish finite evil with infinite hell.

As reward is to merit, so is punishment to guilt. Now, according to Divine justice, an eternal reward is due to temporal merit: *Every one who seeth the Son and believeth in Him hath life everlasting.* Therefore according to Divine justice an everlasting punishment is due to temporal guilt.²⁹

Seymour rejects this line of reasoning on the grounds of justice. When it comes to reward, justice does not prohibit giving a reward that is disproportionate with the act being rewarded. One may give a greater reward than is merited. With punishment, however, justice allows that the punishment must be according to what was deserved *or less*, not more.³⁰ Both the generous reward for a good deed and a mitigated punishment for evil are expressions of a mercy that is compatible with justice.

The Status Principle

A fourth defense for the disproportionality between finite sin and infinite punishment comes from Anselm and Thomas Aquinas. By sinning "one offends God Who is infinite. Wherefore since punishment cannot be infinite in intensity, because the creature is incapable of an infinite quality, it must

²⁸ See chapter five below.

²⁹ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Supplement Q 99, article 1.

³⁰ Seymour 2000, 45-47.

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needs be infinite at least in duration.³¹ This idea, known as the status principle, has found wide reception among traditionalists.³²

Anselm's version of the status principle states that the severity of the punishment is determined not only by the offense committed, but also (primarily) by the status of the offended person.³³ Since God as the being a greater than whom cannot be conceived is worthy of infinite honor, all sin against God is of infinite severity and deserves infinite retribution.

Thomas Aquinas reiterated this idea.

The magnitude of the punishment matches the magnitude of the sin ... Now that a sin against God is infinite; the higher the person against whom the sin is committed, the graver the sin – it is more criminal to strike a head of state than a private citizen – and God is of infinite greatness. Therefore an infinite punishment is deserved for a sin committed against him.³⁴

Although the status principle seems to go against the moral sensitivities of people living in egalitarian democracies, Kvanvig presents an analogy that makes the status principle more accessible to modern Westerners.

A facile dismissal of this defense would attempt to tie the plausibility of such an appeal to status to the moral experience within nonegalitarian societies. The claim would be that such an appeal could only be plausible to those involved in such societies, where, e.g., the moral experience of killing a prince would be quite different from that of killing a serf. I think, however, that this dismissal is too quick. For the concept of status need not be interpreted in such a sociological fashion. Consider, for example, the appeal to status central to humanism. Even in an age emphasizing the moral dimension of the rights of animals, it is too facile to dismiss the humanistic elements of our moral experience as entirely unfounded. Even if it is *prima facie* wrong to kill any animal, it is implausible to think that the forced choice between the death of a human and the death of, say, a lizard is an unresolvable moral dilemma. Furthermore, notice that the moral choice here is difficult to explain in terms only of harm caused or harm intended, unless one builds into the idea of harm caused the idea that human

³¹ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Supplement Q 99, article 1.

³² Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. III (New York: Scribner's, 1873; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1940), 870-880; John Piper, *Let the Nations be Glad!* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), 127; Carson 1996, 534.

³³ Anselm, *Cur Deus Homo*, Book 1, Ch. XXI. Sidney Norton Deane, trans. (Chicago: Open Court Publishing Co., 1926).

³⁴ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Q 87, Article 4, Ia2ae.27.

life has an intrinsic value beyond that of a lizard. Such a viewpoint, I suggest, is nothing more than a recognition of the intuitive plausibility of some type of status principle.³⁵

That is to say that the status of the type of being against whom one may sin is more important than the status of the individual being. Thus, taking the life of a vegetable would be judged by a different moral standard than the taking the life of an animal, which in turn would be judged differently than taking a human life.³⁶ Sins against God are deemed the most serious of all.

Just as the status principle explains how temporal sins can deserve everlasting punishment, it also explains how the collective sins of humanity could be atoned by the temporary sufferings of Jesus Christ. Robert A. Peterson writes:

Instead, he suffered the equivalent of eternal punishment; his temporal anguish was equal to the eternal condemnation due sinful human beings. ... In other words, because of the infinite dignity of Christ's person, his sufferings, though finite in duration, were of infinite weight on the scales of divine justice. ... As God incarnate, Jesus was capable of suffering in six hours on the cross what we can suffer only over an infinite period of time.³⁷

The status principle is not without its problems. First, the status of the offended party is not the only factor that is taken into consideration when determining culpability. A person's intention, negligence, knowledge and the degree of damage done are also determining factors. For instance, a mother who accidentally poisons and kills her family by serving them mushrooms she innocently picked in the forest is not deemed as morally reprehensible as the mycologist who intentionally poisons his wife with a toxic mushroom.

Second, the status principle goes against our normal moral intuitions or assumptions that some sins are more egregious than others. We believe for instance that murder is worse than gluttony. There cannot be degrees of sin if all sins deserve the same infinite punishment since they are all sins against the same infinite God. Our moral intuitions tell us it is unjust to execute

³⁵ Jonathan Kvanvig, "Jonathan Edwards on Hell" in Paul Helm and Oliver Crisp (eds), *Jonathan Edwards: Philosophical Theologian* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), 2-3.

³⁶ Even within these categories there may be a breadth of opinion. Many people would place the killing of a mosquito or rat in a different category than the killing of a beloved family pet. Historically some people have justified treating certain classes of people (Jews, women, slaves, homosexuals) differently than the white male majority. Even in our times philosophers like Peter Singer have justified the unequal treatment of "normal" human beings *vis-à-vis* non-self-conscious humans such as the unborn, newborn or those in a persistent vegetative state.

³⁷ Fudge and Peterson 2000, 175.

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shoplifters or to sentence speeders to a lifetime in prison. Yet this is exactly what the status principle proposes: that even “little white lies” make a person deserving of endless suffering in hell. In *De Conceptu Virginali* Anselm recognizes this truth even though it apparently contradicts the status principle he sets forth in *Cur Deus Homo*. “Although no one thinks that equal punishment follows unequal sins, ... not all individuals deserve to be tormented in hell in equal degree.”³⁸

The Immortality of the Human Soul

Traditionalists accept the immortality of the human soul, although this is a tenet that traditionalists tend to presuppose unless specifically challenged by conditionalists. That is, defenses of ECT rarely include a defense of human immortality. Once the human soul comes into existence, it will continue to exist sempiternally: experiencing after death either the blessings of eternal life with God, or the torment of unending punishment in hell from which there is no possibility of release or escape.

Peterson presents a number of biblical passages in support of human immortality: Luke 16:19-31; Luke 23:44-46; 2 Corinthians 5:8; Philippians 1:23; Hebrews 12:23; and Revelation 6:9.³⁹ However, with the exception of Luke 16 (Lazarus and the rich man), each of the passages describes the continued existence of the souls of the godly.

Peterson points out the irony of conditionalist accusations that the inherent immortality of the human soul is a Platonic concept that was foreign to the worldviews of second temple Judaism and early Christianity.

This is significant in light of Tertullian’s suspicion of philosophy epitomized in his oft-quoted saying “What does Jerusalem have to do with Athens?” It would be unwise for annihilationists to claim that Tertullian believes in eternal punishment under the influence of Greek philosophy.⁴⁰

Against the charge that the everlasting existence of the souls of the ungodly is incompatible with God’s ultimate victory over evil, traditionalists state that if it is legitimate for God to allow evil now, then it is not problematic for God to allow evil to continue to exist in eternity. If the existence of evil is compatible with divine love and justice now, then it will continue to be so.

³⁸ Anselm, *De Conceptu Virginali*, chapter XXIII, in Jasper Hopkins and Herbert Richardson, trans., *The Complete Philosophical and Theological Treatises of Anselm of Canterbury* (Minneapolis: Arthur J. Banning Press, 2000), 457.

³⁹ Fudge and Peterson 2000, 174.

⁴⁰ Robert A. Peterson in Fudge and Peterson 2000, 119.

As benevolence in God seems in the beginning to have permitted moral evil, not because sin was desirable in itself, but only because it was incident to a system which provided for the highest possible freedom and holiness in the creature; so benevolence in God may to the end permit the existence of sin and continue to punish the sinner, undesirable as these things are in themselves, because they are incidents of a system which provides for the highest possible freedom and holiness in the creature through eternity.⁴¹

These are the most important considerations for ECT. In light of divine justice, human desert and exegesis of the biblical material, traditionalists conclude that the ungodly will face unending punishment in a conscious state of mind, forever separated from God in hell.

Conditionalism

Conditionalism is the name for a variety of ideas that have in common the notion that the human soul only has conditional immortality. That is, the human soul has a beginning and will have an end unless it receives eternal life through the gift of faith in God. The ungodly who have not received the gift of eternal life will eventually cease to exist, generally after a period of conscious suffering commensurate with the severity of the sins committed in one's lifetime.

In this section, I shall outline the main reasons given by conditionalists for conditionalist eventual extinctionism.

Exegetical Considerations for Conditionalism

Conditionalists share the traditionalists' concern for faithfulness to the biblical texts. In general, conditionalists also accept a grammatical-historical hermeneutic. Conditionalist Edward William Fudge quotes J. Julius Scott approvingly:

To avoid mishandling Scripture, "the interpreter must deal thoroughly and honestly with the text. He must faithfully follow the principles for grammatical-historical exegesis in order to carefully and painstakingly ascertain the meaning of the passage in its original setting."⁴²

Indeed, conditionalist scholars such as Fudge, John Wenham, John Stott, Clark Pinnock, and Philip Hughes are known for their high view of the Bible

⁴¹ Augustus H. Strong, *Systematic Theology* (Philadelphia: Judson, 1907 reprinted 1958), 1053.

⁴² J. Julius Scott, "Some Problems in Hermeneutics for Contemporary Evangelicals" *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 22/1 (1979): 74-75.

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as Scripture and for their application of a grammatical-historical hermeneutic.

Scriptural support for conditionalism generally falls into two categories: biblical passages that seem to support the conditional immortality of the human soul and passages that speak of the ultimate destruction of the ungodly.

Some of the verses that conditionalist authors often highlight in support of the conditional immortality of the human soul include:

1 Timothy 6:16 – "... the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone has immortality...." The point here is that only God is inherently immortal.

Romans 2:7 – "to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life." In this verse, immortality is not a given, but something that is sought through faith and perseverance.

2 Timothy 1:10 – "... our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel...." The gospel of Jesus Christ is the key to attaining immortality / eternal life.

1 Corinthians 15:54 – "When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: 'Death is swallowed up in victory.'" Humanity's default position is mortality; immortality is given to (at least) some through Christ's ultimate victory over death.

Conditionalists also devote much attention to a large number of biblical texts that speak of the final destruction of the ungodly:

Matthew 10:28 – "And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell." Conditionalists maintain that this verse shows very clearly that hell is a place where both body and soul are destroyed.

Romans 9:22 – "What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction...." The ungodly who are under the wrath of God are destined for destruction.

2 Thessalonians 1:8-9 – "... inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might...."

2 Peter 3:7, 9, 16 – “But by the same word the heavens and earth that now exist are stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly. ... The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise vas some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. ... which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction....”

These, along with a number of Old Testament texts that speak of the final destruction of the ungodly,⁴³ are given in support of the idea that the ungodly will eventually cease to exist.

Furthermore, conditionalists emphasize the destructive nature of fire as a biblical metaphor for the fate of the ungodly. Fudge writes, “When the unquenchable fire finally destroys the lost, they will be gone forever.”⁴⁴ Likewise, Wenham writes that conditionalists “claim that the unquenchable fire and undying worm mean only fire which is unquenchable and worms which are undying until their work of destruction is complete.”⁴⁵

The Conditionalist Interpretation of αἰώνιος and its Derivatives

Closely related to the biblical texts presented in support of conditionalism is the question of how one should interpret αἰώνιος. Whereas traditionalist readings of the relevant biblical passages tend to assume only the quantitative dimension – a person’s consignment to hell will last indefinitely – conditionalists maintain that αἰώνιος has both a quantitative and a qualitative dimension. Bible translations where αἰώνιος is rendered “everlasting”⁴⁶ only do justice to the word’s quantitative dimension. Qualitatively, αἰώνιος is understood in terms of finality or being eternal in its effects. Wenham writes,

Christ’s reference to ‘eternal life’ and ‘eternal punishment’ is not primarily concerned with the everlastingness of the two destinies, but with the finality of what happens when the advent of the New

⁴³ Fudge recognizes the difficulties in drawing conclusions about the fate of the ungodly from the Old Testament use of *sheol*, but remains convinced that a sufficient number of positive statements are made in the Old Testament to conclude that the ungodly will ultimately cease to exist. Fudge 1982, 2001, 85. The verses he highlights include Psalm 1:6, Psalm 37:1-40, and Psalm 68:2.

⁴⁴ Fudge and Peterson 2000), 44.

⁴⁵ Wenham 1974, 36.

⁴⁶ NIV: John 6:47; 2 Thessalonians 1:9. KJV/NKJV: Matthew 18:8; 19:29; 25:41; Hebrews 13:20; passim. Fudge comments on the KJV translation of Matthew 25:46 (“And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal.”): “The King James translators betrayed theological bias and not linguistic expertise with their ‘everlasting’ punishment but ‘eternal’ life, a ‘purely wanton and arbitrary variation.’” Fudge 1982, 2001, 195.

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Age is consummated. These two views are not mutually exclusive and both could be held together.⁴⁷

Fudge admits that the word's etymology supports a *prima facie* quantitative understanding.

We should probably conclude that both "eternal" and *aiōnios* have roots signifying time in both English (and its Latin ancestor) and in Greek. But some are ready then to remind us that in biblical interpretation the important thing is not secular etymology so much as sacred usage.⁴⁸

Fudge then goes on to summarize Pétavel's conclusions that αἰώνιος and its Hebrew equivalent are sometimes used for things that come to an end, such as the sprinkling of blood at Passover (Exodus 12:24), the Aaronic priesthood (Exodus 29:9), Solomon's temple (1 Kings 8:12f) and Gehazi's leprosy (2 Kings 5:27).

Based on second temple Jewish conceptions of the two ages: the Present Age and the Age to Come (Matthew 12:32; Luke 20:34f), Fudge maintains that αἰώνιος can be correctly used to describe the quality of pertaining to the Age to Come.

The Age to Come is of another order which may be called 'eternal' (*aiōnios*). ... That the Age to Come is eternal in quality is seen in the fact that the life of the Age to Come (eternal life) is possible even in the Present Age through faith in Jesus.⁴⁹

When αἰώνιος is used to qualify acts or processes, Fudge claims that the emphasis lies on the results or finality of the action. Regarding Hebrews 6:2, he writes:

There will be an act or process of judging, and then it will be over. But the judging results in a judgment – and that will never end. The action itself is one thing; its outcome, its issue, its result, is something else. "Eternal" here speaks of the *result* of the action, not the action itself. Once the judging is over, the judgment will remain – the eternal, everlasting issue of the once-for-all process of judgment.⁵⁰

The qualitative nature of αἰώνιος is illustrated clearly in Jude 7, where Sodom and Gomorrah were said to be destroyed by "eternal fire." In this verse, the

⁴⁷ Wenham 1974, 36.

⁴⁸ Fudge 1982, 2001, 39.

⁴⁹ Fudge 1982, 2001, 41.

⁵⁰ Fudge 1982, 2001, 45.

primary meaning must be qualitative rather than quantitative since the fires that destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah are not still burning.

The Conditionalist Interpretation of ἀπόλλυμι and its Derivatives

Another key Greek term for conditionalists is the word ἀπόλλυμι and its derivatives. Fudge is careful to defend the “normal” understanding of such words.

There is no reason, therefore, not to take Paul’s primary words in their most ordinary and common senses. He says the wicked will “perish,” “die,” be “corrupted” or be “destroyed.” Those terms have very definite connotations to the most simple person. We need not suddenly become technical physicists worrying about material “annihilation.”⁵¹

Acknowledging the use of ἀπόλλυμι in the sense of “waste” or “uselessness”, Fudge comments that an emphasis on these exceptions can lead to misunderstanding. One must focus on how the word is generally used in the New Testament.

In fact, it appears 92 times in the New Testament, 13 times in Paul’s letter. Most often it refers to actual *death* [Matt. 2:13; 8:25; 12:14; 16:25; 21:41; 22:7; 26:52; 27:20; John 10:10; 11:50; Acts 5:37; 1 Cor. 10:9, 10; Jude 5, 11]. Sometimes it is contrasted with enduring, eternal life [John 6:27; 10:28; 12:25; Heb. 1:11; 1 Pet. 1:7]. It is the regular term for the “lost” or for those who are “perishing.” [Matt. 10:6; 15:24; 18:11; 1 Cor. 1:18, 19; 2 Cor. 2:15; 4:3; 2 Thess. 2:10 etc.]. Several times it describes the final state of the wicked in the Age to Come [Matt. 5:29, 30; 10:28; John 3:16; 17:12; 2 Pet. 3:9].⁵²

John Stott also comments on the finality of destruction. “It would seem strange ... if people who are said to suffer destruction are in fact not destroyed; and ... it is difficult to imagine a perpetually inconclusive process of perishing.”⁵³

That ἀπόλλυμι must entail a total cessation of existence is further illustrated in the doctrine of divine conservation. Fudge summarizes:

[I]f man depends wholly on God for his existence day by day, and if the wicked are banished absolutely from God’s presence and are deprived of any divine blessing, the question must arise how they can continue to exist for any period of time. But there is more. Not

⁵¹ Fudge 1982, 2001, 257.

⁵² Fudge 1982, 2001, 264. The verse references in brackets are placed in the footnotes of Fudge’s book.

⁵³ Edwards and Stott 1988, 316.

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only does Scripture say throughout that *life* in any dimension is a gift of God; it is also a matter of record that “immortality” and “incorruption” are promised as exclusively to the righteous as are “glory” and “honor” (Rom. 2:7, 10; 1 Cor. 15:42-44, 50, 54).⁵⁴

Thus a person’s rejection of God’s offer of eternal life is also a rejection of all the blessings that God bestows on creation, including love, pleasure, beauty, friendship and even existence itself.

Historical Precedents of Conditionalism

Conditionalists claim that the consensus of the early church was that the human soul is mortal. When later church fathers tried to “wed” Plato’s ideas of the immortality of the soul with the teaching of the Bible, two “bastard offspring” were born: universalism (à la Clement of Alexandria and Origen) and unending conscious torment (Augustine and Tertullian).⁵⁵

Once Augustine’s perspective became the canon for correct doctrine in the Western church, ECT became the dominant position. Conditionalist perspectives were still to be found throughout church history, but those who held them were commonly marginalized or anathematized, often for other reasons.⁵⁶

Fudge acknowledges that ECT has held a place of primacy in Western theology, but rejects the idea that theology is to be formulated based on church tradition. If this were so, he pontificates, then “Protestants ought all to line up and apologize to the pope of Rome.”⁵⁷

Ultimately, appeals to the history of theology are inconclusive. The correctness or incorrectness of an idea must be decided on other grounds.

The Nature of God and the Status Principle According to Conditionalism

If one accepts a classic understanding of God as perfectly good, holy, powerful and just, then one immediately encounters problems with the idea of unending conscious torment of the ungodly in hell. How can such endless punishment be fair? Is it reasonable to believe that a loving God would

⁵⁴ Fudge 1982, 2001, 174.

⁵⁵ Wenham 1974, 36.

⁵⁶ Several historical figures whom conditionalists claim as predecessors include Justin Martyr, Tatian, Theophilus of Antioch, and Arnobius of Sicca. Later conditionalists (such as John Biddle) faced church censure because of other doctrinal problems such as modalism or Socinianism.

⁵⁷ Fudge and Peterson 2000, 183.

torture some humans for millions of years for the sins committed during a lifetime of at most 100 years?

Traditionalists since the days of Anselm have sought to defend God's justice by means of the status principle – the punishment due to sin is based not on anything inherent in the sin, but on God's elevated status as the being a greater than which cannot be conceived. Thus, even actions that would be considered minor infractions against a human deserve an infinite punishment when directed towards the infinite God.

If this were the case, then the punishment for all sins should be the same, since all sin is ultimately against the same God. Yet the Bible seems to indicate that there are various degrees of both virtue and reward and of sin and punishment.

Matthew 5:19 – “Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven ...”

Matthew 22:36 – “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?” And he said to him, ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’”

Matthew 23:23 – “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness.”

John 15:13 – “Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.”

John 19:11 – Jesus speaks to Pontius Pilate: “Therefore he who delivered me over to you has the greater sin.”

1 Corinthians 13:13 – “So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.”

In *Death and Eternal Life*, John Hick states that “the very notion of a greater condemnation suggests a range of punishments and not a simple dichotomy between infinite penalty and infinite reward.”⁵⁸

⁵⁸ Hick 1994, 244. In this book Hick argues not for conditionalism, but for an inclusivist universalism. Nonetheless his critique of the status principle is valid.

Fudge also maintains that the status principle is problematic in that there is an implicit presumption of inherent immortality.⁵⁹

The Mortality of the Human Soul

As noted earlier, conditionalists maintain that the human soul is mortal, and that unless one receives immortality through faith in God, one's soul will eventually cease to exist. Conditionalists also aver that the immortality of the human soul is a concept that has crept into Christian theology from Greek philosophy.

Jewish people of the second temple period had no unified concept of the afterlife. Some groups like the Sadducees refused to speculate on the afterlife on the grounds that the Pentateuch gives very few clues about an eventual life after death and because one's duty as a believer was to worship Yahweh alone and not to give veneration to departed ancestors. Other Jewish schools had developed a this-world apocalyptic hope for the nation of Israel after coming into contact with Zoroastrianism during the Babylonian captivity.⁶⁰ Hellenized members of the Jewish community were the first to develop concepts of individual immortality. "Wherever diaspora Jews met Greek intellectuals, the idea of an immortal soul surfaced."⁶¹ While the Book of Wisdom (first century BCE) took immortality for granted, Philo of Alexandria did much to develop and explain the Greek idea.

By creating a unique synthesis of Platonic philosophy and biblical tradition, Philo paved the way for later Christian thinkers. For him, death restores the soul to its original, pre-birth state. Since the soul belongs to the spiritual world, life in the body becomes nothing but a brief, often unfortunate, episode. While many human souls lose their way in the labyrinth of the material world, the true philosopher's soul survives bodily death and assumes "a higher existence immortal and incorporeal."⁶²

The main difference between the Platonic concept of the soul and later Christian adaptations was that Plato believed the soul to be inherently immortal. The view later espoused by Augustine and the mainstream of the Western church was that the soul had a beginning, but that once it came into existence, it would have no end.

⁵⁹ Fudge 1982, 2001, 426.

⁶⁰ Colleen McDannell and Bernhard Lang, *Heaven: A History* (New Haven CT: Yale University Press, 1988), 11-14.

⁶¹ McDannell and Lang 1988, 15.

⁶² McDannell and Lang 1988, 17.

Both Plato and Paul use the terms “death” (*thanatos*), “destruction” (*apōleia*), “corruption” (*phthora*), “perish” (*olethros*) and “die” (*apothnēskō*) – but with this difference: Plato says none of these things will ever befall the soul, for it possesses immortality; Paul says these are the very words which best tell the destiny of those who resist God and refuse to believe in Jesus.⁶³

Other Christian thinkers like Justin Martyr and Tatian actively opposed the Platonic doctrine of immortality on the grounds that it was incongruent with other key doctrines.⁶⁴

Conditionalists would do well, however, not to commit a genetic fallacy in automatically rejecting the idea of the inherent immortality of the soul because of its putative Greek origins.

Clark Pinnock summarizes the effects the presumption of immortality has had on the Christian understanding of hell.

People mixed up their belief in divine judgment after death (which is scriptural) with their belief in the immortality of the soul (which is unscriptural) and concluded (incorrectly) that the nature of hell must be everlasting conscious torment. The logic would be impeccable if only the second premise were not false.⁶⁵

Philip E. Hughes concludes that a Scriptural view of human nature is one in which body and soul are part of an integrated whole, not one in which an eternal soul is held captive in a physical body. That humans are corporeal-spiritual entities is a necessary prerequisite for a proper understanding of christology: the incarnation, death and resurrection of Jesus.⁶⁶

⁶³ Fudge 1982, 2001, 268.

⁶⁴ “For those things which exist after God, or shall at any time exist, these have the nature of decay, and are such as may be blotted out and cease to exist; for God alone is unbegotten and incorruptible, and therefore He is God, but all other things after Him are created and corruptible. For this reason souls both die and are punished...” Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, 5 in Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (eds), *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. I. (Buffalo: The Christian Literature Publishing Company, 1885), 197.

Although Tatian rejected the immortality of the human ψυχή, one must not conclude that he was a conditionalist. Individual humans shared in the immortal πνεῦμα of God. “The soul is not in itself immortal, O Greeks, but mortal. Yet it is possible for it not to die. If, indeed, it knows not the truth, it dies, and is dissolved with the body, but rises again at last at the end of the world with the body, receiving death by punishment in immortality. But, again, if it acquires the knowledge of God, it dies not, although for a time it be dissolved.” Tatian, *Oration to the Greeks*, 13. J.E. Ryland, trans. in Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (eds), *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. II (Buffalo: The Christian Literature Publishing Company, 1885), 70.

⁶⁵ Pinnock 1992a, 148f.

⁶⁶ Hughes 1989, 400.

God's Final Victory over Evil

A further theological reason for the conditionalist understanding of hell is related to God's final victory over evil. The unending existence of people who continue to rebel against God forever in hell is interpreted by conditionalists as a black spot where the lordship of Christ is not complete.

Pinnock writes:

In what is supposed to be the victory of Christ, evil and rebellion continue in hell under conditions of burning and torturing. In what is supposed to be resolution, heaven and hell go on existing alongside each other forever in everlasting cosmological dualism.⁶⁷

Pinnock maintains that this cosmological dualism is inconsistent with verses like 1 Corinthians 15:28 and Revelation 21:5 that speak of a future state in which God will be "all in all" and in which God is "making all things new." The eternal existence of evil is inconsistent with the eternal goodness of God.

The presence of evil in the current world is not as problematic as its existence in the world to come. God allows evil now for the sake of grace – that people will take the opportunity to repent. God's current allowance of evil is also weighed up by the promise that God will provide a final victory over evil and a final justice.

Henri Blocher reflects on this difficulty:

Would it be normal for God to allow for sin to go on for ever since he allows it now? That logic appears to bypass entirely the Biblical theme of divine *patience*. Is not the point that God tolerates at present what he will *no longer* when his patience comes to an end!⁶⁸

It is the conviction of conditionalists that God's ultimate victory over evil must mean the final destruction of all who persist in their rebellion against God.

Based on these theological concerns and the biblical texts that speak of the final destruction of the ungodly and of the conditional immortality of the human soul, conditionalists conclude that only a view of hell where the ungodly ultimately cease to exist is theologically viable and faithful to Scripture.

Universalism

Universalism is the view that all of humanity will eventually be restored and will finally enjoy eternal life with God. Universalists sometimes claim that

⁶⁷ Pinnock 1992a, 154.

⁶⁸ Blocher 1992, 299.

church fathers like Clement of Alexandria⁶⁹ and his disciple Origen promoted the concept of *apokatastasis* or ultimate reconciliation of all creation with its creator. In spite of being anathematized both by the emperor Justinian in 543 and ten years later at the fifth ecumenical council,⁷⁰ universalism and *apokatastasis* have been recurring themes throughout the history of Christian thought.

There are a number of varieties of universalism based on varying contexts, hermeneutical approaches and presuppositions. In the current work, I shall limit my attention to the contributions of Christian universalists who hope for the ultimate reconciliation of all creation with God based on the redemptive work of Jesus Christ on the cross. Among these particularist and inclusivist Christian universalists, Thomas Talbott's influential book *The Inescapable Love of God* has become a modern classic defense of universalism among conservative evangelicals.⁷¹

⁶⁹ It is not altogether clear that Clement believed in *apokatastasis*. Clement writes: "For all things are arranged with a view to the salvation of the universe by the Lord of the universe, both generally and particularly. ... But necessary corrections, through the goodness of the great overseeing Judge, both by the attendant angels, and by various acts of anticipative judgment, and by the perfect judgment, compel egregious sinners to repent." Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* book 7, chapter 2 in Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (eds), *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. II (Buffalo: The Christian Literature Publishing Company, 1885), 526. Daley notes, "Although he alludes in one place, at least, to 'the punishment of eternal fire' (*Quis Dives* 33), Clement generally views punishment after death as a medicinal and therefore temporary measure." Brian E. Daley, SJ, *The Hope of the Early Church* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 46-47. Many Christian universalists have nonetheless claimed him as one of their own, including Hosea Ballou (1829), Thomas Whittmore (1830), John Wesley Hanson (1899) and George T. Knight (1911). See also MacDonald 2008, 173 and Bradley Jersak, *Her Gates Will Never Be Shut: Hell, Hope and the New Jerusalem* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2009), 121.

⁷⁰ "IX. If anyone says or thinks that the punishment of demons and of impious men is only temporary, and will one day have an end, and that a restoration (ἀποκατάστασις) will take place of demons and of impious men, let him be anathema." *The Anathematisms of the Emperor Justinian against Origen*, (Labbe and Cossart, Concilia, Tom. v., col. 677) in Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (eds), *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, Second Series. Vol. XIV: The Seven Ecumenical Councils (NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1900), 320.

"I. If anyone asserts the fabulous pre-existence of souls, and shall assert the monstrous restoration which follows from it: let him be anathema." *The Anathemas against Origen* from the Fifth Ecumenical Council (Constantinople 553) in Schaff and Wace 1900, 318.

⁷¹ As we shall see presently, Thomas Talbott clearly affirms the three trademarks of basic issuantism. I choose nonetheless to categorize his version of Christian universalism as a distinct category from issuantism for three reasons. First, Talbott has engaged for many years in an ongoing scholarly discussion with issuantists like Jerry Walls and Jonathan Kvanvig where both sides have recognized that there is a fundamental difference between Talbott's perspective and that of Walls and Kvanvig. Second, issuantism has developed as an answer to the problem of hell – how belief in an omnipotent, omniscient, omnibenevolent God can be

Exegetical Considerations

Talbott shares a grammatical-historical hermeneutic with the conditionalists, traditionalists and issuantists with whom he dialogues. As such, he devotes much space to biblical exegesis. He presents, among others, a number of verses from the New Testament that *prima facie* seem to support universalism.

Romans 5:18 – “Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men.”

Romans 11:32 – “For God has consigned all to disobedience, that he may have mercy on all.”

1 Corinthians 15:22 – “For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.”

Some critics of universalism interpret these verses by showing that the word “all” is sometimes limited in scope, or by claiming that “all” refers to all classes of people rather than to all individuals.⁷² Talbott maintains however that there is no good reason either from the immediate context of these texts

reconciled with the belief that some people will end up forever in an eternal hell. Rather than trying to reconcile these paradoxical beliefs as do issuantists, Talbott and other Christian universalists circumvent the problem of hell by rejecting the idea that anyone will end up forever in an eternal hell. Finally, Talbott’s affirmation of the three trademarks of basic issuantism are only tangential to his main argument for universalism, the idea that since a fully-informed, rational choice for an eternal hell is incoherent and thus logically impossible, a loving God would do anything possible to dispel the illusions and confused mental states that would lead a person ultimately to reject God.

⁷² “I suggest that ‘all’ in Rom. 5 really has primarily in view ‘both Jews and Gentiles and not just Jews’: that is the point that Paul is concerned to make.” I.H. Marshall, “Does the New Testament Teach Universal Salvation” in J. Colwell (ed.), *Called to One Hope: Perspectives on the Life to Come* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2000), 20.

“[T]he universal terms in these texts ... are all limited or generalized by their context in such a way that it is nowhere possible to maintain that every human being everywhere, past, present, and future, is being clearly, specifically, and inescapably spoken of as destined for salvation.” J.I. Packer, “Universalism: Will Everyone Ultimately Be Saved?” in Christopher W. Morgan and Robert A. Peterson (eds), *Hell Under Fire* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 187.

“Both the context and Paul’s theology as a whole make it clear that in saying ‘in Christ all will be made alive,’ he means ‘in Christ all who are in Christ will be made alive.’ The lack of such a qualifier in the sentence itself is the result of both the balanced style and the fact that he expected it to be read in the context of his argument with them, not as a piece of abstract theology.” Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (New International Commentary on the New Testament) (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 749-750.

or from the wider context of Pauline thought to conclude “that Paul did not mean what his sentence, taken in isolation, *appears* to say.”⁷³

I have been unable to find a single example, drawn from Paul’s theological writings, in which Paul makes a universal statement and the scope of its reference is unduly fuzzy or less than clear. Paul’s writing may be cumbersome at times, but he was not nearly as sloppy a writer (or a thinker) as some of his commentators, in their zeal to interpret him for us, would make him out to be.⁷⁴

Talbott maintains that in each of the verses cited above, Paul provides a contrast between two universal statements, where the first statement provides the scope for the second.

Talbott’s Interpretation of αἰώνιος and its Derivatives

Talbott admits that while the quantitative definition of αἰώνιος is often assumed, “on no occasion of its use in the New Testament does ‘*aiōnios*’ refer to a temporal process of unending duration.”⁷⁵

I do not mean to imply that the New Testament writers took over the Platonic idea of an utterly timeless eternity, but I do mean to imply that their use of “*αἰώνιος*” was *roughly* Platonic in this sense: Whether God is eternal (that is, timeless, outside of time) in the Platonic sense or everlasting in the sense that he endures throughout all of the ages, nothing other than God is eternal in the primary sense. Other things – for example, the gifts, possessions, and actions of God – are eternal in the secondary sense that they have their causal source in the eternal God himself.⁷⁶

It is this “secondary sense” that makes Talbott unwilling to limit the scope of αἰώνιος to the quantitative dimension. “[T]his adjective need not carry any implication of unending duration.”⁷⁷ As such, Talbott emphasizes the word’s qualitative dimension. He cites verses like Romans 16:25-26 and Jude 7 as examples of the limited temporal duration of αἰώνιος. Just as the eternal times of Romans 16 and the eternal fire of Jude 7 were limited in duration, the eternal punishment of which Jesus speaks in Matthew 25:46 is “eternal” even if limited in duration.

⁷³ Talbott 1999, 57.

⁷⁴ Talbott 1999, 59.

⁷⁵ Thomas Talbott, “Pauline Interpretation of Divine Judgement” chapter 3 in Parry and Partridge, 2003, 46.

⁷⁶ Talbott 1999, 87.

⁷⁷ Talbott 1999, 86.

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Both the fire and the punishment are eternal in the sense that they have their causal source in the eternal God himself. For anything that the eternal God does is eternal in the sense that it is the eternal God who does it.⁷⁸

The qualitative definition of αἰώνιος can be applied to the eternal life of which Jesus also speaks in the same passage. “The emphasis is upon the special *quality*, not the duration, of a life in proper relationship with God.”⁷⁹

Jürgen Moltmann concurs with this qualitative definition of αἰώνιος.

The Greek word *aionios*, like the Hebrew word *olam*, means time without a fixed end, a long time, not eternal in the absolute, timeless sense of Greek metaphysics. The plural forms *olamin* and *aiones* cannot point to a timeless eternity as this can only be communicated in the singular. If damnation and the pains of hell are ‘eternal,’ then they are aeonic, long-lasting or finite. Only God himself is ‘eternal’ in an absolute sense and in a qualitative sense ‘unending’. ... The term *aionios* refers not to God’s absolute eternity, but to the necessity of choosing faith or lack of faith.⁸⁰

It is by means of a qualitative definition of αἰώνιος that Christian universalists like Talbott and Moltmann can harmonize biblical passages that speak of eternal punishment with his premise that the love of God will lead to the ultimate reconciliation of all creation with God.

Talbott’s Interpretation of ἀπόλλυμι and its Derivatives

Talbott concedes that “Paul no doubt believed that God would eventually destroy the wicked.”⁸¹ But what exactly does that mean? Talbott denies that ἀπόλλυμι means annihilation. On the basis of 1 Corinthians 5:5, he writes that destruction is an explicitly “redemptive concept.”

It could not possibly imply the ultimate ruin of the individual whose flesh is destroyed. For *that* individual, it implies just the opposite: the *gain* of all that is worthwhile, utter blessedness, for Paul here presents ‘the destruction of the flesh’ and ‘the salvation of the spirit’ as two sides of the same coin.⁸²

⁷⁸ Talbott 1999, 88.

⁷⁹ Talbott 1999, 88.

⁸⁰ Jürgen Moltmann, *Das Kommen Gottes: Christliche Eschatologie* (Gütersloh: Chr. Kaiser, 1995), 269. My translation.

⁸¹ Talbott 1999, 94.

⁸² Talbott 1999, 95.

The destruction of which Paul speaks is not the annihilation of the individual, but the destruction of the vessel of wrath for the redemptive purpose of showing mercy to the person who was captive in sin.

Talbott highlights some of the same Bible passages as traditionalists, where ἀπόλλυμι and its derivatives are used in relation to things that clearly do not cease to exist: Matthew 10:6; Luke 15:4, 24; and Luke 19:10.

In none of these contexts does being lost or having perished imply the annihilation of an individual's consciousness, nor does it imply that salvation is no longer possible; to the contrary, being lost or having perished is just what makes one eligible for being found and thus for being saved.⁸³

The wages of sin is death, but death or destruction is a necessary prerequisite for God's gift of eternal life.

Historical Precedents of Universalism

Talbott maintains that one major cause of the moral atrocities for which the Christian church has historically been responsible was its rejection of *apokatastasis* in favor of the doctrine of endless torment.

So if a sound doctrine, soundly interpreted, does not produce evil fruit in the lives of those who sincerely embrace it, then we are entitled, I believe, to regard acts of persecution within the Christian Church as a symptom of unsound doctrine or theological error.⁸⁴

Fear of eternal torment led to fear of heresy, which led to the persecution of putative heretics. "Had it not been for an obsessive fear of heresy, grounded in the traditional understanding of hell, most of the atrocities committed in the name of the Christian religion would never have occurred."⁸⁵

Belief in *apokatastasis* was systematically maligned and anathematized. "Those who prevailed were those with the civil authorities on their side and the power of the sword at their right hand."⁸⁶ As such, Talbott is unconvinced that theological truth can be ascertained by examining the putative consensus of Christian orthodoxy. "But the more I read about the imperial church – the power plays, the petty jealousies, the various political intrigues – the less inclined I was to place any confidence at all in its pronouncements."⁸⁷

⁸³ Talbott 1999, 99.

⁸⁴ Talbott 1999, 24.

⁸⁵ Talbott 1999, 31.

⁸⁶ Talbott 1999, 17.

⁸⁷ Talbott 1999, 20.

The Nature of God According to Talbott

Talbott illustrates the inherent problem with ECT. There is a fundamental inconsistency in affirming the following three statements:

1. It is God's redemptive purpose for the world (and therefore his will) to reconcile all sinners to himself;
2. It is within God's power to achieve his redemptive purpose for the world;
3. Some sinners will never be reconciled to God, and God will therefore either consign them to a place of eternal punishment, from which there will be no hope of escape, or put them out of existence altogether.⁸⁸

All three propositions seem to have biblical support. Yet, if one denies the first proposition, as do the Augustinians, then one jeopardizes the love of God. God's love must be severely limited or redefined. If one rejects the second proposition, as do the Arminians, then one has difficulty in affirming the sovereignty or omnipotence of God in fulfilling God's redemptive purposes for humanity. It is only in rejecting the third proposition that one preserves a conception of God wherein God is all-loving, sovereign and omnipotent, and worthy of one's worship and devotion.⁸⁹

Like the issuant-view scholars whom he engages in debate, Talbott sees a fundamental inconsistency in viewing eternal punishment as an expression of God's justice while eternal life is an expression of God's mercy. A scenario where God's mercy towards people and God's desire to forgive and protect them from punishment stands in conflict with God's justice in meting out the punishment that sinners rightly deserve can easily lead to the conclusion that "Christ died not to effect a cure in us, but to put an end to a bad case of schizophrenia in the Father."⁹⁰

But where is the biblical warrant, I would ask in return, for thinking that divine justice requires something that divine mercy does not, or that divine mercy permits something that divine justice does not? Where is the biblical warrant for thinking that mercy and justice are separate and distinct attributes of God?⁹¹

⁸⁸ Talbott 1999, 43.

⁸⁹ Talbott 1999, 48.

⁹⁰ Talbott 1999, 145.

⁹¹ Talbott 1999, 70-71.

This inconsistency is not overcome by an appeal to the “incoherent” idea of divine simplicity whereby all of God’s character qualities are in essence one and the same. Yet an understanding of both mercy and justice as expressions of God’s essential quality of love provides the only logically consistent means of bridging the gap between mercy and justice while preserving the integrity of both attributes.

Beginning with the statement “God is love” (1 John 4:8), Talbott maintains that if God is essentially loving, then it is impossible for God to act in an unloving way. This must be much more than a fortuitous coincidence. Nor can it mean that God chooses to be loving to an arbitrarily chosen group of people. Due to the nature of human relationships, it is impossible for me to experience the love of God knowing that God at the same time is acting in unloving ways towards the people whom I love.

The idea that God loves some created person but not all, or that he divided the human race into the elect and the non-elect, is, I contend, necessarily false. ... even if God could have chosen not to love us – he could not choose to love some of us without also choosing to love all of us. The reason, I have said, has to do with the inclusive nature of love, the way in which it binds people’s interests together. For any two people you choose, either they will themselves be united in a bond of love, each willing the good for the other, or they will not be so united. If they are so united, then God cannot will the good for one of them without willing the good for the other as well.⁹²

When God consigns some of the people I love to an unending retribution in hell, I suffer along with them and God is no longer acting in love towards me. Logical consistency demands that God loves all people equally.

The love of God “no doubt does preclude positive *hatred* and does preclude a final rejection of the beloved, [but] it in no way precludes our *experiencing* that love as punishment, or as harsh judgment, or even as divine wrath.”⁹³ This is because of the nature of judgment and punishment as restorative, not retributive.

Judgment

Two prominent themes of the New Testament are divine judgment and God’s ultimate victory over evil. Critics of universalism sometimes claim that Christian universalists overlook the biblical material that speaks of divine

⁹² Talbott 1999, 139.

⁹³ Talbott 1999, 117-18.

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wrath and judgment,⁹⁴ but Talbott maintains that a proper understanding of the judgment motif is a necessary prerequisite for affirming the theme of God's ultimate victory over evil.

The main options for understanding the purpose of divine judgment and punishment are retribution, deterrence, protection of the innocent, and rehabilitation. Talbott doesn't develop the themes of deterrence and the protection of the innocent, as they are not so common in the discussions of eternal punishment. Retribution, however, is a much more common theme and Talbott gives extensive consideration to it.

One foundational idea for retribution is justice. Some compensating loss is exacted of the sinner or criminal. Loss of personal freedom (prison sentence), loss of pleasure (corporal punishment) or of wealth (fines) compensate for the loss which the sinner / criminal has caused his victims. The idea of justice also demands that no innocent person be punished for the crimes of another and that punishment not be too excessive for the crime. In order for the criterion of justice to be satisfied, some evaluation must be made of the degree of harm done or of the actual loss inflicted by the criminal. The key issue becomes one of proportion. Talbott asks, given the principle of equal retaliation (*lex talionis*), what kind of sin could merit everlasting torment.

One possible solution to this difficult question is to posit the status principle, which Talbott rejects for several reasons. First, there are other factors that we take into consideration when determining one's degree of guilt: premeditation, knowledge, the degree of harm inflicted, etc. Second, we judge some sins to be greater than others. We regard torture and murder as more serious than pick-pocketing. This is a necessary assumption for the justice of the theory of retribution.

[I]f 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 – as does the idea of an excessive punishment and that of fitting lesser punishment to lesser crimes.⁹⁵

Third, everlasting torment for any possible sin against God goes against our normal moral understanding that jaywalkers should not be executed, or that not even mass-murderers should be tortured indefinitely.

Talbott rejects Anselm's reasoning that endless suffering is necessary to make restitution for the sins against God that cannot be redeemed by

⁹⁴ Blocher 1992, 290-291; Wenham 1974, 33.

⁹⁵ Talbott 1999, 154.

suffering of a limited duration. “The truth is that no suffering of any duration will satisfy the demands of justice fully, because justice requires something of a different nature altogether.”⁹⁶ Real justice demands restitution, but since full restitution is impossible, the whole point of retributive justice is thwarted. For Talbott, “Perfect justice requires *reconciliation* and *restoration*.”⁹⁷

Freedom and Rationality

Talbott accepts a libertarian incompatibilist definition of human freedom. Yet for a human choice to be counted as truly free, it must also be rational. An irrational choice is one that a person makes when there is no motive for making that choice and in spite of an exceedingly strong reason not to choose it.⁹⁸ Irrational choices are incompatible with true freedom. “A necessary condition of free choice, in other words, is a minimal degree of rationality on the part of the one who acts freely.”⁹⁹ The logical consequence of this, according to Talbott, is that no choice for hell can truly be free, since no choice for hell can be truly rational in the absence of a motive for making the choice and in spite of strong reasons for *not* doing so. Since the inchoate choice for hell is irrational and thus not free, a loving God is justified in orchestrating events such that the person realizes the irrationality of the choice for hell and freely and rationally accepts the gift of God’s love.

As long as any ignorance, or deception, or bondage to desire remains, it is open to God to transform a sinner without interfering with human freedom; but once all ignorance and deception and bondage to desire is removed, so that a person is truly ‘free’ to choose, there can no longer be any motive for choosing eternal misery for oneself.¹⁰⁰

According to Talbott’s definitions, God does not violate a person’s freedom by removing all ignorance, deception and bondage to desire. However, an everlasting hell would be so egregious that God would be justified in overriding human freedom to prevent someone from ending up there.

We still have every reason to believe that everlasting separation is the kind of evil that a loving God would prevent even if it meant interfering with human freedom in certain ways. ... So, a loving

⁹⁶ Talbott 1999, 156.

⁹⁷ Talbott 1999, 160.

⁹⁸ Talbott 1999, 184.

⁹⁹ Talbott 1999, 184.

¹⁰⁰ Thomas Talbott, “The Doctrine of Everlasting Punishment” *Faith and Philosophy* 7 (1990), 37.

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God ... could never permit his loved ones to destroy the very possibility of future happiness in themselves. Just as loving parents are prepared to restrict the freedom of the children they love, so a loving God would be prepared to restrict the freedom of the children he loves.¹⁰¹

Victory over Evil

Through loving intervention to “cure” human irrationality and prevent them from making unfree choices, God ensures the final victory over evil. Talbott cites two passages that illustrate what he believes to be Paul’s understanding of Christ’s victory over evil.

Philippians 2:10-11 – “... so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

Colossians 1:16-20 – “For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities – all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preminent. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.”

According to Talbott, Christ’s victory entails the *willing* submission of all creation to the lordship of Christ. This choice is made freely and rationally. God is always merciful, even though sinful creatures can sometimes perceive God’s mercy as severity, judgment, or punishment. God judges and disciplines a person for the purpose of helping a person recognize the irrationality of her ways, and producing a contrite heart that is able to receive God’s mercy.

In this chapter we have taken a more detailed look at the main non-issuant views of hell: eternal conscious torment, conditionalism and universalism. These views provide a foil for advocates of various forms of issuant views that we will examine in the coming chapters.

¹⁰¹ Talbott 1990a, 38.

3

“MY WILL BE DONE” – C.S. Lewis’ Issuant View of Hell

In the long run the answer to all those who object to the doctrine of hell is itself a question: “What are you asking God to do?” To wipe out their past sins and, at all costs, to given them a fresh start, smoothing every difficulty and offering every miraculous help? But He has done so, on Calvary. To forgive them? They will not be forgiven. To leave them alone? Alas, I am afraid that is what He does.¹

Although C.S. Lewis cannot be considered a contemporary thinker, I am including an examination of his views on hell here since he was one of the earliest Christian thinkers to develop a full-fledged issuant view as a proposal for answering the problem of hell. Moreover, his ideas have served as a great inspiration to a number of subsequent issuantists such as N.T. Wright, Jonathan Kvanvig, Stephen T. Davis, Peter Kreeft, Bradley L. Sickler and Jerry Walls. Many of these scholars have sought to improve on some areas where Lewis’ ideas are deemed inadequate or inconsistent.

C.S. Lewis shared the sentiments of many people today. “There is no doctrine which I would more willingly remove from Christianity than this, if it lay in my power. ... If a game is played, it must be possible to lose it.”² But since Jesus so clearly warned against hell, Lewis believed that one must take his words seriously. Yet how does one reconcile the possibility that some people may end up in hell with a classic Christian concept of a loving God? He writes, “I am not going to try to prove the doctrine tolerable. Let us make no mistake; it is not tolerable. But I think the doctrine can be shown to be moral by a critique of the objections made, or felt, against it.”³

¹ C.S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (NY: Macmillan, 1962, 1974), 128.

² Lewis, *Problem of Pain*, 118.

³ Lewis, *Problem of Pain*, 120.

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To understand Lewis' concept of hell, one must first look at his understanding of humanity and of God. Lewis believed that if one doesn't like the idea of eternal reward and eternal punishment, it is often because one has a faulty concept of God. One cannot understand God's greatness and character while at the same time trivializing both God's greatness and the sin that makes it impossible for sinful humans to dwell in God's presence.

The Nature of God, the Nature of Humanity

According to Lewis, divine sovereignty and human freedom belong together in an almost inexplicable way. He presupposed a compatibilist definition of human freedom whereby a sovereign God knows – and at least allows through some voluntary limitation of his powers – human choices for evil. In *Perelandra*, Ransom comes to the conclusion that “Predestination and freedom were apparently identical.”⁴ In another context, Lewis wrote, “Free will is the *modus operandi* of destiny.”⁵ It is necessary to affirm both ideas, even if they seem from a human, temporal perspective to be contradictory.

For every attempt to see the shape of eternity except through the lens of Time destroys your knowledge of Freedom. Witness the doctrine of predestination which shows (truly enough) that eternal reality is not waiting for a future in which to be real; but at the price of removing Freedom which is the deeper truth of the two.⁶

He illustrates the relation between predestination and human freedom with our understanding of the nature of light. Sometimes light appears to observers as particles, while at other times it manifests itself as a wave. It is likewise easier for humans to see God's sovereignty at some points while human freedom comes more into focus at others.

... but till (if ever) we can see the consistency it is better to hold two inconsistent views than to ignore one side of the evidence. The real inter-relations between God's omnipotence and Man's freedom is something we can't find out. ... It is plain from Scripture that, in whatever sense the Pauline doctrine [of election] is true, it is not true in any sense which excludes its (apparent) opposite.⁷

⁴ C.S. Lewis, *Perelandra* (NY: Macmillan, 1944, 1965), 149.

⁵ C.S. Lewis, “On Stories” in Walter Hooper (ed.), *Of Other Worlds: Essays and Stories* (NY: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1966), 15.

⁶ C.S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce* (NY: Macmillan, 1946), 141.

⁷ From a letter dated August 3, 1952 in C.S. Lewis, W.H. Lewis (ed.), *The Letters of C.S. Lewis* (NY: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1966), 252.

From God's atemporal perspective, there is no contradiction. "For the Enemy [God] does not *foresee* the humans making their free contributions in a future, but sees them doing so in His unbounded Now. And obviously to watch a man doing something is not to make him do it."⁸ For God then, there is no such thing as *foreknowledge* or *predestination*.

Yet without true human freedom, people cannot be held morally accountable for their actions. "[S]ince the two conceptions, in the long run, mean the same thing – to think of this bad man's perdition not as a sentence imposed on him but as the mere fact of being what he is."⁹ Likewise, without human freedom, there can be no justice in judgment.

The Nature of God According to C.S. Lewis

Lewis believed that both divine justice and divine mercy demand the idea of hell. Without a hell one would have just cause to question God's justice. If God knows all the evil that people cause yet ignores it, God is no longer just, but an enabler. It is unfair both to the guilty and to the innocent to turn a blind eye to human evil.

God's standards for right and wrong are not arbitrary – they are grounded in God's nature. That's why evil people will not be permitted to continue in their sin forever and believe mistakenly that they've "won." God's justice demands that people come to the realization that evil is evil and that goodness and morality have their source in the nature of God.

Hell is also an expression of divine mercy and grace. Hell was created as a "... tourniquet on the wound through which the lost soul else would bleed to a death she never reached."¹⁰

The pain that the sinner experiences in hell, whether physical or psychological is also an expression of God's mercy in that it prevents human evil from harming even more people.

Human Nature According to C.S. Lewis

When God created humankind, it was with the intention that human beings would live in a relationship with God. To illustrate this, let's call it humanity's "factory settings." People have unfortunately changed these factory settings through their sinful choices. Now the new default setting is that humanity is separated from God and headed for destruction. It is possible in the course of

⁸ Letter 27 in C.S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* (NY: Macmillan, 1961), 150.

⁹ Lewis, *Problem of Pain*, 123.

¹⁰ Book Ten: "The Regress," chapter IV: "The Black Hole" in C.S. Lewis, *The Pilgrim's Regress* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 180.

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using a computer, that viruses can “infect” the operating systems, or that files related to various downloaded programs can conflict and cause problems for the computer’s operation. The best solution in such cases is to save one’s documents and restore all the factory settings. Likewise, when people recognize that the “settings” they’ve created in life no longer work, they can go back to the manufacturer’s settings. In theological terms this is called repentance and salvation.

Lewis believed that for people to be held morally responsible for their actions, they must also be free. One can choose to promote the good of creation and general revelation, which is found in every person, or one can choose to follow the sinful tendencies that are also there as a result of original sin. The free moral choices one makes can lead to a lasting character – a virtuous life or a character that makes it impossible for a person to heed the voices that call one to a virtuous life. In *The Magician’s Nephew*, Aslan says of Uncle Andrew: “[he] has made himself unable to hear my voice. If I spoke to him, he would hear only growlings and roarings. Oh Adam’s sons, how cleverly you defend yourselves against all that might do you good!”¹¹ When this happens, one can no longer distinguish between good and evil.

Since we are created to live in a relationship with God, we are dependent upon God for our continued existence. When one becomes separated from God, or when God respects a people’s wishes to be left alone in hell, they will die both physically and spiritually.

Lewis’ Understanding of Hell

In this section, I would like to highlight Lewis’ answers to a number of common questions about hell: *What does hell look like? How does one end up there?* and *What kind of fate can one expect there?* Lewis’ answers to these three questions will even cast some light on his thoughts regarding the duration, quality, purpose and finality of hell.

What Does Hell Look Like?

Lewis’ theology shows clear signs of influence from Augustine, who in turn was strongly influenced by both Plato¹² and Plotinus. Plotinus believed that

¹¹ Chapter 14: “The Planting of the Tree” in C.S. Lewis, *The Magician’s Nephew* in C.S. Lewis, *The Complete Chronicles of Narnia* (NY: HarperCollins, 1998), 67.

¹² Andrew Walker, “Scripture, revelation and Platonism in C.S. Lewis” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 55/1 (2002): 19-35. “Lewis’ Platonism is unmistakable ... Lewis found in Platonism a comprehensive way to reconcile reason’s dialectic with the reasons of the heart. To settle for anything less than such a reconciliation, he felt, would be to betray his experience of art, mind, and the everyday world.” “[M]any aspects of Lewis’ thought are Platonic to the core.” Corbin

God was pure Being, the greatest good. Everything else can be placed on a scale where the beings closest to God are also those who share divine character qualities like existence. The farther away from God one comes, the more one is lacking in these divine attributes.¹³

One can see similar ideas in Lewis' theology of hell. In *The Great Divorce*, heaven and celestial beings are portrayed as really real. The ungodly, who come to the outskirts of heaven on a day-trip from hell, are presented as shadows or ghosts. Their voluntary distance from God makes them both less corporeal and less real. On the outskirts of heaven, even the grass and the water are so hard that it hurts for the ghosts to come into contact with them.

This illustrates an important aspect of Lewis' theology of hell. There are no "people" in hell; only the *remains* of human beings. These remains are what is left over when all the good that is part of human nature gradually disappears through one's persistent choices to live apart from God. When one rejects God, one also rejects all the good things that God wishes to give his created beings: joy, beauty, friendship, generosity, love, goodness, benevolence, maybe even existence itself. The only things that remain are one's selfishness, bitterness, spite, revenge, and a total lack of grace and forgiveness. Lewis illustrates this idea in *The Great Divorce* where hell is presented as a gray, rapidly expanding city where people move farther and farther away from each other since they cannot tolerate the others' presence.¹⁴

In one of the conversations in *The Great Divorce*, a ghost tries to understand the true nature of things in hell. He receives an explanation from writer George MacDonald, who in this book is a spokesman for Lewis' own ideas.¹⁵

'Then those people are right who say that Heaven and Hell are only states of mind?' 'Hush,' said he sternly. 'Do not blaspheme. Hell is a

Scott Carnell, *Bright Shadow of Reality: Spiritual Longing in C.S. Lewis* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 67, 71. It is also comic to note that according to *The Great Divorce* (chapter 1), the chthonic bookshops in the gray city sell the works of Aristotle. Perhaps Plato's books are available in celestial bookshops?

¹³ This scale of existence is nicely illustrated by Lewis' application of the term *Shadowlands* to normal, earthly, human life. The name *Shadowlands* also betrays a striking connection to Plato's cave allegory, where humans can only sense the shadows and simulacra of an unseen reality. Life on earth is characterized by a certain degree of goodness and existence – more than that which characterizes hell and its denizens, but less real than heaven and its inhabitants.

¹⁴ Lewis, *Great Divorce*, chapter 2.

¹⁵ There are certain similarities here between MacDonald and Virgil in Dante's *Inferno*. Both act as insightful "guides" into unknown worlds beyond the grave.

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state of mind – ye never said a truer word. And every state of mind, left to itself, every shutting up of the creature within the dungeon of its own mind – is, in the end, Hell. But Heaven is not a state of mind. Heaven is reality itself. All that is fully real is Heavenly. For all that can be shaken will be shaken and only the unshakable remains.¹⁶

Lewis draws a clear contrast between what humans were intended to be by the creator, and what they will become in hell as a consequence of their choices.

To be a complete man means to have the passions obedient to the will and the will offered to God: to have been a man – to be an ex-man or ‘damned ghost’ – would presumably mean to consist of a will utterly centered in its self and passions utterly controlled by the will.¹⁷

Another image for hell comes from *The Screwtape Letters*, where hell is pictured as an all-encompassing bureaucracy. Lewis did not believe there is fire and brimstone in hell, nor in a devil who runs around tormenting people with a pitchfork. As a professor of literature, it was important for Lewis to emphasize that one must not “confuse the doctrine with the imagery by which it may be conveyed”¹⁸ when the Bible describes the fate of the godless in hell.

How Does One End Up in Hell?

Lewis’ answer to this question is closely related to his understanding of salvation. According to Lewis, people are saved only when they stop fighting against God and “surrender” to God’s will and plan for their lives. It is only then that they become truly human. A good illustration is the story of the dreadful boy Eustace in *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*.¹⁹ Eustace’s consistently selfish actions led his body to be transformed into a dragon that matched his evil soul. Only when he surrendered completely to Aslan did he become fully human on both the inside and the outside.

If we define salvation as surrender, then universalism presents a logical dilemma. God must either violate people’s free will and save them even

¹⁶ Lewis, *Great Divorce*, 68-69.

¹⁷ Lewis, *Problem of Pain*, 125-126.

¹⁸ Lewis, *Problem of Pain*, 124.

¹⁹ Chapter 6 in C.S. Lewis, *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* in C.S. Lewis, *The Complete Chronicles of Narnia* (NY: HarperCollins, 1998).

though they don't want to surrender, or else it must be possible for them to finally reject God.

In the long run the answer to all those who object to the doctrine of hell is itself a question: 'What are you asking God to do?' To wipe out their past sins and, at all costs, to given them a fresh start, smoothing every difficulty and offering every miraculous help? But He has done so, on Calvary. To forgive them? They will not be forgiven. To leave them alone? Alas, I am afraid that is what He does.²⁰

God is a "gentleman" and will not force himself on anyone.

The most important aspect of Lewis' answer to this question is that he didn't believe that God *sends* anyone to hell.

It's not a question of God 'sending' us to Hell. In each of us there is something growing up which will of itself be Hell unless it is nipped in the bud.²¹

A man can't be taken to hell, or sent to hell: you can only get there on your own steam.²²

The people who end up in hell do so as a natural consequence of their choices made in life. They choose to live their lives without God, and God in love and justice respects their moral maturity even when it entails self-destructive choices.

There are only two kinds of people in the end: those who say to God, 'Thy will be done,' and those to whom God says, in the end, 'Thy will be done.' All that are in Hell, choose it. Without that self-choice there could be no Hell. No soul that seriously and constantly desires joy will ever miss it. Those who seek find. To those who knock it is opened.²³

Those who refuse to surrender to God continue in their rebellion against God. "I willingly believe that the damned are, in one sense, successful, rebels to the end; that the doors of hell are locked on the *inside*."²⁴ It is thus not God who locks them up in hell, but the rebels themselves who distance themselves from God until God finally removes all blessing from them. God had never

²⁰ Lewis, *Problem of Pain*, 128.

²¹ C.S. Lewis, "The Trouble with X" in C.S. Lewis, Walter Hooper (ed.), *God in the Dock* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 155.

²² C.S. Lewis, *The Dark Tower* (NY: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1977), 49.

²³ Lewis, *Great Divorce*, 72-73.

²⁴ Lewis, *Problem of Pain*, 127.

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intended for any person to end up in hell. “The saved go to a place prepared for *them*, while the damned go to a place never made for men at all.”²⁵

What Kind of Fate Can One Expect in Hell?

Many people have the idea that heaven will be boring. Sometimes we hear people say that they’d rather go to hell where they can play poker and drink beer with their buddies. At least there, they’ll have some fun. Lewis claimed it was the exact opposite. God created people as sensuous beings with the capacity to enjoy friendship, sex, good food and drink. It is only in fellowship with God in heaven that the natural human capacity to experience pleasure will continue. Hell will be boring: friendship, beauty and all the good things one enjoys in life will be blatantly absent. The only thing left will be the unbridled human vices that make a person unbearable.

Lewis was aware of the common objection to the doctrine of hell that the proportions between sin and everlasting punishment are unreasonable. He speculates freely at this point and presents several possible solutions. First, he calls into question the temporality of hell. That is, he wondered whether hell really entails an endless expanse of time. “That the lost soul is eternally fixed in its diabolical attitude we cannot doubt: but whether this eternal fixity implies endless duration – or duration at all – we cannot say.”²⁶ Likewise, “Our Lord ... usually emphasises the idea, not of duration but of *finality*.”²⁷

Second, Lewis speculated on the nature of time. In the alternate worlds of *The Chronicles of Narnia* and in his space trilogy, time often flows differently than it does in our world. He writes in *The Problem of Pain* that it is possible that time also has breadth in addition to length, and that time should be viewed as a plane and not as a line. An omniscient God would also know whether granting a person more time would make it easier for him to repent. If more opportunities (even more chances after death) would make a difference, God would give them.

One could illustrate this with a hardened criminal who upon release from prison would perhaps like to stay out of prison, but who lacks the will to make the necessary changes in lifestyle.²⁸ In the same way, there is at least a theoretical possibility for someone in hell to repent and be saved, and thus be released from his suffering, but considering the total absence of divine

²⁵ Lewis, *Problem of Pain*, 124-125.

²⁶ Lewis, *Problem of Pain*, 127.

²⁷ Lewis, *Problem of Pain*, 126-127.

²⁸ This point is insightfully raised by Jonathan Kvanvig in Kvanvig 1993, 120.

goodness and grace in hell, the chances that anyone in point of fact does that are negligible.

Discussions of one's fate in hell naturally raise the question of how the godly could enjoy being in heaven with the knowledge that some of their loved ones are suffering in hell.

Lewis answers this question with yet another question: "Are we more merciful than God?"²⁹ We cannot allow our subjective feelings to determine how we are to interpret the goodness of God. In *The Great Divorce*, Lewis tells the story of Sarah and Frank Smith. Sarah is in heaven. Her husband Frank comes on an excursion from hell to the outskirts of heaven where he meets Sarah. Just as he always did in life, Frank tries to manipulate Sarah into feeling sorry for him in hell, but to no avail. Sarah finally goes her way filled with joy and a song in her heart.

What some people say on earth is that the final loss of one soul gives the lie to all the joy of those who are saved. ... That sounds very merciful: but see what lurks behind it. ... The demand of the loveless and the self-imprisoned that they should be allowed to blackmail the universe: that till they consent to be happy (on their own terms) no one else shall taste joy: that theirs should be the final power; that Hell should be able to *veto* Heaven.³⁰

According to Lewis, hell can never blackmail heaven. The damned will never be able to take the final joy of the saved as hostage.

Evaluation of Lewis' View of Hell

It would appear that Lewis is somewhat inconsistent in his thoughts on hell. Some aspects of his theory seem to fit more naturally with annihilationism or conditionalism. If one's situation in hell means that one is separated from all blessings (the capacity to experience pleasure, joy, friendship, beauty) as Lewis maintains, it would be consistent to claim that one is also separated from the capacity for existence. According to Lewis, people become something less than fully human as a result of sin. It is only through surrender to God and salvation that they can be restored to full humanity. In hell, the corruption continues, which makes people not only less and less human, but less and less real.³¹ Lewis writes that "a damned soul is nearly

²⁹ Lewis, *Problem of Pain*, 126.

³⁰ Lewis, *Great Divorce*, 120.

³¹ Lewis never placed much emphasis on the ontological argument for God's existence, but he shared its presupposition that being is better than non-being.

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nothing.”³² Among other things, he describes hell as “... ‘the darkness outside,’ the outer rim where being fades away into nonentity.”³³ Yet several pages earlier, he explains why he does not believe in ultimate annihilation. There he gives the analogy of a log on a fire. It ceases to be a log, but does not cease to exist. It continues to exist in new forms: ashes, gases, heat, light, etc. Lewis argues that total annihilation is not a possibility due to certain physical laws.

There are several problems here. First, it could be argued that Lewis’ ideas are at odds with the Christian doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*. If God can create something from nothing, then it is not too difficult to believe that God can cause something that exists to cease existing.

Of course this applies to the material universe. A human person has both physical and spiritual dimensions. The laws of nature that govern the material world do not necessarily apply to the immaterial world. Lewis clearly rejects the physicalism and naturalism of his day, which insisted that the material universe is all that exists.³⁴ Lewis holds to a mind-body dualism wherein human beings have both physical and spiritual dimensions. In spite of this, it seems that Lewis commits something of a category error here when he assumes that the immaterial dimension is also governed by the laws of nature. The laws of nature that govern the material world do not necessarily apply to other dimensions beyond the physical. In other words, that which is physically impossible due to certain laws of nature may nonetheless be logically and metaphysically possible. It is not physically possible for a person to lift a fully-grown horse into the air. Yet there is nothing illogical with the idea that a person with extraordinary strength like Pippi Longstocking or Superman could do it. Matter and energy cannot be destroyed; they take on new forms. This does not mean that the immaterial human soul could not be annihilated or otherwise cease to exist. Based on his understanding of both God and human nature, I maintain that Lewis would be more logically consistent if he had concluded that God will respect a person’s will to live life without God even when that choice leads to a final cessation of existence.

A second problem for Lewis relates to the nature of human freedom. He seems inconsistent when he presupposes a compatibilist definition of human

³² Lewis, *Great Divorce*, 139.

³³ Lewis, *Problem of Pain*, 127.

³⁴ See in particular chapters 3 and 4 in *Miracles*. Here he states explicitly that “rational thought is not part of the system of Nature” and that in “relation to Nature, rational thought goes on ‘of its own accord’ or exists ‘on its own.’” C.S. Lewis, *Miracles* (NY: Touchstone / Simon & Schuster, 1996), 39.

freedom (“Predestination and freedom were apparently identical”) on one hand while at the same time claiming that God’s omnipotence is voluntarily limited for the sake of deferring to human free choices³⁵ – something that presupposes libertarian incompatibilism.

This apparent inconsistency is perhaps nowhere more clear than in Lewis’ account of own salvation in *Surprised by Joy*. He writes that he had a free choice “in a sense”, but that it was not necessarily a libertarian free choice.

I say, “I chose,” yet it did not really seem possible to do the opposite. ... You could argue that I was not a free agent, but I am more inclined to think that this came nearer to being a perfectly free act than most that I have ever done. Necessity may not be the opposite of freedom.³⁶

In addition, Lewis describes himself as “the most reluctant convert in all England” and God as one who loves the prodigals whom he brings in “kicking, struggling, resentful, and darting his eyes in every direction for a chance of escape.”³⁷ Hardly a description of libertarian free choice. Lewis seems thus to advocate a form of compatibilism when it comes to salvation yet libertarian incompatibilism when it comes to damnation.

In the name of consistency, Lewis has two options. He could presuppose libertarian human freedom for both salvation and damnation or he could recognize that people are not free in a libertarian sense. Libertarian freedom preserves the goodness of God *vis-à-vis* people in hell. However, it takes its toll on God’s sovereignty. Is God really in control of the universe at all? Prayer would be limited to confession of sin and praising God for divine attributes. There would be no point in making any petition of God that involves human choices or actions. “Lord, please save my father” and “Lord, please help me get that job” become meaningless. Nor would thanking God for blessings that involve human choice be meaningful. “Lord, thank-you that this wonderful person and I choose to love each other and get married – because we know that you didn’t have anything to do with us becoming the wonderful people we are, or orchestrating the course of human events so that we would meet each other and fall in love.”

³⁵ “Finally, it is objected that the ultimate loss of a single soul means the defeat of omnipotence. And so it does.” Lewis, *Problem of Pain*, 129. Yet Lewis regarded this as a miracle in itself – that the Almighty would both freely limit himself and make adjustments for even self-destructive human choices.

³⁶ C.S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy* (NY: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1955), 224.

³⁷ Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*, 229.

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A more realistic option given Lewis' overall theology is to recognize that people are not free at all; they are slaves under sin. When one is saved by Christ one is still not free in a libertarian sense. There is an enemy of our souls who has a vested interest in leading people away from God and keeping them in sin. At the same time, there is also a good God who does everything possible to influence people to want to be saved.

A presumption of compatibilism for both salvation and damnation would mean that God somehow "causes" some people to freely lock themselves into hell – in a similar manner to God's way of compelling others to freely accept the gift of grace. In this case, the problem of God's goodness would remain. That is, if God has even a little part in people ending up in hell, then God bears part of the blame, so to speak. This is the very problem Lewis tries to circumvent by positing that God does not send anyone to hell and that the gates of hell are locked from the inside.

If God determines reality in even a small way, as one does in compatibilism, it becomes extremely difficult to explain why God could not prevent people from making self-destructive choices, or to cause people to "freely" choose to live in fellowship with God. Lewis writes that

You may attribute miracles to Him, but not nonsense. This is no limit to His power. If you choose to say, 'God can give a creature free will and at the same time withhold free will from it', you have not succeeded in saying *anything* about God: meaningless combinations of words do not suddenly acquire meaning simply because we prefix to them the two other words 'God can'. It remains true that all *things* are possible with God: the intrinsic impossibilities are not things but nonentities. It is no more possible for God than for the weakest of His creatures to carry out both of two mutually exclusive alternatives; not because His power meets an obstacle, but because nonsense remains nonsense even when we talk it about God.³⁸

A third area of difficulty for Lewis relates to the classic Christian understanding of the resurrection of the body – the idea that both the godly and the ungodly will be raised from the dead to receive their eternal rewards and punishments (John 5:28-29). Lewis portrays the human "remains" in hell as incorporeal "damned ghosts." Lewis does not deny the resurrection of the body, but he seems to do injustice to the idea – at least in relation to the ungodly. Based on his scale of existence, he claims that our present physical

³⁸ Lewis, *Problem of Pain*, 18.

bodies are only “half real and phantasmal”³⁹ in comparison with the body the godly will receive in the resurrection of the dead, while the ungodly have a nearly incorporeal existence.

Fourth, although Lewis rejects the idea that suffering in hell is a punishment or judgment, he commonly refers to the people in hell as “the damned.” Consider these passages already quoted in this chapter:

To be a complete man means to have the passions obedient to the will and the will offered to God: to have been a man – to be an ex-man or ‘*damned* ghost’ – would presumably mean to consist of a will utterly centered in its self and passions utterly controlled by the will.⁴⁰

I willingly believe that *the damned* are, in one sense, successful, rebels to the end; that the doors of hell are locked on the inside.⁴¹

The saved go to a place prepared for them, while the *damned* go to a place never made for men at all.⁴²

Of course one could say that this is only a figure of speech, or that by their free choices, the ungodly damn themselves, but this still presumes some kind of judgment and punishment, not the purely natural consequences of one’s choices.

A fifth problem for Lewis is also related to the substitution of the Retribution Thesis with the Self-Determination Thesis. Lewis is quite clear in his texts that deal specifically with the doctrine of hell that he rejects the Retribution Thesis in favor of the Self-Determination Thesis. Yet this seems to be at odds with his writings on a closely related topic. In 1953 Lewis published the article “The Humanitarian Theory of Punishment” in the legal journal *Res Judicatae*.⁴³ In this article he rejects what he calls the “humanitarian” theory of punishment, which would reform the penal system by treating criminals as sufferers from an illness. According to this humanitarian theory, the purpose of punishment should not be retributive, but either deterrence by example or remedial in the healing or treatment of the criminal. Lewis urges a “return to the traditional or Retributive theory not

³⁹ C.S. Lewis in a letter dated 19 August 1947 in Walter Hooper (ed.), *The Letters of C.S. Lewis to Arthur Greeves (1914-1963)* (New York: Collier/Macmillan, 1986), 511.

⁴⁰ Lewis, *Problem of Pain*, 125-126. My emphasis.

⁴¹ Lewis, *Problem of Pain*, 127. My emphasis.

⁴² Lewis, *Problem of Pain*, 124-125. My emphasis.

⁴³ C.S. Lewis, “The Humanitarian Theory of Punishment” *Res Judicatae* 6 (1953): 224-230. Reprinted in *God in the Dock* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 287-294.

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solely, not even primarily, in the interests of society, but in the interests of the criminal.”⁴⁴ He believes that this view “carries on its front a semblance of mercy which is wholly false.”⁴⁵ If one views deterrence as the primary purpose of the penal system, then it is not necessary that the one being punished is truly the one who committed the crime. If one rejects this idea as unjust, Lewis claims it is only because one has a residual concept of justice based on a retributive understanding of desert. Regarding the remedial view of punishment, Lewis writes, “To be ‘cured’ against one’s will and cured of states which we may not regard as disease is to be put on a level with those who have not yet reached the age of reason or those who never will; to be classed with infants, imbeciles, and domestic animals.”⁴⁶ That is to say, the legal right to govern one’s own affairs and the moral responsibility for one’s actions are taken away.

When it comes to crimes against the civil law, Lewis advocated a return to the concept of desert and retribution as the only view that respects the individual’s freedom and responsibility. Yet in the very similar case of crimes against God’s laws, Lewis removes the concept of desert and retribution in favor of self-determination. Could not Lewis’ critique of the humanitarian theory of punishment also be turned against his view of hell? He writes,

But do not let us be deceived by a name. To be taken without consent from my home and friends; to lose my liberty; to undergo all those assaults on my personality which modern psychotherapy knows how to deliver; to be re-made after some pattern of ‘normality’ hatched in a Viennese laboratory to which I never professed allegiance; to know that this process will never end until either my captors have succeeded or I grown wise enough to cheat them with apparent success – who cares whether this is called Punishment or not?⁴⁷

Lewis is unwilling to call consignment to hell a punishment, but isn’t this the very type of playing with words of which he accuses the humanitarian theory of punishment? One could easily say that taking a sinner from his home and friends, causing him to lose his liberty, to force him to undergo all the assaults on his personality that consignment in hell knows how to deliver; to be re-made after some pattern of ‘normality’ hatched in a heavenly laboratory to

⁴⁴ Lewis, “Humanitarian”, 224; Lewis, *God in the Dock*, 287.

⁴⁵ Lewis, “Humanitarian”, 230; Lewis, *God in the Dock*, 293.

⁴⁶ Lewis, “Humanitarian”, 229; Lewis, *God in the Dock*, 292.

⁴⁷ Lewis, “Humanitarian”, 226; Lewis, *God in the Dock*, 290.

which he never professed allegiance; to know that this process will never end – who cares whether this is called Punishment or not?

A final problem for Lewis is the difficulty of harmonizing his theory with the Bible.⁴⁸ Lewis claims that hell is not an issue of judgment or punishment, but rather the natural consequences of a person's free choices. The ungodly will certainly suffer in hell, but it is not because God judges them or consigns them to hell. It is difficult to integrate this idea with biblical passages that speak of hell as a punishment (Matthew 25:46; 2 Thessalonians 1:9), God's wrath (John 3:36; Romans 9:22; Revelation 14:10 and 19:15), and that God casts the ungodly into a lake of fire (Revelation 20:15). Even if one interprets the lake of fire metaphorically, as Lewis does, taking God's active roll in *casting* the ungodly into the lake of fire and reinterpreting it as a person's free choice to lock himself into hell from the inside remains problematic. Henri Blocher makes the keen observation that "the Biblical picture of the wrathful Lord and Judge of all hardly suggests a mere passive role. There is something suspicious in the zeal to exonerate God of responsibility in judgement – theodicy built on insignificance?"⁴⁹

In chapter two I outlined three criteria for issuant views of hell: the integration of heaven and hell as both issuing from the same divine motivation in dealing with humanity, the criterion of metaphysical libertarian human freedom, and the replacement of the Retribution Thesis with the Self-Determination Thesis. Lewis is quite clear in regard to the Self-Determination Thesis; God does not *send* a person to hell. The gates of hell are closed from the *inside*. As we have seen in my analysis, Lewis is somewhat inconsistent when it comes to compatibilist or libertarian definitions of human freedom. Nor does Lewis specifically address the issue of love as God's primary motivating attribute in allowing people to close themselves into hell, although the pastoral tone in the questions he asks seems to show a bit of what he believes to be God's heart for creatures who have gone astray.

In his reflections on the doctrine of hell, C.S. Lewis is – as always – a creative and innovative Christian thinker. Despite some internal difficulties, his ideas have both set the stage for later discussions on the duration, quality, purpose and finality of hell and inspired a number of younger issuantists who, standing on the shoulder of this giant, have attempted to refine issuant views of hell in ways that are more philosophically rigorous.

⁴⁸ Lewis does not claim explicitly to build his theology of hell on the Bible. As such, this point of critique does not reflect a weakness in the coherence of Lewis' view.

⁴⁹ Blocher 1992, 300.

4

BASIC ISSUANTISM

Therefore, paradoxical though it may sound, the very *possibility* of people going to hell is created by God in order to enable human beings to gain the highest good. Without the possibility of hell there is no ultimate happiness. In this sense, both heaven (union with God) and hell (separation from God) flow essentially from God's love for humanity.¹

Hell, especially after the resurrection, is a gracious gift, reflecting the love of God and His desire to join with Him as much as possible.²

Just as many who were brought up to think of God as a bearded old gentleman sitting on a cloud decided that when they stopped believing in such a being they had therefore stopped believing in God, so many who were taught to think of hell as a literal underground location full of worms and fire, or for that matter as a kind of torture chamber at the center of God's castle of heavenly delights, decided that when they stopped believing in that, so they stopped believing in hell. The first group decided that because they couldn't believe in childish images of God, they must be atheists. The second decided that because they couldn't believe in childish images of hell, they must be universalists.³

At times Christ's words, 'Depart from Me,' begin to sound less like a decree of banishment and more like an answer to the question, 'May I be excused?'⁴

Problems with ECT have led a number of theologians to call into question one or more of its tenets. Conditionalists and annihilationalists reject the Existence Thesis in their claim that the ungodly do not exist (at least not

¹ Wilko van Holten, "Hell and the goodness of God" *Religious Studies* 35 (1999): 53.

² Michael Potts, "Aquinas, Hell, and the Resurrection of the Damned" *Faith and Philosophy* 15/3 (1998): 347.

³ N.T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope* (NY: HarperOne, 2008), 175.

⁴ Fudge 1982, 2001, 351.

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forever) in hell. Universalists reject at a minimum the Anti-Universalism Thesis and possibly also the No Escape Thesis and the Retribution Thesis. If anyone is consigned to hell at all, it is only for the temporary purpose of rehabilitation.

Issuant perspectives on hell have developed in response to what issuantists perceive to be shortcomings in the answers to the problem of hell historically provided by ECT, conditionalism and universalism. Kvanvig writes that both ECT and any simple rejection of any of the four premises that make up ECT are “inadequate.” He writes,

[T]he strong view must be abandoned as an adequate account of the nature of hell. ... The typical alternatives to the strong view, which I call “simple alternatives,” are developed by dropping commitment to one of (H1)-(H4). Each of the simple alternatives is at least as problematic as the strong view itself, and this fact shows that whether any account of hell can be a component of an adequate theology of the Christian religion is far from a settled issue.⁵

The “simple alternatives” to which he refers are the abandonment of the Existence Thesis (in annihilationism and conditionalism), the abandonment of the No Escape Thesis (in what Kvanvig calls “second chance theories” or what I later identify as Extra Chance Theses), universalism, and the rejection of the Retribution Thesis.

At first glance, this last “simple alternative” would seem somewhat paradoxical, since Kvanvig himself also rejects the Retribution Thesis. Indeed, its rejection is one element of the issuant view Kvanvig posits. At this point Kvanvig criticizes Swinburne’s rejection of the Retribution Thesis on the grounds that Swinburne’s “reasoning is incomplete” in not explaining how God’s final abandonment of the ungodly in hell could be justified on non-retributive grounds.⁶

In this chapter I shall now turn to a more detailed presentation of issuant views of hell, beginning with what I shall call basic issuantism. Basic issuantism is the view of hell where the end is not universal salvation and which is made up of what I believe to be the three *sine qua non* trademarks of issuantism that distinguish all forms of issuantism from non-issuant views of hell: the love of God as the motivation for both heaven and hell, metaphysical

⁵ Kvanvig 1993, 63.

⁶ Kvanvig 1993, 101. As we shall see, Kvanvig’s own solution to the problem of hell is found in a “composite view” comprised of basic issuantism supplemented with the Middle Knowledge Thesis and the possibility of ultimately passing out of existence.

libertarianism and the rejection of the Retribution Thesis. Each of these trademarks relates directly to one of the sobriquets used for this category of views of hell: issuantism, the choice model of hell and the natural consequence view of hell, respectively. Although the term *issuantism* has its origins in the first of these three trademarks, issuantism is not limited to or defined exclusively in terms of the love of God as divine motivation for both heaven and hell.

My desire in this chapter is not to create a straw man whom I shall then destroy in one fell swoop. Rather, I intend to distill the essence of issuantism from a large number of books and articles written by scholars who in some way reject the conclusions of traditionalists, conditionalists and universalists regarding the duration, quality, purpose and finality of hell.⁷ In critiquing basic issuantism I bear in mind the fact that no issuantist to my knowledge believes only in the three trademarks of basic issuantism. The issuantist scholars highlighted in the present work all seek to strengthen basic issuantism with the addition of one or more supplements. I shall subsequently turn to these supplements in chapter five.

The Love of God as Divine Motivation for Heaven and Hell

On issuantism, hell is the potentially eternal fate of the ungodly that is distinguished from non-issuant views by three characteristics: the love of God as divine motivation both for heaven and hell, metaphysical libertarian human freedom and the rejection of the Retribution Thesis. In this section I shall examine the case made by issuantists for the first of the three trademarks of basic issuantism: that divine motivations for both heaven and hell must issue from the same divine character quality, *viz.*, the love of God.

Advocates of ECT and conditionalism generally maintain that heaven is an expression of (or “issues from”) God’s love and grace, while hell issues from a different divine character quality such as justice or holiness. Although the idea that hell could issue from the love of God is a fairly novel concept within Protestant theology, it is well established within the Eastern Orthodox tradition. Citing verses like Romans 8:35 and Psalm 139:7, Many Orthodox scholars echo the sentiments of earlier believers like St Isaac the Syrian that one can never escape from the love of God. Everyone will experience the same love of God in the postmortem state. For believers this will be a source

⁷ It is for this reason (among others) that I do not classify the works of universalists who hold to the three trademarks of basic issuantism as issuantists.

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of blessing and eternal bliss; nonbelievers who reject God's love and grace will experience the love of God as a burning fire.⁸

While it is not ordinarily a problem to explain some of God's actions in terms of one character quality and other actions in terms of a very different attribute, issuantists maintain that this becomes problematic when we view heaven and hell as two mutually exclusive and exhaustive alternatives for postmortem human existence.

Kvanvig proposes a way around this problem:

When one thinks of Heaven and Hell in geographic terms, it is easy to see how to generate the desire for a third alternative to Heaven and Hell, since if these are but two postal addresses, the possibility of other postal addresses is easy to imagine. But when one's conception of the afterlife is a relational matter with Heaven involving a beatific vision and enjoyment of the divine, Hell is properly understood as the contrast of such a relationship.⁹

More specifically, Kvanvig suggests what one must do in order to defend the idea that heaven issues from the love of God while hell is an expression of a different divine attribute.

Explaining some of God's actions by appealing to one of his characteristics and different divine actions by appealing to other characteristics is not in itself a mistake. ... my complaint is that it is not enough *merely* to cite different motives. We must also have some account of how the different motives are related to each other.¹⁰

The contrast between heaven and hell is the contrast between such opposites as mercy and justice or grace and desert. Issuantists claim that if one understands hell as a punishment for sin, as in ECT and conditionalism, then the natural conclusion would be that the only alternative to hell – heaven – would be a reward for good service. However, this does not square easily with

⁸ Isaac of Nineveh (Isaac the Syrian) insisted that a remedial hell issues from the love of God and will eventually result in *apokatastasis*, the ultimate reconciliation of all creation with God. See tracts 38-41 in Isaac's *The Second Part*, Sebastian Brock, trans., *Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium*, Vol. 555; *Scriptores Syri*, Vol. 225 (Louvain: In Aedibus Peeters, 1995). See also Sergius Bulgakov, *The Bride of the Lamb*, Boris Jakim, trans. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 459; Aristotle Papanikolaou and Elizabeth H. Prodromou, eds, *Thinking Through Faith: New Perspectives from Orthodox Christian Scholars* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2008), 195; George Metallinos, "Paradise and Hell in the Orthodox Tradition" *Orthodox Heritage* 7/3-4 (2009): 211-223; Romanides 2004.

⁹ Kvanvig 2011, 29.

¹⁰ Kvanvig 1993, 109-110.

classic Christian faith, where one gains entrance to heaven through the grace of God.

One objection against belief in the doctrine of hell relates directly to the question of whether hell is an expression of divine love or some other attribute. In what is now called McTaggart's dilemma, John McTaggart reasons that if there is a hell, one would have no good reason for believing in it.¹¹ According to McTaggart, the only two reasons for believing anything are empirical evidence or credible testimony. Since there is no empirical evidence that hell exists, our only knowledge of it comes as a putative revelation from God. Revelation tells us that a person's condition in hell will be horrific. McTaggart claims that anyone who would send a person to such an everlasting hell would be very vile indeed. Since revelation tells us that God sends some people to hell, one must conclude that God is very vile. If God is vile, there is no reason why one should believe anything God says, including the claim that there is a hell.

One possible way around McTaggart's dilemma is by insisting on the loving nature of God and God's loving purpose for humanity, even as they relate to the doctrine of hell. If there is a genuine threat to our well-being, and if God loves us, it would be loving for God to warn us. However, if God is the one responsible for the possibly harmful fate, one could question the goodness and/or love of God unless there were some good reason for the potentially harmful fate. For example, parents can put out rat poison and warn their children not to eat it because if they do, they could die. The parents are not evil unless they put out the rat poison with the specific purpose of harming their children. If they put out rat poison for a different purpose – to get rid of rats that could harm their children – then both putting out rat poison and warning their children of the dangers of eating rat poison are loving acts, not evil ones. According to the Bible, hell was not created for the purpose of harming or punishing humans, but primarily for punishing Satan and the demons that have rebelled against God and who would harm people, and secondly for protecting people from Satan's harm. As such, the creation of hell is not an evil thing, but a loving thing.

According to issuantism, failure to integrate the divine motives for heaven and hell in the love of God can easily lead to a fragmented view of God. God is viewed as gracious and loving to a person, calling her to repentance until the time of her death, but then immediately switches to become a God of wrath and retribution. Kvanvig writes: "it will not do to portray God as

¹¹ John McTaggart, *Some Dogmas of Religion* (London: Edward Arnold Press), 1906.

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fundamentally loving until we reach the point of discussing the nature of hell, and suddenly portray God as fundamentally a just God.”¹² Rob Bell comments that the concept of God presented by ECT is not very appealing.

God would have no choice but to punish them forever in conscious torment in hell. God would, in essence, become a fundamentally different being to them in that moment of death, a different being to them *forever*. A loving heavenly father who will go to extraordinary lengths to have a relationship with them would, in the blink of an eye, become a cruel, mean, vicious tormenter who would insure that they would have no escape from an endless future of agony.¹³

Kvanvig maintains that it is not enough for non-issuantists merely to state that heaven and hell both issue from different divine character qualities. This approach “wreaks havoc on the integrity of God’s character.”¹⁴

Trevor Hart concurs:

The danger here lies in the suggestion that love and justice are somehow two separable quantities within the character of God, and that the dynamics of atonement consist in some sort of power struggle between two distinct sets of claims within God himself. The concomitant suggestion follows on that men and women may thus be placed either under the love of God, or else under his justice; that the claims of the one may apply to them or not, depending upon their faith or lack of it; that God may be a loving Father towards some, and an arbiter of naked justice towards others.¹⁵

There are two possible approaches to solving this problem. A segregated approach must not only state that there are different motivations for the two possible destinies, but also seek to explain how these motivations are related to each other. In particular, it must explain why the divine attribute that generates hell must predominate when the attribute that finds expression in heaven cannot.

¹² Kvanvig 1997, 567.

¹³ Rob Bell, *Love Wins* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2011), 173-174. The theology of hell presented in Bell’s book clearly displays the three main characteristics of basic issuantism: the love of God as the divine motivation for both heaven and hell, libertarian free will and hell as a natural consequence of free human choices. With the further rejection of the No Escape Thesis, his conclusions tend more towards a hopeful universalism than most other issuantist scholars. See Ray Baker, “Hell’s Bells for Bell’s Hell” *Theofilos 2* (2011b): 41-54.

¹⁴ Kvanvig 1993, 136.

¹⁵ Trevor Hart, “Universalism: Two Distinct Types” in Cameron 1992, 24.

[A]ny account of hell that involves such a shift and does not explain it is theoretically inadequate. Furthermore, the needed explanation cannot posit a change in the character of God, for example, from being an individual whose primary motive is love to one whose primary motive is justice. Such changes of character are possible for imperfect beings, but God's character is not alterable in this way, according to traditional theism.¹⁶

This is the challenge Kvanvig gives non-issuantists.

Kvanvig's own approach on the other hand is that of integration. That is, he seeks to explain how both heaven and hell issue from the same divine character quality. For Kvanvig, hell flows "from the same divine character from which heaven flows."¹⁷ Kvanvig first attempts to show why God's love must be the foundational attribute for both heaven and hell, and not some other attribute like God's sovereignty. Making God's sovereignty the absolute starting point risks justifying even horrendous evils as good just because God has willed them. It goes back to the classic question raised by Plato in *Euthyphro*: Is the good good because God wills it, or does God will the good because it is good? Supposing that the good is good because God wills it is metaethical voluntarism. The greatest weakness with this view, according to Kvanvig, is that it robs God's moral judgment of any kind of meaningful content. If God is beyond morality, then nothing God does can be truly said to be evil, wrong or unjust. Moreover, nothing God does can correctly be deemed good, right or just. If anything can be good because God wills it, "it is true that God is good and perfectly so; the problem is that it is a trivial truth, no more informative about God's character and behavior than is the statement that God is God."¹⁸

If God wills the good because it is good, then one can raise questions about God's relationship to the good. Is God bound by moral norms in the same way as humans? God's goodness presumably does not consist in following an external set of moral rules. But is God free not to follow these rules? If God is not able to sin, but does what is good of necessity, then how can God be praiseworthy for being good? Kvanvig's conclusion is that God's sovereignty provides an insufficient basis for justifying God's actions.

Nor can God's justice be the dominant attribute since the Bible repeatedly reports instances where God postpones judgment on account of love. Justice as a dominant attribute does not explain why God would take the initiative to

¹⁶ Kvanvig 1993, 111.

¹⁷ Kvanvig 1993, 136.

¹⁸ Kvanvig 1993, 114.

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do something to remedy humanity's predicament. The integration of divine motivations for heaven and hell must be one that is faithful to the uniqueness of both alternatives. For Kvanvig and other issuantists, this divine motivation is the love of God. Other divine qualities such as sovereignty and justice fail to account for God's great actions of creation and redemption.

Eleonore Stump presents another integrated approach to the divine motivations for heaven and hell. She defines the love of God for a human person in thomistic terms as God doing whatever possible to ensure the most good for that person.¹⁹ This entails the actualization or fulfillment of the person's nature. She writes:

[F]or Aquinas, to love something is to treat it according to its nature. Thus God's love for human persons consists essentially in treating them according to their nature; and so, given Aquinas' account of human nature, God's love for a person involves helping to maximize that person's capacity for reason.²⁰

The height of human reason is the cultivation of a virtuous character, including a character that loves God.

People who refuse or fail to cultivate a virtuous character develop a secondary, vicious nature. It would be inappropriate for God to allow a person with a vicious character into heaven. There would then be two options open for God. First, God could annihilate a person with a vicious character. Stump believes that this would be unloving of God. God could only destroy a being if there were some overriding good that could so be achieved. Given the thomistic identification of goodness with being, it is difficult to conceive how God's love (ensuring the most good for a person) could be expressed by destroying the person's being.

Since the person's vicious character makes it impossible for God to love in the sense of maximizing the person's capacity for reason, God's other option is to treat the person according to her second, vicious nature. The person with a vicious character is thus consigned to a hell that is more like a quarantine than a torture chamber. In Stump's conception of hell, the ungodly are unable to harm themselves and others. "[B]y putting restraints on the evil they can do, he [God] can maximize their being by keeping them from additional decay. In this way, then, he shows love."²¹ Thus hell is an

¹⁹ Eleonore Stump, "Dante's Hell, Aquinas' Moral Theory, and the Love of God" *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 16/2 (1986): 192.

²⁰ Stump 1986, 192.

²¹ Stump 1986, 197.

expression of God's love for people who have chosen not to develop a virtuous character.

Walls agrees with Stump in his emphasis that divine goodness must be closely related to God's love. Otherwise, God's goodness could easily become a cold, metaphysical abstraction, whereas the emphasis in the Bible and in the religious experience of believers is that God's goodness finds its primary expression in God's love for creation and in God's desire to have a meaningful relationship with at least some human creatures. A loving God will do everything possible to call people into a relationship with Godself, including providing "optimal grace" after death for those who have lived their lives under circumstances where they have not been able to see God's true loving character. "But if God does everything he can to save all persons, short of destroying anyone's freedom, it may be that God can, consistent with perfect goodness, create some persons knowing they will never act in accordance with grace."²² Once these criteria are fulfilled, God's action in allowing people to make a definitive choice for hell can be a loving act.

Peter Kreeft presents an issuant view of hell that is clearly inspired by C.S. Lewis. Regarding the integration of divine motivations, he writes:

Some think that if there is a hell, justice has the last word, not love or mercy, which is one of love's works. We naturally think of mercy as the relaxation and compromising of justice, and justice as prior. But in God, love is more primordial than justice. Justice is simply a form that love takes. The very act of creation is pure love, for no creature was even there to justly deserve anything, not even existence, before it was created. Scripture never says, "God is justice", but it does say that "God is love" (1 Jn 4:8). Love is God's essence; justice is one of its works, and mercy is another. Justice is the structure of love. Justice is like the skeleton; love is like the person.

Hell is due more to love than to justice. Love created free persons who could choose hell. Love continues to beat upon the damned like sunlight on an albino slug and constitutes their torture, as we have seen. The fires of hell are made of the love of God.²³

²² Walls 1992, 93.

²³ Peter J. Kreeft and Ronald K. Tacelli, *Handbook of Christian Apologetics* (Crowborough, E Sussex: Monarch, 1995), 292. Stanley J. Grenz presents a similar idea: "Because God is eternal, our experience of God's love – whether as fellowship or as wrath – is also eternal. Just as the righteous enjoy unending community with God, so also those who set themselves in opposition to God's love experience his holy love eternally. For them, however,

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Like Kvanvig, Kreeft insists that only the love of God could provide a sufficient motivation for God's acts of creation.

Issuantist Stephen T. Davis reflects that one's normal intuitions are to view love and wrath as opposites, an idea which he rejects. Love is an intrinsic quality in God and an essential part of God's inter-Trinitarian relations. God's wrath, on the other hand, is not intrinsic; it emerges only as a result of human sin. The same can be said of grace, which like wrath is a divine response to human sinfulness. Even though both wrath and grace emerge as secondary qualities in God, they are not opposites, since both exist for the same purpose – to lead sinners to repentance.²⁴

Sharon L. Baker²⁵ argues for a form of issuantism where God's purpose for hell is always restorative not retributive. She combines issuantism with a form of annihilationism. "The wrath of God, rather than anger, is love that burns away the sin, purifying the sinner so that true reconciliation and restoration can take place."²⁶ In Baker's eschatology, God's love both purifies those who make positive responses to God's grace and consumes the ungodly.

Buckareff and Plug defend an issuant version of hell that includes endless opportunities for the ungodly to repent and be released from hell. Regarding love as the divine motivation for hell, they reason:

1. All of God's actions are just and loving.
2. If all of God's actions are just and loving, then no action of God's is motivated by an unjust or unloving pro-attitude.
3. If no action of God's is motivated by an unjust or unloving pro-attitude, then God's soteriological activity is motivated by His just and loving pro-attitudes.
4. If God's soteriological activity is motivated by His just and loving pro-attitudes, then God's provision for separation from Him is motivated by God's desire for the most just and loving state of affairs to be realized in the eschaton.²⁷

this experience is hell." Stanley J. Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 836.

²⁴ Stephen T. Davis, "Hell, Wrath and the Grace of God" in Buenting 2010, 93-94.

²⁵ No known relation to the present author.

²⁶ Sharon L. Baker, *Razing Hell* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), 122.

²⁷ Andrei A. Buckareff and Allen Plug, "Escaping hell: divine motivation and the problem of hell" *Religious Studies* 41 (2005): 42-43.

The Wrath of God

The issuantist contention that even hell must issue from the love of God raises some interesting questions about the wrath of God. What is one to make of verses like John 3:36,²⁸ Romans 1:18²⁹ or Revelation 14:9-11?³⁰ In chapter one of the present work I described the methodology of some issuantists who use philosophical reflection more than exegesis in the development of their view of hell. As a result, some of these issuantists choose to ignore the question altogether.³¹

Fortunately, not all issuantists turn a blind eye to the biblical language of God's wrath towards the ungodly. Peter Kreeft and Ronald Tacelli give three options for understanding the images of wrath.

‘The wrath of God’ is a scriptural expression. But (a) it is probably a metaphor, an anthropomorphic image, like ‘God’s strong right hand’ or God changing his mind. It is not literal. And (b) if it is not a metaphor but literal wrath (hate), it is a projection of our own hate onto God rather than a hate within God himself. And (c) if it is an objective fact in God rather than a subjective projection from us, then it refers to God’s holiness and justice, not a smoldering resentment; it is his wrath against sin, not against sinners.³²

Kreeft and Tacelli give the illustration of a child who wants to be angry and resentful towards his parents. As his mother takes him into her arms to reassure him of her unfailing love, the child becomes even more furious,

²⁸ “Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.”

²⁹ “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.”

³⁰ “If anyone worships the beast and its image and receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand, he also will drink the wine of God’s wrath, poured full strength into the cup of his anger, and he will be tormented with fire and sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever, and they have no rest, day or night, these worshipers of the beast and its image, and whoever receives the mark of its name.”

³¹ No mention is made of the wrath of God in any of the works by Swinburne, Kvanvig or Stump listed in the bibliography. Walls gives the wrath of God only a passing mention in the context of the views of Origen and Clement of Alexandria on the purifying nature of purgatory (Walls 2012, 15) and in a description of the penal substitution view of the atonement (Walls 2012, 158). In a brief discussion Walls uses “the fourth bowl of God’s wrath” (Revelation 16:9), to illustrate the point that punishment does not always achieve the desired end of a restored relationship (Walls 2004a, 211). In a similar vein, Buckareff and Plug only touch upon the wrath of God in the context of stating that God allows hell for the sake of restoring a relationship (Buckareff and Plug 2005, 44).

³² Kreeft and Tacelli 1995, 289-290.

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kicking and shouting and pounding his fists at her. They write, “Wrath is what love feels like to us when we hate it.”³³ Kreeft and Tacelli do not exegete any specific scriptural passages, but lay out these alternatives as general observations or possibilities, seemingly landing on alternative (b) as the most probable interpretation.

Issuantist Stephen Davis explains how biblical images of the wrath of God can be harmonized with the conviction that even hell must issue from the love of God. He begins by defining the wrath of God as “God’s opposition to, hatred of, and dissatisfaction with human disobedience.”³⁴ Davis maintains that the wrath of God is not retributive in nature; its purpose is not to punish for punishment’s sake. Rather, the purpose of God’s wrath is to lead wrongdoers to repentance. As a parallel to his statement “the grace of God is our only hope” Davis makes the surprising but “equally true” statement that “the wrath of God is our only hope.”³⁵ By this he means that without the wrath of God, we would have no awareness that some acts are morally right or that others are morally wrong or that our morally wrong acts have ruptured our relationship with God.

Davis does not see the wrath of God and the love of God as competing or contradictory concepts; both are aspects of God’s nature. While God’s love is an intrinsic characteristic of the triune God, wrath only manifests itself in God as a response to sin. Grace is related to wrath in that it too only arises as a response to sin. The purpose of God’s goodness is to lead wrongdoers to repentance (Romans 2:4). Thus, both grace and wrath have the same function. “[T]he divine wrath and the divine mercy are not opposed to each other after all.”³⁶ Without wrath we would not understand mercy and would not be moved to take the necessary steps to have a restored relationship with God.

Perhaps the scholar who does the most to interpret the wrath of God in non-retributive terms is Stephen Travis.³⁷ Travis examines scores of biblical

³³ Peter J. Kreeft and Ronald K. Tacelli, *Handbook of Catholic Apologetics* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2009), 352.

³⁴ Davis 2010, 92.

³⁵ Davis 2010, 92.

³⁶ Davis 2010, 94.

³⁷ Stephen H. Travis, *Christ and the Judgement of God: The Limits of Divine Retribution in New Testament Thought* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2008). Although Travis does not always state positively what he believes to be the nature or purpose of hell, he seems at least to distance himself from both belief in ECT and universalism. He most likely leans towards some form of conditionalism or annihilationism, based partly on this statement: “But the balance of

passages that *prima facie* would lend themselves to a retributive interpretation and shows how they can more properly be understood in terms of relationship. Although his purpose is to show that retribution is not God's main motivation in judgment,³⁸ he is careful not to do violence to the texts by forcing implausible, non-retributive interpretations.

The main thrust of Travis' exegesis is that the basis for judgment in both the Old Testament and the New Testament is not a person's or nation's individual sins or good deeds. Instead, the basis is one's covenantal relationship with God. Although individual acts gradually form a fixed character, one's character is a sign of one's place within the covenant or one's choice to stand outside the covenant. Those who are in covenant with God can expect to enjoy the protection and blessings of that relationship while those who are not in such a relationship with God will experience the wrath of God. The wrath of God for Travis is tantamount to being abandoned by God. This includes the removal of God's protection and God's "face" or presence so that people will experience the natural consequences of their choice to stand outside the covenantal relationship with God.

I will illustrate Travis' interpretations by summarizing his exegesis of two representative passages: one from the gospels and one from Paul.

The clear contrast in John 3:36 is between belief and obedience on the one hand and disbelief and disobedience on the other hand. Those who are in relationship with Christ through faith experience eternal life while those who demonstrate through their disobedience the fact that they are not in relationship with Christ will experience the wrath of God.³⁹

In Romans 1:18-32 the contrast is between God's righteousness that is revealed in the gospel and God's wrath that is revealed against

evidence suggests that 'the second death' symbolizes the destiny of those who have refused to be in relationship with God as a state of non-being rather than a state of conscious torment." (Travis 2008, 307). He is careful however to balance this by cautioning himself and his readers that "we are wise not to build on John's visions a dogmatic case for any precise answer to the question, What is the fate of those who refuse the mercy of God?" (Travis 2008, 307). I include Travis in this section because his exegesis of biblical passages dealing with the wrath of God along non-retributive lines is fully in keeping with both the issuantists' insistence on the love of God as the divine motivation for hell and their rejection of the Retribution Thesis. Even though he is not an issuantist, he does the exegetical work that most issuantists only hint at.

³⁸ Travis admits that some texts are best understood in retributive terms, especially in the Old Testament, but states that their infrequency is surprising given the prominence of concepts of retribution in the Greco-Roman world. He maintains however that the retributive texts from the Old Testament are generally reinterpreted by the New Testament authors in light of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

³⁹ Travis 2008, 266-267.

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unrighteousness. God's wrath is revealed in God "giving them over" to their own devices. The natural consequence of their choice not to have a relationship with God is that God respects that wish and leaves them alone. "Wrath is thus equivalent to abandonment by God. It is the lost condition of humanity."⁴⁰ He relates that each kind of sin is met by its own appropriate judgment. The glory that was God's due (v. 23) relates to the degrading actions of verse 24. For exchanging the truth about God for a lie (v. 25), they will exchange natural sexual relations for unnatural ones (v. 26). For not thinking it worthwhile (οὐκ ἔδοκίμασαν) to know God (v. 28) they will experience a corresponding depraved (ἀδόκιμον) mind (v. 28). Travis encapsulates his findings, "This structured series goes to emphasize that wrath is not capricious. It is God's personal and fitting response to human contempt of him and his will."⁴¹

As we have seen, Kvanvig challenges non-issuantists to provide a defense for the segregated approach of interpreting heaven as an expression of God's love and hell as an expression of God's justice, wrath or holiness. On the whole, non-issuantists do not need to take this challenge since a segregated approach to God's motivations for heaven and hell is not a necessary component of any non-issuant view of hell.

The non-issuantist need not take issue with the issuantists' attempts to integrate both heaven and hell under the banner of God's love. While belief that the love of God must be the divine motivation for hell is a necessary (but not adequate) part of issuantism, its rejection is an adequate (but not necessary) part of any non-issuant view of hell. Saying that hell is an expression of God's love is admittedly somewhat counterintuitive,⁴² but nothing that directly contradicts the views of non-issuantists, since non-issuantists also believe in the non-contradictory nature of God's attributes. Both issuantists and non-issuantists can agree that describing God's attributes is somewhat like trying to look at a house with a microscope – one can only see a tiny bit at any one time. Even while looking at a piece of kitchen tile, one

⁴⁰ Travis 2008, 61.

⁴¹ Travis 2008, 61-62.

⁴² This observation was made by Nietzsche in section 15 of the first essay in *On the Genealogy of Morals*, "Dante, as it seems to me, made a crass mistake when with awe-inspiring ingenuity he placed that inscription over the gate of his hell, 'Me too made eternal love.'" Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Genealogy of Morals*, Horace B. Samuel, trans. (New York: Dover, 2003), 28. Nietzsche was here paraphrasing Dante's *Inferno*, canto III:4-6 and suggested that eternal hate would be a more appropriate source for the creation of the Christian doctrine of hell. Dante, however, does not see hell as issuing exclusively from the love of God, but also from God's wisdom and justice.

knows the house is also made up of wood, plumbing, electrical wiring, windows, wallpaper, insulation and more. It's just that one cannot see all these aspects of the house at the same time with the limited perspective of a microscope. Both issuantists and non-issuantists know that God is holy, just, loving, eternal, omnipotent, omniscient, etc. – even though it is hard to see all these attributes simultaneously with the limited perspective of God's actions in one specific set of circumstances.

Metaphysical Libertarian Human Freedom

A second trademark of basic issuantism is libertarian human freedom. In this section I shall examine the issue of compatibilist and libertarian definitions of human freedom as they relate to issuantism.

The issue of determinism versus free will is of course a perennial topic of discussion in philosophy and theology. The question of whether determinism and human freedom are compatible has led to two major viewpoints: compatibilism and incompatibilism.

Incompatibilism is the idea that human freedom is incompatible with determinism. Incompatibilism takes two forms: a hard determinism that rejects human freedom and a metaphysical libertarian human freedom that rejects all forms of causal determinism.

A classic definition of metaphysical libertarianism that goes back to Alexander of Aphrodisias (late second century CE) is that one is free if, *ceteris paribus*, one at the time of action had the possibility of doing otherwise in a particular situation. Harry Frankfurt labeled this definition the Principle of Alternative Possibilities (PAP).⁴³ A deciding factor is the *ceteris paribus* condition. Libertarians interpret PAP as the ability to do otherwise in a given situation assuming that the laws of nature and the events of the past up to the moment of action were identical. For a compatibilist PAP means that one “could have done otherwise if one had so willed” or one “could have done otherwise if one had had sufficiently good reasons for so doing.” In such cases, all other things would not be equal at the time of action.

It would then appear that compatibilists and libertarians have differing understandings of PAP. Libertarians assume that the laws of nature and history of the world up to the point of decision would be the same regardless of whether the person chooses action A or action B. Compatibilists, on the other hand, maintain that one could have chosen to act differently if one had

⁴³ Harry Frankfurt, “Alternate Possibilities and Moral Responsibility” *Journal of Philosophy* 66/23 (1969): 829-39.

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so desired, but deny, on the basis of the laws of nature and the previous history of the world, that a person would have different desires.

A somewhat more nuanced definition would include the idea that one is free in a libertarian sense when all of one's actions are causally undetermined.⁴⁴ The way one understands "causally undetermined" may vary among libertarians. Some level of quantum indeterminacy in one's brain may be sufficient for some libertarians to say that a person is free, whereas others require a higher degree of indeterminacy. Libertarians commonly hold that a person's will and actions can be caused, but these causes can only be probabilistic, not deterministic. These causes may be either internal or external. Internal causes like dispositions or a fixed character are (at most) probabilistic; they may increase the likelihood of a certain choice, but do not determine it.

Take for instance two cases. In the first, a child is raised by racist parents who are part of a white supremacist movement. From an early age the child is indoctrinated with the virtues and achievements of whites while ethnic minorities become scapegoats for all societal ills. Chances are great that the child will grow up to be a racist, even though there is a possibility that the child will not be a racist. Maybe a falling-out with the parents over an unrelated issue will cause the child to fall in love with a person of color to spite the racist parents. In a second scenario, the child is raised in a setting where a person's race is simply not an issue. Yet somewhere along the way, the now young adult begins to explore white supremacist websites, books, chat rooms and more – to the point that the person becomes a convinced white supremacist. In this case the young person's racism has primarily internal causes. In both scenarios, external and internal causes are contributing or probabilistic factors without being determining.

Compatibilism

A hard determinism that denies human freedom implies that external causes such as the decrees of God, fate or natural laws determine a person's course of action. As a soft form of determinism, compatibilism states that there is at least an internal cause for everything. The presence of external causes may mean that an act is not free if the external cause leads one to act against one's desires. Because of external causes such as the commands or threats of a superior officer, a soldier may find himself "forced against his will" to commit war crimes or other atrocities against civilians. According to compatibilism,

⁴⁴ Hall 2003, 24.

this soldier is not free since he is not able to act in accordance with his desires.

Compatibilism allows for at least some form of determining cause that still allows a person to act in accordance with her desires. Some forms of inner causes (such as compulsion) impinge on freedom. The important thing is that people can act based on their values or desires. For instance, a person may wash her hands hundreds of times a day. If the hand-washing is due to obsessive-compulsive disorder, and the person wishes to be free from this compulsion, then she is not free. If, however, she repeatedly washes her hands because she is a doctor making her rounds in the hospital ward (plus bathroom breaks, meal preparation, etc.), then she is acting according to her values and her actions are free.

First and second-order desires and volitions

In a now classic article in *The Journal of Philosophy*,⁴⁵ Frankfurt makes a distinction between first and second-order desires and explains the difference between persons, animals and “wantons.”

Both humans and animals have what Frankfurt calls first-order desires. These are the simple desires to do or not to pursue a certain course of action. The distinction between persons and animals is that persons also have second-order desires. Second-order desires are desires about first-order desires. They can take several forms: the desire not to have a first order desire (such as the desire to eat lots and lots of ice cream); a desire to have a first-order desire that one does not have (the desire to exercise); and a desire for one first-order desire to win over another one – when a person wants a certain desire to be her will (that the desire to exercise would win out over the desire to eat too much dessert).

A person has free will if she acts on the desire that she wants to win. A will is a desire that is effective in producing behavior. A person has freedom of the will if she has the will she wants.

Frankfurt specifies further that a person who has this third type of second-order desire (that a certain first-order desire be her will) also has a “second-order volition.” It is the presence of second-order volitions that distinguishes a “person” from non-persons. Frankfurt calls these non-persons “wantons.” Wantons are beings who do not care about their will; they do not deliberate over which desires or set of desires they would prefer to translate into action.

⁴⁵ Harry G. Frankfurt, “Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person” *The Journal of Philosophy* 68/1 (1971): 5-20.

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Even though wantons do not have freedom of will, they may still be held morally responsible for their actions.

In my view, however, the relation between moral responsibility and the freedom of the will has been very widely misunderstood. It is not true that a person is morally responsible for what he has done only if his will was free when he did it. He may be morally responsible for having done it even though his will was not free at all.⁴⁶

Although Frankfurt is a compatibilist, several authors have found his theory helpful in understanding issuant views of hell.⁴⁷ Using Frankfurt's terminology, one could say that a person in hell has a first-order desire to love self rather than God. She may also have a second-order desire that she love God more than she does. In addition, she may have a second-order volition in her wish that her first-order desire to love self were not her effective will. Thus, according to Frankfurt's theory, the person in hell is not there freely since her first-order desire to love self does not align with her second-order volition. If she is not free, can she be morally responsible for her predicament? Frankfurt and some other compatibilists would answer in the affirmative.

Frankfurt's theory explains how a person's choice to love self rather than God can be morally culpable despite the presence of external constraints. This is a controversial view and philosophical journals are replete with discussions of what are now called Frankfurt-style counterexamples. With these counterexamples Frankfurt and other compatibilists maintain that because of hypnosis, brainwashing or electrical or mechanical manipulation of the brain a person can be morally responsible even though she lacks the possibility of doing otherwise in a given situation.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Frankfurt 1971, 18.

⁴⁷ Barnard 2010, 65-75; Andrei A. Buckareff and Allen Plug, "Value, Finality and Frustration: Problems for Escapism?" in Buening 2010, 77-90.

⁴⁸ To name just a few: David P. Hunt, "Frankfurt Counterexamples" *Faith and Philosophy* 13/3 (1996): 395-401; Joseph Keim Campbell, "A Compatibilist Theory of Alternative Possibilities" *Philosophical Studies* 88/3 (1997): 319-330; Michael S. McKenna, "Does Strong Compatibilism Survive Frankfurt Counter-Examples?" *Philosophical Studies* 91/3 (1998): 259-264; Linda Zagzebski, "Does Libertarian Freedom Require Alternative Possibilities?" *Noûs* 34 (2000): 231-248; Daniel Speak, "The Impertinence of Frankfurt-style Argument" *The Philosophical Quarterly* 57/226 (2007): 76-95.

Libertarianism

A simple definition of libertarianism can be expressed in PAP: a person is free if he or she had the possibility of doing otherwise. A more exact definition of PAP would include the ideas that the freedom to do otherwise must obtain *at the time of action* and under the *same set of circumstances*. Libertarians insist that all of our actions be causally undetermined. One's choices must also be morally significant. That is, the choices must be between good and bad alternatives, not simply among a range of good choices.

Libertarians point to the common human phenomenon of deliberating over different courses of action as evidence that a person must be free in this sense. Libertarian philosophers like Héctor-Neri Castañeda and Richard Taylor argue that one cannot rationally deliberate about whether to bring about some event that one thinks is determined to happen.⁴⁹ For example, it would be meaningless to deliberate over whether one should allow the sun to rise tomorrow morning. According to libertarianism, if internal or external determining causes limit the range of choices available to a person, then it would be meaningless to look back on a past choice and wish one had done something else unless the choice were morally significant. Following Alexander of Aphrodisias, a libertarian may claim that the fact that we regret our actions shows that we were actually free to do otherwise. This conclusion is not necessary; a compatibilist like Tomis Kapitan could claim that it would suffice for a person to *believe* herself to be free to do otherwise.⁵⁰ Thus a person who voted for presidential candidate *M* could in retrospect wish she had voted for a different candidate even though unbeknownst to her, the election was rigged so that it was not possible for *M* not to be elected. Kapitan calls this the presumption of contingency. Together with the efficacy condition (the belief that one has some ability to affect the course of events), the presumption of contingency shows how libertarians cannot use the fact of deliberation as support for libertarianism.

Moral Responsibility

Of perhaps greater interest to issuantists is the relationship between human freedom and moral responsibility. Although compatibilists argue for moral responsibility even in the midst of some degree of determinism, libertarians maintain that people can only be morally responsible if they are free in a

⁴⁹ Cited in Tomis Kapitan, "Deliberation and the Presumption of Open Alternatives" *The Philosophical Quarterly* 36/4 (1986): 231.

⁵⁰ Kapitan 1986, 233-237.

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libertarian sense. The degree to which one is to be considered free and morally responsible in the presence of internal causes that in turn have external causes is a topic of discussion among libertarians. Swinburne, for example, acknowledges that acts may have external causes, but maintains that they are not sufficient causes; that is, they are not determining causes. Lindsey Hall explains the fine line the libertarian must walk between randomness and compatibilism.

The libertarian then must provide an account of freedom with a very specific degree of causation. Too much, and the type of freedom will become compatibilist or even determinist and too little and the freedom will be no more than randomness of choice, unable to make that agent morally accountable.⁵¹

Whereas libertarians do not allow for any form of cause that determines a person's course of actions, compatibilists allow for the presence of internal causes like personal convictions, fear or sloth, even if these internal causes have developed as a result of external factors like culture or conditioning.

Personal convictions or a fixed character may limit what choices are practically open for a person. Compatibilists say that the person is still free and responsible for his actions, while libertarians maintain that a person is still free and morally responsible if the internal and external causes only increase the probability of a certain action without determining it. If however some cause determines an action, the resultant absence of freedom also entails the absence of responsibility for the action. Let us look at an example to illustrate these points.

Suppose that in a non-determined universe, a man is at home watching television and suddenly hears a woman outside crying for help. According to both libertarianism and compatibilism, he is free either to go out and help the woman or to continue watching TV. Let's suppose he chooses to remain in front of the TV. The compatibilist would say he is free, since this is what he wants to do. The libertarian would also say he is free, since he could choose to go out and help the woman. Both the compatibilist and the libertarian would contend that the man is morally responsible for his decision.

Yet unbeknownst to the man, his doors were nailed shut so that he couldn't have left his home to help the woman if he had tried. In this case, both the libertarian and the compatibilist would say the man had freedom of will even if he did not have freedom of action, regardless of whether he knew the door was nailed shut. Libertarians would say the man is not responsible

⁵¹ Hall 2003, 88.

for not helping the woman since he did not have freedom of action. Compatibilists would say that the person's physical (in)ability to leave his home is irrelevant to how we judge the freedom or morality of his (in)action. He may not be free to leave his home, but he is free to desire to leave it. According to compatibilism, that makes all the difference.

If not only external causes like a barred door, but even internal causes such as fear, indifference or belief in a deterministic universe are determining factors in the decision-making process, then the person does not enjoy libertarian freedom – given the present set of circumstances, it is not possible for him to act otherwise. Although the person may experience some level of personal regret, he recognizes at the same time that it was not a freely chosen course of action.

Libertarianism and the Problem of Hell

The problem of hell is a specific form of the problem of evil. One common means of providing a defense for God's actions in allowing evil in the world is the Free Will Defense (FWD).⁵² The FWD is dependent upon a libertarian conception of human freedom. One could summarize the FWD that free will is a great good; so great, in fact, that it justifies the existence of the moral evil that free humans may cause. Since God desires to bring about a world in which the greater good of human freedom obtains, God cannot create a world in which human creatures are both free and in which there is no evil.

The FWD could be strengthened by explaining why one should value freedom above the absence of moral evil. Intuitively we believe that we should take precautions to stop people from harming others. These precautions may include legislation, fines or imprisonment for those who break the injunctions of law, and even acts of civil courage whereby some people react to prevent situations where it appears that an innocent person may come to harm. Of course one must keep in mind that the FWD is presented as a defense and not a theodicy. This is a distinction made by Alvin Plantinga. “[T]he aim [of a FWD] is not to say what God's reason [for permitting evil] *is*, but at most what God's reason *might possibly be*.”⁵³ The purpose of a defense is to provide a logically possible explanation for the state of affairs in the actual world, whereas greater demands are placed on a theodicy in justifying

⁵² A classic presentation of the Free Will Defense is found in Alvin Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1974) and Alvin Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977).

⁵³ Plantinga 1977, 28.

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God's actions in creating the actual world. That is, the explanation must be not only logically possible, but true (or at least plausible).

Issuantists claim that any theology of hell which presupposes anything other than a libertarian definition of human freedom fails *simpliciter* to answer the moral objections against hell raised by the problem of hell. If God can predestine or otherwise compel a person to salvation, then God would be morally culpable for not choosing or compelling all people to salvation.⁵⁴ Moreover, people who ultimately reject God cannot be held morally responsible for their choices if their condition were such that they were not free to choose otherwise.

Walls points out the serious implications of compatibilism for the doctrine of hell.

For if freedom and determination are compatible, and persons are free only in the sense that they do what God has made them willing to do, then God could save all persons with their freedom intact. Not only could God save all persons, but he could also eliminate evil and do it in such a way that all would obey his will 'most freely.' He could, but he will not.⁵⁵

Issuantists thus insist on a libertarian understanding of human freedom. Swinburne writes: "Free will is a good thing, and for God to override it for whatever cause is to all appearances a bad thing."⁵⁶ He does not believe that God may override people's freedom, even for the sake of preventing them from being damned.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ This critique can even be directed against libertarians like William Lane Craig who are also molinists. See William Lane Craig, "No Other Name: A Middle Knowledge Perspective on the Exclusivity of Salvation through Christ" *Faith and Philosophy* 6/2 (1989): 172-188 and Gordon Knight, "Molinism and Hell" in Buenting 2010, 103-114. If God can use middle knowledge to manipulate the state of the world in such a way as to bring about God's ultimate purpose for creation without impinging upon human freedom, then why doesn't God use that same middle knowledge to bring about the salvation of more (or all) humans? See a further discussion of the implications of molinism for issuant views of hell in chapter five of this present work.

⁵⁵ Walls 1992, 68.

⁵⁶ Richard Swinburne, "A Theodicy of Heaven and Hell" in Alfred J. Freddoso (ed.), *The Existence and Nature of God* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), 49.

⁵⁷ The prospect of self-damnation may be an example of horrendous evil that God allows. Cases of horrendous evil present a formidable objection to the FWD unless one also posits a form of the Not-so-Nasty Thesis. See the discussion in chapter five below.

Evaluation of libertarian freedom as it relates to issuantism

Metaphysical libertarianism is not without its challenges. It is difficult to conceive why a rational person would choose to go to hell if PAP is true. In other words, is it an intelligible notion to believe that some people could freely choose to do evil or to damn themselves if they really knew what they were doing? Swinburne holds that significant freedom must include the freedom to act irrationally and damn oneself,⁵⁸ while universalists like Thomas Talbott and Eric Reitan, on the other hand, claim that a decisive choice for evil is an unintelligible notion simply because it is irrational.⁵⁹ David Guevara argues that consigning a person to hell is unjust if that person has been fully rational in choosing not to believe in God, and insists that such a choice for hell can indeed be rational.⁶⁰

A second problem relates not directly to libertarianism as such, but to the use by some issuantists of Frankfurt's model of first and second-order desires and volitions to explain how a person can end up in hell. The Frankfurt model seemingly works well with issuant views that combine basic issuantism with the Less-than-Human Thesis where the person in hell is a wanton.⁶¹ Yet it seems problematic for issuantists who in rejecting the Retribution Thesis see hell as the natural consequence of a person's free choice to live without God. People are not morally responsible for actions in which they are not free. Nor do the people who end up in hell have to be wantons; they can have first- and second-order desires for evil and volitions that are in line with those evil desires. This is a logical possibility even if it is difficult to imagine a person who consciously chooses to do evil. It is more common that people believe their actions to be good or that their actions will lead to a better result than some other course of actions.

A third critique of some extreme forms of libertarianism is that the absence of causes makes all choices random. Although he is a libertarian himself,⁶² Talbott writes:

⁵⁸ Swinburne 1983, 49.

⁵⁹ Talbott 1990a, 37; Reitan 2003.

⁶⁰ Guevara 2003. For further discussion, see the section in chapter five on the Irrationality Thesis.

⁶¹ It may however be susceptible to some of the critiques one may raise against the Less-than-Human Thesis. See the section on the Less-than-Human Thesis in chapter five.

⁶² "I now believe, however, that indeterminism of any kind in the process of deliberating and choosing introduces a degree of randomness, even irrationality, into it, and I also believe that we libertarians should simply bite the bullet and concede this point to the compatibilists." Thomas Talbott, "Libertarian Freedom and the Problem of Hell". Unpublished

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If a person makes a choice, and nothing causes him to make that choice, his undetermined choice would be a mere chance occurrence or random event, and one could hardly be held responsible for a chance occurrence or a random event.⁶³

If the only criterion for free choice is the absence of determining causes, then a person could make significant moral choices by simply flipping a coin. Talbott points out that a satisfactory definition of libertarian freedom must include at least some conception of rationality. That is why we do not regard infants, the severely brain damaged, paranoid schizophrenics, or even dogs as free, morally responsible agents.⁶⁴

People have a tendency to try to see reasons for why things happen. When a loved one is killed in an accident, people want to know why. When a child comes down with cancer, the parents want to know why. As such, indeterminacy is existentially unsatisfactory. Therefore, the libertarian must make some sort of qualification as to what types of causes (such as probabilistic causes) can be admitted for a choice still to be considered free.

It is not at all certain that Talbott's charge of randomness is properly directed against the issuantists. Among the issuantists highlighted in this work, none makes the claim that freedom demands that no external causes be allowed, only that these external causes can only be probabilistic and not determining. The presence of probabilistic causes provides enough of a basis for decisions not to be made randomly.

Hall comments that once issuantists qualify what types of causes are compatible with freedom, this qualified libertarianism starts to look more like compatibilism.

Swinburne concedes that human freedom is not perfect and that actions do have causes, but the point is that they are not sufficient causes. The libertarian then must provide an account of freedom with a very specific degree of causation. Too much, and the type of freedom will become compatibilist or even determinist and too little and the freedom will be no more than randomness of choice, unable to make that agent morally accountable.⁶⁵

paper delivered at Wheaton Philosophy Conference (2005). Provided by courtesy of the author.

⁶³ Thomas Talbott, "Indeterminism and Chance Occurrence" *The Personalist* (1979), 253.

⁶⁴ Talbott 2005.

⁶⁵ Hall 2003, 88.

Issuantists need therefore to be more precise in distinguishing between determining causes and probabilistic causes. What would constitute a determining cause for a libertarian? If there are only probabilistic causes, are there any circumstances in which a person is not truly free?

In a fourth critique against libertarianism as it relates to issuantism, one could say that the libertarian interpretation of PAP is not sufficient for determining moral responsibility. Compatibilist philosopher Daniel Dennett writes: “I will argue that *whatever* ‘could have done otherwise’ actually means, it is not what we are interested in when we care about whether some act was freely and responsibly performed.”⁶⁶ The main consideration is not whether a person could have done otherwise, but rather whether the action itself is morally right or wrong and whether the person is morally responsible for her actions.

Dennett goes on to give the example of Martin Luther at the Diet of Worms.⁶⁷ When Luther stated, “Here I stand; I can do no other”, he was saying that the constraints of his conscience and convictions made it practically impossible for him to recant. Luther was not trying to avoid prosecution by an appeal to some lack of freedom that would entail absence of moral responsibility. Nor did the ecclesial court free him from responsibility because he was unable to do otherwise. Dennett claims that the (in)ability to have done otherwise is a red herring in any discussion of freedom and responsibility. Likewise, the Nürnberg trials at the end of World War II did not absolve Nazi concentration camp guards of their guilt on the grounds that they were not free not to follow the orders they’d received from their superiors.

In this section I have shown that issuantists maintain that only a libertarian definition of human freedom preserves an agent’s moral responsibility for her actions. I shall return to the question of libertarianism as it relates to issuantism in chapter five where I shall examine the implications of the development of a fixed character for issuantism.

Rejection of the Retribution Thesis

Thus far we have examined two criteria for issuant views of hell: the love of God as the integration of divine motives for heaven and hell and metaphysical libertarianism. As noted previously, the term *issuantism* relates directly to the integration of divine motives for heaven and hell; both

⁶⁶ Daniel Dennett, *Elbow Room* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1984), 131-132.

⁶⁷ Dennett 1984, 133.

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destinies must “issue” from the same divine character quality, *viz.*, God’s love. Libertarian human freedom relates directly to an alternative designation for issuantism, “the choice model of hell.” A third important characteristic of issuantism relates to the designation “the natural consequence model of hell” – the rejection of the Retribution Thesis.

In this section, I shall first examine the concept of desert. Next I shall present the chief objections raised by issuantists against the Retribution Thesis. Finally, I shall detail and evaluate the most common explanations proposed by issuantists as to the purpose of hell.

Desert

In the penal system, possible justifications for punishment can be divided into two main categories: retributive and utilitarian. George Sher claims that utility and desert face in opposite temporal directions.

Because an action’s utility is determined by the future benefits it will bring, while what a person deserves ordinarily depends on his past or present actions or characteristics, it is not obvious that a consistent utilitarian can allow for desert.⁶⁸

Because of their forward-looking nature, utilitarian accounts tend to emphasize the incentive effects of reward and punishment.

Retributive justice is founded upon notions of desert. Certain agents or subjects are said to deserve some positive or negative object on the basis of some action or condition related to the agent and/or the object. The basis for desert can be an act, an omission or a character quality. Some formulations of desert also include a source who in some way bears the responsibility for providing the subject or agent his due object, as in the following example: *Because of her bravery in saving children from a burning school building, Miss Yoder deserves praise from the community.* Unless one presupposes the existence of God or some other provider of cosmic justice, it is not necessary to include a source in the formula, especially if there is no apparent connection between the source and the benefit or harm done by the action, as in the statement: *Marcus has had so much bad luck; he deserves some good luck for a change.* In this case, who (if not God) should be the supposed source or provider of the good luck Marcus deserves?

In other examples, it would appear that a violinist deserves praise for her stunning performance because she has practiced diligently for many years, but that the winner of a lottery does not deserve praise since his purchase of a

⁶⁸ George Sher, *Desert* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 10.

winning lottery ticket was a matter of pure chance. While philosophers like John Rawls and James Rachels claim that desert presupposes responsibility on the part of the agent for the basis of the object, they also reject the idea of true desert on the grounds that not even the violinist deserves praise since the basis for her achievements lies partly outside her personal responsibility: a natural-born talent, early conditioning by parents, etc.⁶⁹ Rawls writes:

It seems to be one of the fixed points of our considered judgments that no one deserves his place in the distribution of native endowments, any more than one deserves one's initial starting place in society. The assertion that a man deserves the superior character that enables him to make the effort to cultivate his abilities is equally problematic; for his character depends in large part upon fortunate family and social circumstances for which he can claim no credit. The notion of desert seems not to apply to these cases.⁷⁰

Moreover, criminals do not deserve retributive punishment since they do not bear responsibility for the combination of nature and nurture that has led to their criminal character and actions. There may, however, be certain legitimate expectations on the part of both the criminal and society: rehabilitation of the criminal, restitution, restoration, deterrence and/or incapacitation for the purpose of protecting innocent members of society.

This issue of desert relates closely to questions of determining causes for a person's actions and to the role of religious luck in character formation. Causes that have their origin in religious luck would seem to allow for moral responsibility if they are only probabilistic or if one accepts some form of compatibilism. Without moral responsibility there can be no grounds for saying that a person deserves reward or punishment.

The injustice of retribution

Issuantists, who reject compatibilism in favor of a metaphysical libertarian definition of human freedom, also reject retribution as a divine motivation for hell for a number of reasons.

Beyond the aforementioned reasons for a general rejection of desert, issuantists reject the Retribution Thesis first because the rejection of positive notions of desert is consistent with other parts of Christian theology.

⁶⁹ John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971) and James Rachels, "What People Deserve" in John Arthur and William Shaw (eds), *Justice and Economic Distribution* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1978), 167-196.

⁷⁰ Rawls 1971, 104.

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On the surface of things, it would seem that if one thinks of hell as a place of punishment, it would be reasonable to conclude that heaven is a place of reward if one also believes that heaven and hell represent two mutually exclusive, exhaustive alternatives for postmortem human existence. That is, if the ungodly deserve eternal punishment, then the godly must deserve eternal life. Yet classic Christian theology denies that eternal life is a reward for faithful service. Rather, it is the free and gracious gift of a loving God, unmerited by anything one has done. If heaven is not a reward for doing good, how could hell be a punishment for doing evil?

For instance, I once found 500 Swedish crowns (at that time roughly €50) on the platform of a subway station in Stockholm. Although I did not have any desert-claims on the money, my family and I benefited from a nice meal (including dessert!) in a restaurant as a consequence. In what way does this relate to eternal salvation? One cannot say that anyone deserves salvation as a reward for good behavior. Consider the following statements:

MT1 Mother Teresa deserves to go to heaven because of her loving service to the poor.

MT2 Mother Teresa deserves to go to heaven because of her great faith in God.

MT3 Mother Teresa deserves to go to heaven because of Christ's atoning death on her behalf.

Although statement MT1 may resonate with popular sentiments, it does not easily harmonize with classic Christian theology that one does not merit salvation by good works. Statements MT 2 and MT 3 may *prima facie* seem to fit in better with Christian theology, even though the notion of desert may still seem alien to discussions of God's grace. It is precisely because grace is undeserved that it is grace.

If one rejects positive notions of desert as reward, it makes sense to reject ideas of desert as punishment. Consider these statements:

1. Emma deserves to go to hell because of her persistent rejection of God's grace.
2. Alex deserves to go to hell because of his failure to place his faith in God.

Although issuantists allow for some form of existence in hell, they reject the idea that it is something one deserves. It may, however, be a legitimately expected consequence based on Emma's free choice to reject God's grace or Alex's failure to place his faith in God.

Sharon Baker presents a second reason for rejecting the Retribution Thesis. She claims that the Retribution Thesis renders forgiveness unnecessary. “Retributive justice does not require forgiveness, and if forgiveness later occurs, it is meaningless because the offense has already been set right through the retributive measures.”⁷¹ In contrast to this idea, Baker maintains that God’s unilateral decision to forgive means that punishing sinners becomes unnecessary. The fires of hell serve a purifying and restorative purpose.

A third reason for rejecting the Retribution Thesis relates to justice and proportionality. Here one can legitimately ask whether two wrongs can make a right. If it’s wrong for Emma and Alex to live in rebellion against God or fail to submit themselves to God in worship and service, then it must also be wrong of God to punish them eternally with no prospect of rehabilitation or restoration. After arguing that justice demands nonviolence, Baker asks, “If justice is not present in violence, how then can we conceive of a God who executes justice through violence, especially the eternal violence of hell as we have traditionally thought it?”⁷² In a non-theological context, George Sher asks: “How can one impermissible act annul or cancel the normal impermissibility of another?”⁷³

Issuantists claim that according to a retributivist understanding of hell, the ungodly could never be punished sufficiently. In the legal system, punishment must be condign for the crime that has been committed. Once the demands of justice have been fulfilled, it is expected that the criminal be released from prison regardless of whether he has mended his ways. Without an appeal either to the status principle or to the Continuing Sin Defense advanced by Carson and Craig that unending punishment in hell is warranted by unending sin against God, the retributivist can never say that the demands of justice have been satisfied. The criterion of commensuration cannot be fulfilled according to the ECT theory of hell where even after millions of years in hell, the sinful lifestyle of the ungodly still warrants an infinite number of additional years of incarceration. Buckareff and Plug conclude that a retributivist view of hell from which there is no possibility of escape is inconsistent with the loving nature of God.

If retributivism is right and some people are consigned to hell forever, then those who are consigned to hell forever are so

⁷¹ S. Baker 2010, 81.

⁷² S. Baker 2010, 85.

⁷³ Sher 1987, 4.

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consigned because of the heinous nature of the sins that they have committed. Since hell would be retributive, the denizens of hell would be eligible to leave and enter heaven only when their punishment was exhausted. Those who are consigned to remain in hell for eternity, however, would never exhaust their punishment, and so could never enter heaven and be in communion with God. But, if the above arguments are sound, then this state of affairs would be one that God would not will since it would be inconsistent with His motivational states – in particular His desire for all persons to be reconciled with Him. So if retributivism is true, and some of those in hell remain there forever, then there must be some reason why they remain in hell, otherwise God’s policy would seem inconsistent – specifically, God would desire reconciliation, but after serving their time, some or all remain in hell.⁷⁴

James Cain rejects the idea that hell must necessarily involve some form of divine injustice. “Suffering the loss of heaven – even if this is an infinite loss – also does not seem to involve an injustice if what one has lost is not something one has a right to in the first place.”⁷⁵ That is to say that since heaven is not based on desert, it is not unfair of God not to grant heaven to some people regardless of whether they’ve been good or not.

It seems that the concept of desert would demand that every person be consigned to hell, since “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). That God gives the opportunity of salvation to at least some human creatures is grace. God is not obligated to create a “fair” world in which every person receives the same opportunity to be saved. To think thus is to presuppose some concept of desert whereby people deserve salvation or at least the chance to receive salvation.

One might compare this to the TV show *Undercover Boss*. In this series, the CEO of a major corporation “incarnates” as an entry-level employee in his or her corporation. While learning new job skills, the undercover boss meets some employees who strive for excellence, take pride in their work and have creative ideas for improving the company’s efficiency and products. At the same time the boss also meets slackers who do as little work as possible, who take extended breaks for coffee, lunch and cigarettes, and who through their negative attitudes poison the work environment. After a period of observing the company’s operations from the ground level, the boss reveals his or her true identity to the employees. The good employees are rewarded with

⁷⁴ Buckareff and Plug 2005, 46.

⁷⁵ James Cain, “Why I Am Unconvinced by Arguments against the Existence of Hell” in Bunting 2010, 138.

promotions, pay raises and other benefits. The slackers on the other hand are given a chance to mend their ways during a period of “grace” – or in the worst cases find themselves unemployed. The CEO is under no obligation to give anyone these perks or benefits. Nor can one say that she is unloving or unfair to the many employees she never encountered during her undercover incarnation. When an employee is hired, an agreement is reached as to job description, expectations, pay and benefits. If the company fails to abide by this agreement, it becomes a case for the labor union or some other outside arbiter. The company may however reward its employees with bonuses and benefits beyond the stipulated agreement. Likewise, the company may treat a bad or unproductive employee less harshly than warranted.

Like the undercover boss, God’s choice of whether to extend mercy or grace is largely determined by relationship. Stephen H. Travis writes,

[H]eaven and hell are best spoken of not as reward and punishment for the kind of life we have lived, but as the logical outcome of our relationship to God in this life. Heaven is not a reward for being a Christian any more than marriage is a reward for being engaged. And hell, we may say, is not a punishment for turning one’s back on Christ and choosing the road that leads to destruction. It is where the road leads.⁷⁶

Kvanvig concurs. For him,

the demands of [God’s] justice never arise apart from considerations of his love for the created order, and hence no account of hell that appeals only to God’s justice in explaining hell can offer a fully comprehensive solution to the problem of hell.⁷⁷

In rejecting the idea of retribution, the issuantist must also reject the concomitant idea of desert.

The Purpose of Hell

Issuantists agree in their rejection of the Retribution Thesis, but vary in their understanding of the purpose of hell. Apart from retribution, an idea that issuantists reject, the most common interpretations of the purpose of hell are related to various utilitarian theories of punishment such as restitution or reparation, deterrence or prevention, incapacitation or quarantine, rehabilitation and restoration.

⁷⁶ Stephen H. Travis, “The Problem of Judgment” *Themelios* 11/2 (1986): 54. This line of thought is developed in somewhat more detail in Stephen H. Travis, *Christian Hope and the Future of Man* (Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 1980), 121.

⁷⁷ Kvanvig 1993, 136.

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In this section I shall present the most commonly advanced theories as to the purpose of hell. Even though issuantists are unanimous in their rejection of retribution as the purpose for hell, I shall begin with a brief consideration of retribution both for the sake of completeness and in order to provide a clear contrast to the non-retributive ideas presented by issuantists.

Retribution

The ECT view of hell outlined in chapter two above includes 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.”⁷⁸ Retribution is also generally seen as the purpose of hell according to conditionalists.⁷⁹ Retribution involves the imposition by an authority of some hardship on a wrongdoer, such as a deprivation or special burden.⁸⁰ Retribution may entail a deprivation of freedom, privacy or goods to which a person otherwise has a right, or the imposition of special burdens in the form of fines, jail sentences or community service.

Retributivists point to Bible texts like 2 Thessalonians 1:6-8 as support for their view. “[S]ince indeed God considers it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you ... inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.” Traditionalist J.P. Moreland writes, “Justice demands retribution ... It would be unjust to allow evil to go unpunished and to reward evil with good, even if the good was not sought in a genuine, informed way.”⁸¹

⁷⁸ Kvanvig 1993, 19.

⁷⁹ Retribution is nonetheless not a necessary component of conditionalist theories of hell. Some conditionalists, as noted earlier, see the cessation of the existence of the ungodly as a natural ending for a mortal human soul (Clark Pinnock), whereas others see the annihilation of the soul as a retributive act of God. Christopher M. Date (ed.), *Rethinking Hell: Readings in Evangelical Conditionalism* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2014). In her book *Razing Hell* (S. Baker 2010), Sharon Baker presents a hybrid view of issuantism and conditionalism where the purpose of hell is restorative, but for those who persist in rejecting God’s grace, the natural end will be their ultimate annihilation. Subsequent to the release of *Razing Hell*, Baker has publicly affirmed a belief in Christian universalism on the “Beyond the Box” podcast. <http://www.beyondtheboxpodcast.com/page/6/>

⁸⁰ It is the issue of authority that distinguishes retribution from revenge. Revenge can be exacted by anyone who has the inclination, ability and opportunity, regardless of authority to mete out legitimate punishment. Because of its vigilante, lawless, “Wild-West” nature, revenge also tends to be disproportionate, thus contributing to the overall injustice and evil of a situation. Steve Jeffery, Michael Ovey and Andrew Sach, *Pierced for Our Transgressions: Rediscovering the Glory of Penal Substitution* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2007), 252.

⁸¹ J.P. Moreland, *The God Question* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2009), 241.

Likewise, the “An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth” texts or *lex talionis* of Exodus 21:24 and Leviticus 24:20 have often been touted as a foundation for justice. The purpose of the law may well have been the establishment of proportionality – that one could not execute a person for knocking out a tooth. The *lex talionis* sets limits to the severity of allowable punishment as a means of upholding a foundational notion of justice.

Theologians from the Anabaptist tradition frequently reject the *lex talionis*, quoting the words of Jesus from Matthew 5:38-39 – “You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ But I say to you, Do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.”

John Howard Yoder points out that Jesus set aside the *lex talionis* and that even in its original Old Testament context, the law was not applied to tit-for-tat retribution in the case of murder.⁸²

Sharon Baker concludes that “[i]n the teaching of Jesus, we are exhorted, through forgiveness, to break the cycle of retribution, an eye for an eye, of getting even.”⁸³

Baker states that the attribution of retributive motives to God in Old Testament times has its origin in an illegitimate borrowing of retributive ideas from surrounding cultures. She goes on to argue that Jesus corrects these misunderstandings on a number of occasions, perhaps most tellingly in his glaring omission when reading the text of Isaiah 61:1-2 at the synagogue of Nazareth in Luke 4:16-21. There Jesus reads: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.” At that point Jesus closes the book and sits down, omitting the words “... and the day of vengeance of our God.” Baker concludes that “Jesus reinterprets the message of the Old Testament. Through Jesus, God will bring not a sword but salvation, not revenge but redemption, not the violence of force but the compassion of forgiveness.”⁸⁴

Marilyn McCord Adams argues that retribution as expressed in *lex talionis* fails to provide a just basis for ECT on the grounds that justice would not allow people to be treated worse than they actually deserve and that no one

⁸² John Howard Yoder, *The War of the Lamb: The Ethics of Nonviolence and Peacemaking* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2009), 31.

⁸³ S. Baker 2010, 98.

⁸⁴ S. Baker 2010, 59.

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deserves everlasting torment in hell. "According to the 'eye for an eye' principle, God would have the right to visit total and everlasting unhappiness on a sinner, if and only if that sinner had done the same to God."⁸⁵ One could, however, argue that God punishes the ungodly on behalf of the people who have been victims of a person's offenses. In this scenario, God is not getting revenge for God's own unhappiness, but for the unhappiness the ungodly have caused others. Adams insists that *lex talionis* fails even by this standard to provide a just basis for endless suffering in hell since no person can have caused an eternal amount of suffering in the span of one lifetime. Even if one could quantify the suffering caused by the archetype of evil Hitler by multiplying the number of his victims by the duration of their suffering, one would still end up with a finite number. Even at that, Adams maintains that causing Hitler to suffer for millions of years would be out of proportion to the suffering he caused his victims.

She illustrates this with the example of Jones who knocks out one of Smith's teeth.⁸⁶ According to *lex talionis*, Jones should also have a tooth knocked out in retaliation. Suppose however that Jones was particularly bellicose and knocked out one tooth from each of 32 victims. For each of the victims to retaliate by knocking out one of Jones' teeth would be to place Jones at a greater disadvantage than the disadvantage he caused in knocking out one tooth from each of his 32 victims. The disadvantage of having no teeth is out of proportion to the disadvantage caused by Jones whereby his victims each lost one tooth.

As we have seen, one objection raised against retributive theories of hell is that unending, conscious punishment in an eternal hell is out of proportion to any evils a person may commit in this lifetime. Retributivists, however, could respond that even the concept of proportionality presupposes retribution. If one believes it to be morally wrong to execute shoplifters or to torture speeders, it is only because we have a more foundational sense of desert, that the nature of acts like shoplifting and speeding does not warrant execution or torture.

We will now turn to various utilitarian theories of punishment that have the potential of providing a purpose for hell that entails benefits both to wrongdoers and their victims, a consideration that is very important to many issuantists.

⁸⁵ Marilyn McCord Adams, "Hell and the justice of God" *Religious Studies* 11/4 (1975): 435.

⁸⁶ Adams 1975, 439-441.

Restitution / Reparation

The emphasis of restitution as a theory of punishment lies not on paying one's debt to society, but on paying one's debt to the victim. Victims of crime often end up with great financial loss due to loss of wages, legal fees, and even the necessity of paying for the criminal's upkeep in prison. Where is the justice in that?

Instead of viewing sin as a simple transgression of rules, proponents of restitution as the purpose for hell see the ungodly as gaining an unfair advantage over those who strive to live a godly life. The unfair advantage comes in many forms, including perceptions of freedom from ethical demands such as the duty to worship God, or from other demands that may have their basis in religious faith, such as altruism or marital faithfulness. Those who obey these and other rules abjure the advantages they otherwise could have gained. The ungodly thus benefit twice from their wrongdoing: once from the self-restraint of others and once from their own lack of self-restraint. The ungodly have the advantage of freedom from the moral restraint that characterizes the godly. The fair balance is restored when the protection that the godly enjoy is removed from the ungodly. This is in one sense a natural consequence. When protection is removed, the unfair advantage is removed.

The purpose for hell as restitution would be to remove the unfair advantage that the ungodly have usurped while restoring the balance of benefits and burdens that are common to all morally responsible people.

Hell as restitution does not have to involve pain and suffering and thus avoids the criticism that retributive theories of hell entail unending, divinely sanctioned, senseless cruelty.

Universalist Thomas Talbott leaves room in his theology for a temporary hell that combines several utilitarian models: restitution, rehabilitation and restoration.⁸⁷ Talbott rejects the Retribution Thesis on the grounds that justice demands restitution rather than suffering.

⁸⁷ I include Talbott in this section for two reasons: because his view of hell helps illustrate what various utilitarian conceptions of the purpose of hell might look like, and because Talbott does indeed believe in the three main trademarks of issuantism: the love of God as the motivation for both heaven and hell, metaphysical libertarianism and a rejection of the Retribution Thesis. It would not, however, be fair to classify him as an issuantist since his views on the nature and purpose of hell are only tangential to his main argument for universalism, the idea that since a fully-informed, rational choice for an eternal hell is incoherent and thus logically impossible, a loving God would do anything possible to dispel the illusions and confused mental states that would lead a person ultimately to reject God.

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If no suffering of *finite* duration will satisfy the demands of justice, perhaps suffering of *infinite* duration will do the trick. But the truth is that no suffering of any duration will satisfy the demands of justice fully, because justice requires something of a different nature altogether.⁸⁸

The idea here is that real justice demands restitution, not retributive punishment for punishment's sake. Since full restitution is impossible from a human perspective, the whole point of retributive justice is thwarted.

What *sort of thing* would satisfy justice *to the full* in the event that one should do something morally wrong? ... If one could somehow make amends for the wrong action, that is, undo any harm done, repair any damage, in a way that would make up for, or cancel out, the bad consequences of the action (in one's own life as well as in the life of others), one would then satisfy justice *to the full*.⁸⁹

Talbott maintains that it is impossible to achieve this type of restitutive justice from a human perspective.

In human society, of course, we cannot always achieve perfect justice; some may wonder whether even God has the power to achieve it. And when we cannot achieve perfect justice in a given case, such as cold-blooded murder, we then settle for the best possible alternative: a means of removing the murderer's unfair advantage. But whether we execute murderers, condemn them to a life sentence without possibility of parole, or punish them in some other way, our punishment does not in any way undo the harm they have done either to themselves or to others and does not, therefore, satisfy all the demands of justice.⁹⁰

In human terms, one can never fully establish justice and must settle for a second-best kind of justice, including forms of retribution. God, however, does not face such limitations.

Accordingly, not even the best of the humanly devised systems of justice can be anything more than a distorted reflection of divine justice – limited, perhaps, to preventing wrongdoers from achieving an unfair advantage through their misdeeds and to regulating our human desire to strike back. ... If we accept the Christian view, according to which sin is anything that separates us from God and

⁸⁸ Talbott 1999, 156.

⁸⁹ Talbott 1999, 157.

⁹⁰ Talbott 1999, 158.

from each other, then the answer to our question is clear: Perfect justice requires *reconciliation* and *restoration*.⁹¹

Justice demands restitution, but since restitution is impossible from a human perspective, we can leave it to God to achieve a higher form of justice in the form of reconciliation and restoration. Through the pains of a temporary hell, the illusions of ungodly are stripped away and they come to understand clearly the harm their sin has done to themselves, to others and to God. The repentance they express in response to God's forgiveness is a concrete expression of their desire to make restitution to God and others.

According to the restitution theory of punishment, prisons would serve a different purpose than they would under a retributive understanding of punishment. Restitution would mean the establishment of structures for criminals to give restitution to their victims with financial restitution as a basic first step. However, it may be argued that restitution cannot provide a complete and sufficient basis for justice. In cases of assault or murder there can be no restitution and fines for such crimes are arbitrary. Can one place a price tag on a human life or on the loss of peace of mind after an assault?

Critics may claim that even in cases of theft, the restitution of stolen money is not sufficient since the victim's loss is not exclusively financial and because restitution has no value in deterring either the criminal or others from (re)committing this crime.

Moreover, it is difficult to imagine what a theory of hell as restitution would look like in practice for several reasons. First, the involuntary redistribution of benefits and burdens would seem like a *prima facie* violation of a person's freedom in the libertarian sense, thus contradicting another key component of basic issuantism.

A second problem comes in knowing what standard to apply in measuring the amount of unfair advantage the ungodly gain by their wrongdoing. If the benefits of wrongdoing are measured in terms of likelihood, then lying would have to be "punished" more severely than murder since people are less likely to murder than to seek the unfair advantage they believe they will gain by lying.

Third, while one can understand the idea that hell removes the unfair advantage the ungodly have over the godly and restores a sense of balance, it does nothing to address the sins that the ungodly commit against God. Although God may be grieved by a person's sin, there is little chance for

⁹¹ Talbott 1999, 160.

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restitution of God's emotional loss unless one combines restitution with some other theory of hell, such as restoration or rehabilitation.

Deterrence / Prevention

A theory of punishment popularized by utilitarians like Jeremy Bentham was that fewer people would commit crimes if they could see that the negative experience of harsh punishment would outweigh any putative pleasure the criminal may gain from his wrongdoing. Deterrence takes two possible forms: specific deterrence or prevention in which the wrongdoer is prevented from further wrongdoing and general deterrence in which the punishment of a wrongdoer serves as a warning example so that other people are deterred from the same wrong behavior. In many cases the mere threat of punishment may suffice to deter a would-be wrongdoer if the wrongdoer believes the threat.

In the Bible deterrence is presented as one possible motivation for punishment in early Hebrew society alongside restitution and retribution. In the context of perjurers, the Israelites were instructed to punish the perjurer with the punishment his false testimony would have led to for the accused.

[T]hen you shall do to him as he had meant to do to his brother. So you shall purge the evil from your midst. And the rest shall hear and fear, and shall never again commit any such evil among you. Your eye shall not pity. It shall be life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot.⁹²

In the case where an Israelite tries to persuade others to follow false gods, the punishment should be harsh so that "all Israel shall hear and fear and never again do any such wickedness as this among you."⁹³

Swinburne rejects both the Retribution Thesis and the idea that hell could lead to reform or rehabilitation of the ungodly. Instead, he prefers to emphasize *poena damni* as the nature of hell more than any specific purpose of hell, he believes that hell nonetheless may have a certain value in deterring sin. "[P]*oena damni* will not serve any purposes of prevention or reform, but if it is known to or suspected by others that that may be the fate of those who sin continually, it can certainly deter those others."⁹⁴ He does, however, admit

⁹² Deuteronomy 19:19-21.

⁹³ Deuteronomy 13:11.

⁹⁴ Richard Swinburne, *Providence and the Problem of Evil* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1998), 198.

that a condign punishment probably does not provide sufficient gravitas to deter would-be wrongdoers.⁹⁵

There are several problems with deterrence as the purpose for hell. In the first place, deterrence doesn't work as a model without some concomitant idea of retribution. Without presupposing notions of desert, it would be justified for God to send an innocent person (who was presumed guilty) to hell.

Sofia Jeppsson further explains this problem of founding punishment on a utilitarian theory of deterrence.

The motivation for putting up walls and bars between A and B was to protect B from violence, but this could in theory be done by imprisoning B just as well as A. The reason that it is A and not B who ought to be imprisoned is not that it would be inconvenient to lock up all potential victims instead of the criminals, or have bad consequences from doing so, but simply that it was A and not B who did wrong, so it is A who deserves it.⁹⁶

It is thus only with the presupposition of desert that justice can be maintained.

The punishment of a putatively guilty person for the purpose of deterrence leads to a second problem. Since no one truly knows who ends up in hell, the people who perhaps most need to be deterred from their sin are not likely to believe they are headed to hell. Buckareff and Plug write:

Nor can the suffering be for deterrence purposes. If hell has a deterrent effect, that effect is due to the threat of hell. It is not due to the actual suffering of those in hell since we, prior to being consigned to hell, cannot observe the suffering. So any deterrence is due to the threat alone. If the threat *alone* is a sufficient deterrent, then the actual suffering of those in hell is unnecessary to satisfy any deterrent purpose.⁹⁷

As such, the actual sufferings of hell are unnecessary and the threat of hell is ineffective in deterring people from sin.

A third problem is raised by the question of proportionality. According to the deterrence theory, if there were no punishment for crime, a great number

⁹⁵ Richard Swinburne, *Responsibility and Atonement* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1989), 103.

⁹⁶ Sofia Jeppsson, *Practical Perspective Compatibilism* (Stockholm: Stockholm University, 2012), 117.

⁹⁷ Andrei A. Buckareff and Allen Plug, "Hell and the Problem of Evil" in Justin McBrayer and Daniel Howard-Snyder (eds), *A Companion to the Problem of Evil* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 132.

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of people would commit petty theft such as shoplifting. Since most people have a greater natural resistance to taking another person's life, fewer people would be tempted to do it in the absence of punishment. If deterrence were the only criterion for punishment, it would make sense to have a harsher punishment for the petty crimes that people are more likely to commit than for more serious crimes, which fewer people are likely to commit. As a utilitarian theory, deterrence has no means of insuring that less serious, but more common crimes not be punished harsher than more serious but less common crimes. The only justification for matching the severity of a punishment to the crime is a notion of proportionality that presupposes concepts like desert and retribution – that certain actions are inherently worse than others and thus deserving of a harsher punishment.

Incapacitation / Quarantine

Hell can also be seen as a form of quarantine or exile for the purpose of incapacitation of the wrongdoer or protection of the innocent. Quarantine or incapacitation may be seen as a form of prevention where the purpose is not primarily that the ungodly would learn the consequences of their action or mend their ways, but that they would be unable to continue in their wrongdoing. Those who are in hell are deprived of the goodness that comes from relationship with God and with other people in community. Issuantist Eleonore Stump states that consignment in hell has the purpose of preventing the ungodly from contaminating the heavenly community while God at the same time demonstrates divine love by allowing the good that is entailed in the existence of even the ungodly to continue. She ties this idea to a rejection of the No Escape Thesis, but maintains that it is only a contingent fact that no one ever escapes from hell.⁹⁸

Stump's quarantine conception of hell builds on Aquinas' definition of love as willing good to a person. When God loves a person, God wills that person good. This means God does whatever is within God's power to ensure the most good for the person. For Aquinas, this good is the promotion of human rationality, which is closely related to morality. To actualize rationality is to aim at promoting moral actions and emotions in accord with reason, and virtuous states of character – thus fulfilling the final cause of humanity. For both Aquinas and Stump, existence is good, but this goodness can be outweighed by evil actions so that a person turns out on the whole to be evil.

⁹⁸ Stump 1986, 181-198.

For Stump, in order for hell to issue from God's love for humanity, it is necessary that it be the best way open to God to aim at an increase of being. Since some people do not want to fulfill their God-given final cause in developing a moral character and becoming more fully rational creatures, it becomes necessary for God to do something with them so that they do not hinder the overall good which is going on in the redemption and growth of others. The logical choices are annihilation or some form of existence separate from God. Although allowing the ungodly to cease to exist might seem like a greater good than their unending suffering in hell, Stump does not believe that annihilation can be a greater good since annihilation necessarily entails non-existence and goodness is inextricably tied to existence. "In the absence of such an overriding good, however, the annihilation of the damned is not morally justified and thus not an option for a good God."⁹⁹ God consigns the damned to a place where the goodness of being is not lost, but where the corruption of their character does not risk endangering the progress being made by other beings.

Kvanvig sees several problems with Stump's approach. First, the quarantine model is no guarantee that the damned will not continue to destroy or corrupt whatever goodness may still be found in the other beings in quarantine. The second problem relates to the Existence Thesis. "If being is the fundamental value, justifying annihilation is difficult. However, if freedom is of fundamental value annihilation seems to be easier to justify."¹⁰⁰ Freedom is clearly important, since it is the main explanation why God does not redeem everyone. Moreover, freedom cannot be of secondary importance to being since God should otherwise sacrifice the freedom of a person who has rejected God for the sake of maximizing his being. According to Kvanvig, Stump's quarantine model has no means of explaining why seclusion in hell is morally superior to forced residence in heaven when the logical end of seclusion in hell is loss of freedom.

C.P. Ragland develops a similar line of thought. If, as Stump maintains, God overrides the freedom of the ungodly for the greater good of existence, in spite of the fact that the ungodly may prefer annihilation to the everlasting suffering of hell, then why could God not override the freedom of the ungodly for the sake of saving them against their will? Surely the blessing of a

⁹⁹ Stump 1986, 196.

¹⁰⁰ Kvanvig 1993, 127.

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forced heaven must weigh greater than a forced consignment in an everlasting hell.¹⁰¹

Rehabilitation

A further utilitarian theory of punishment is that of rehabilitation. The rehabilitation theory of punishment is not satisfied with a change of actions or the prevention of certain negative actions. One of the underlying assumptions of this theory is that no healthy person in a sound state of mind would commit a heinous crime. As George Sher sees it, "... any society that wishes to forego punishment, but also wishes to control behavior, will be pressed to regard undesirable acts as forms of pathology."¹⁰² That is, since it is a sign of illness, wrongdoing doesn't warrant retribution. Attempts to alter the wrongdoer's behavior become forms of therapy.

As a theory of hell, rehabilitation is often a concomitant to either universalism or escapism as a supplement to basic issuantism. Many evangelical universalists make a place in their system for a temporary hell in which the ungodly see the error of their ways and are rehabilitated.¹⁰³ Once the sinner has been rehabilitated, she is released from hell to enjoy the benefits of eternal life.

Rehabilitation seems to face at least one of the weaknesses also seen in other utilitarian theories of punishment, *viz.*, the lack of proportionality.

As therapy, they need be neither predictable nor proportional to what the "patient" has done. ... Instead, the mere potential for "pathological" behavior is sufficient to justify such attempts. ... Carried to its natural conclusion, the "logic of therapy" ends by degrading us to the status of animals or things.¹⁰⁴

It appears that rehabilitation can not only lead to arbitrary and gross injustice, but that it also places enormous and arbitrary power to decide a person's fate in the hands of those who set a course of treatment and decide when the criminal has been rehabilitated. In this case, a shoplifter and a mass-murderer are both sentenced to an open-ended course of therapy and rehabilitation. Suppose the mass-murderer responds well to therapy and is

¹⁰¹ C.P. Ragland, "Love and Damnation" in Kevin Timpe (ed.), *Metaphysics and God: Essays in Honor of Eleonore Stump* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 215.

¹⁰² Sher 1987, 75.

¹⁰³ Talbott 1999; MacDonald 2008. Morwenna Ludlow writes that this was a theme in the writings of early universalists like Origen and Gregory of Nyssa. Morwenna Ludlow, "Universalism in the History of Christianity" in Robin A. Parry and Christopher H. Partridge (eds), *Universal Salvation? The Current Debate* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 192.

¹⁰⁴ Sher 1987, 75.

fully rehabilitated after a few weeks, while the shoplifter refuses to admit her guilt, is recalcitrant and remains in therapy for the rest of her life. On the rehabilitation theory, all sentences should be indeterminate. Since the relative severity of the crime is no longer a consideration (because it presupposes desert and retribution), all courses of treatment should continue until such time as the criminal is deemed to have been successfully rehabilitated by whatever arbitrary board or judge.

More specific to our purposes, it would appear that viewing rehabilitation as the purpose of hell may present difficulties in explaining what happens to those who refuse to mend their ways, who remain permanently in hell. This seems to be most problematic for evangelical universalists, who would have to provide other reasons for their belief that no one ever refuses indefinitely to be rehabilitated and released from treatment in hell. Viewing the purpose of hell as rehabilitative does not have to present an inherent problem for issuantists who believe that a person may experience an unending hell as the natural consequence of one's choices in life.

Restoration

According to restorative theories of justice, crime and wrongdoing are viewed as offenses against an individual or community, rather than against the state. The goal of justice is the healing of broken relationships and reconciliation of the wrongdoer with the offended. Among other means, this may take the form of personal meetings where wrongdoers learn of the great suffering their actions have caused the victims and their communities.

One well-known example of an attempt to apply restorative justice on a large scale was South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission of the 1990s. During these hearings, survivors of egregious crimes committed primarily against black South Africans during the apartheid regime testified before those who had committed atrocities against them, telling their stories of personal suffering, loss and terror. Full amnesty was granted to some wrongdoers who confessed their guilt and met several other criteria. The goals were the reintegration of offenders into the community by encouraging them to take personal responsibility for their wrongdoing and the establishment of harmony across racial divides.

Sharon Baker defines restorative justice as "A theory of justice that focuses on repairing a harm or offense so that the relationship between victim and offender can be restored."¹⁰⁵ One of her objections against retributive justice is that it removes the need for forgiveness. Even if forgiveness is subsequently

¹⁰⁵ S. Baker 2010, 18.

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given, it is meaningless when the penalty has already been paid through retributive measures.¹⁰⁶

Focusing on the needs of the offenders, she points to God's desire in the Bible to forgive and restore sinners to a renewed relationship with God. "[I]n Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them..."¹⁰⁷

Baker explains that divine justice does not mean that wrongdoers get off scot-free, but rather that God's love "means coming face-to-face with the shameful depravity of personal sin by coming face-to-face with the one who has the right and the power to punish but who instead loves and forgives."¹⁰⁸ Love and forgiveness result in repentance and redemption. Repentance is a fruit of, not a prerequisite for, restorative justice.

In judgment, the sinner is confronted with the merciful, forgiving God whom she has wronged. The unfiltered exposure to God's love serves as a catalyst for the sinner to recognize her guilt and repent. "[T]his is a chain reaction in which love forgives, forgiveness reconciles, and reconciliation restores – all characteristics of divine justice, God's reconciling justice."¹⁰⁹

As we have seen, one of the weaknesses of restitution as the purpose of hell is the impossibility of making restitution to an offended God. Baker's restorative model seeks to overcome this problem through the extension of forgiveness and mercy to the wrongdoer. It would seem that Baker also succeeds in avoiding one of the problems facing other utilitarian theories of punishment, *i.e.*, that they presuppose notions of desert and retribution. On Baker's theory of restorative justice, one need not presuppose that sinners deserve mercy or forgiveness. They are gracious gifts given by a loving God.

¹⁰⁶ S. Baker 2010, 81.

¹⁰⁷ 2 Corinthians 5:19. A similar proclamation of God's unilateral work in salvation and forgiveness is found in Luke 1:68-79 – "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed his people and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David, as he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old, that we should be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us; to show the mercy promised to our fathers and to remember his holy covenant, the oath that he swore to our father Abraham, to grant us that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies, might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him all our days. And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, to give knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of their sins, because of the tender mercy of our God, whereby the sunrise shall visit us from on high to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace."

¹⁰⁸ S. Baker 2010, 93.

¹⁰⁹ S. Baker 2010, 103.

As previously noted, Talbott rejects the Retribution Thesis in favor of a combination of utilitarian purposes, including restitution, rehabilitation and restoration. Recognizing the shortcomings of restitution as a theory of justice he suggests that one may settle for a second-best purpose, prevention.

If we cannot achieve perfect justice, if we must settle for partial justice as a kind of second best, then we should at least prevent the wrongdoer, in so far as it lies within our power to do so, from achieving an unfair advantage over others.¹¹⁰

However, the best means of preserving the dignity and humanity of the wrongdoer is through a restorative meeting between the sinner and God.

Do we not want him to reclaim enough of his humanity to admit that he was wrong and to appreciate *why* he was wrong? Do we not want his illusions stripped away, so he can stand naked before his Creator? Only when the light finally breaks into his darkened understanding, only when the divine forgiveness begins its work of transformation, will he begin to appreciate the meaning of his punishment and the true nature of his evil deeds; and then, of course, he will already be on the road to redemption.¹¹¹

It is Talbott's firm belief that no fully informed, rational person would continue perpetually in his rebellion against the love of God. Because of love, God does everything possible (including a personal confrontation after death) to show the sinner the error of his ways with the purpose of giving him full insight into the irrationality and destructiveness of his wrongdoing. When he realizes how his choices have harmed himself, others, and God he will repent and be restored to fellowship with God.

The Nature of Hell

While some issuantists like Stump and Baker clearly define the purpose of hell as quarantine or restoration, many others avoid the specific question of the purpose of hell and focus instead on the nature of hell.

Theologians have traditionally defined the sufferings of hell in terms of both physical and spiritual anguish. *Poena sensus* is physical suffering and *poena damni* is the pain of loss experienced by the eternal separation of the ungodly from the presence of God. *Poena damni* or the natural loss of the good is perhaps the most common conceptualization of the nature of hell among issuantists today.

¹¹⁰ Thomas Talbott, "Punishment, forgiveness, and divine justice" *Religious Studies* 29/2 (1993): 162.

¹¹¹ Talbott 1993, 168.

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Swinburne maintains that hell does not consist of eternal physical punishment (*poena sensus*). Indeed, he is not certain that there is any suffering in hell. If there is suffering, it is a result of being separated from God (*poena damni*).

But for God to subject them to literally endless *physical* pain (*poena sensus* in medieval terminology) does seem to me to be incompatible with the goodness of God. It seems to have the character of a barbarous vengeance; whatever the evil, a finite number of years of evildoing does not deserve an infinite number of years of physical pain as punishment. The all-important punishment is to be deprived of eternal happiness...¹¹²

For Swinburne, the *poena damni* is on the one hand a more severe fate than *poena sensus*, yet at the same time possibly the best allocation of fate for those who have chosen it.¹¹³ “For the totally corrupt there must be the *poena damni* (i.e. damnation), the penalty of the loss of the vision of God, a penalty of far greater importance than any *poena sensus*...”¹¹⁴

Michael Levine critiques Swinburne’s ranking of *poena sensus* and *poena damni*.

If Swinburne sees the deprivation of the happiness of heaven as the ‘all-important punishment’, then in claiming that God opts for distributing that punishment rather than the milder one of endless physical pain he sees God as choosing the more important and significant punishment. But given that Swinburne sees the less important punishment (i.e., endless physical pain) as incompatible with the goodness of God; is there not a presumption in favour of the view that the harsher, more significant punishment is also incompatible with the goodness of God?¹¹⁵

According to Swinburne, *poena sensus* is incompatible with God’s goodness in that God would not punish a person with endless physical torment. Yet he believes that *poena damni* is a more significant punishment than *poena sensus*. How can *poena damni* be compatible with the goodness of God if it is worse than *poena sensus* and *poena sensus* is incompatible with God’s goodness? It would seem that one possible way around this conundrum is to propose the Not-so-Nasty Thesis. Swinburne seems to believe that *poena*

¹¹² Swinburne 1983, 51-52.

¹¹³ Swinburne 1989, 198.

¹¹⁴ Swinburne 1989, 182.

¹¹⁵ Michael Levine, “Swinburne’s heaven: one hell of a place” *Religious Studies* 29/4 (1993): 530.

damni may not be all that bad if the totally corrupt have no desire for the good. The incorrigibly bad “have lost any desire for the good; and so for them the *poena damni* will be in no way a bad thing.”¹¹⁶ Even with the addition of the Not-so-Nasty Thesis, it is not completely clear how the Not-so-Nasty Thesis succeeds in rescuing Swinburne from the apparent contradiction of claiming that *poena damni* is worse than *poena sensus* and that *poena sensus* is incompatible with the goodness of God.

Although Swinburne sometimes uses the language of punishment and judgment, he ultimately rejects the Retribution Thesis in favor of a view of hell as the natural consequences of one’s choices. “The *poena damni* is a loss of good, not an inflicted evil; and it is not so much a punishment inflicted from without as an inevitable consequence of a man allowing himself to lose his moral awareness.”¹¹⁷ Swinburne sees consignment to hell as the natural result of a fixed character that has been formed by a person’s choices in life.

A fixed character limits the range of choices a person can freely choose. One may act in such a consistent manner over such an extended period of time that one’s natural desires for the good are extinguished. When this happens, the person’s freedom and chances of rehabilitation are also eliminated.

Swinburne reasons that while one’s initial consignment to hell may be retributive in nature, one’s continued existence in hell is best explained by having lost one’s soul. The eternal duration of one’s residence in hell is not because one has done something to deserve it, but rather because it is impossible for one to achieve the moral character required for escape or release from hell. Kvanvig sees this as a weakness: at some point God abandons a person who persists in choosing evil, yet according to Kvanvig, Swinburne fails to provide an adequate explanation of why the issue of residence in hell is eternally fixed. That is, Swinburne has an insufficient basis for the finality of hell. Given the grounds of Swinburne’s rejection of the Retribution Thesis, there is no reason why he should keep the No Escape Thesis, which he does not reject. Similarly, he fails to provide reasons for the moral acceptability of God abandoning these people in hell.¹¹⁸

According to Kvanvig, there are two possible approaches to understanding the privations one experiences in hell. First, it is possible to conceive of hell in terms of exile. Those who are in hell are deprived of the goodness that comes

¹¹⁶ Swinburne 1998, 197.

¹¹⁷ Swinburne 1989, 182.

¹¹⁸ Kvanvig 1993, 99-100; 119-120.

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with relationship with God and with other people in community. On the other hand, the privations of *poena damni* experienced by the ungodly in hell may extend even to the good of existence itself. This could be called an annihilation doctrine of hell. The main issue here is whether freedom or existence is the more important value.

Kvanvig uses the analogies of capital punishment and suicide. In general, our penal system prioritizes existence more than freedom. Yet in some cases, suicide may be an expression of the preeminence of freedom over existence. Just as suicide may be justifiable in certain cases, the choice of annihilation may be justified in certain cases where one's opposition to God is so great that anything (even nonexistence itself) is preferable to the presence of God. For God to override a person's suicidal wishes (whether spiritual or physical) would be to declare the person morally incapable of handling one's own affairs. If God were to override a person's freedom to preserve her existence in an endless hell, then there is no good reason why God should not override a person's freedom to give her an eternally blessed existence. "No matter how important existence is, intervention is sometimes too paternalistic to be justified, and hence the importance of freedom wins out over the importance of existence."¹¹⁹ In such a case, the annihilation model would be preferable to the exile model.

When issuantists like Kvanvig, Swinburne and others¹²⁰ explain the nature of hell as the loss of some good a person otherwise would have enjoyed in heaven, they still fail to explain the *purpose* of hell. Why would God eternally remove common grace, the *imago dei*, or even existence itself from people as a "natural consequence" of their temporal rejection of God? That is, why should we believe that God will eternally remove people in hell from all experience of the goods of which God is author (love, friendship, beauty, joy, pleasure, existence)? If such a state entails immeasurable suffering for the ungodly, then why would it not be preferable for God to remove a person's freedom as one of the good gifts of which God is the giver? If not for the sake of retribution, then there's no clear reason why any of these goods would be absent, nor why they would be absent forever.

¹¹⁹ Kvanvig 1993, 138.

¹²⁰ Although I have focused on Swinburne and Kvanvig in this section, the same question could be directed to any number of issuantists who see hell primarily in terms of loss, including (but not limited to) N.T. Wright, Jerry Walls, and C.S. Lewis.

Summary and Evaluation of Basic Issuantism

In this chapter I have presented what I believe to be the three *sine qua non* trademarks of basic issuantism: the love of God as the divine motivation for both heaven and hell, a libertarian definition of human free will, and the rejection of the Retribution Thesis.

In regard to the first trademark, the integration of divine motives in the love of God, I have shown that issuantists contend that there is a fundamental inconsistency to most retributive perspectives on hell whereby God is portrayed as loving towards those who are being saved and wroth against those whom he condemns to hell.

Issuantists maintain that both heaven and hell must issue from the love of God since love is a more foundational character quality than justice or wrath. Love is an intrinsic quality in God, while wrath only expresses itself as a response to sin. Moreover, issuantists hold that God's love is the only attribute that provides a satisfactory foundation for God's great works in creation and redemption; only love can be the basis for grace and mercy.

Regarding the second trademark, metaphysical libertarianism, I have shown that issuantists believe that only a libertarian definition of human freedom is capable of preserving the concept of human moral responsibility. Issuantists contend that any form of determinism, including the soft determinism of compatibilism, eliminates moral responsibility. If a person's actions can be at least partially determined by outside causes while claims of freedom and moral responsibility are asserted, then God would be morally culpable for not creating the world such that all people would freely choose salvation while at the same time being determined to do so.

Regarding basic issuantism's third trademark, I have shown that while not all issuantists state explicitly what they believe to be the purpose of hell, they uniformly reject the Retribution Thesis. Many issuantists emphasize the nature of hell more than its purpose and describe hell in terms of the privations of the goods with which God blesses those who are in a right relationship with God.

With each of these points I have presented some possible objections to the positions held by issuantists. In most cases I have also shown that at least some forms of issuantism provide plausible answers to these objections. The problem comes in looking at basic issuantism's overall potential for answering the problem of hell.

Stephen Kershner likens the doctrine of hell to a school principal who rules that any students caught fighting would be forcibly sodomized by the

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school janitor. In setting up such a disproportionate system of punishment, the principal is responsible for the fighters' suffering even if they place themselves in a position where they will be punished.¹²¹

Kershner's example is clearly directed against retributive theories of hell. Yet if one rejects the Retribution Thesis, as in basic issuantism, then one views hell as some form of natural consequence of a person's choice. In Kershner's example, there is no natural connection between the act of fighting and the punishment of being sodomized. According to issuantism there is nonetheless a natural connection between a person's choice to live life without God and the natural consequences of those choices, being eternally separated from God and all the goods with which God wishes to bless people. Even so, God would still seem morally culpable for establishing a system whereby some people will suffer eternally, even if people can only blame themselves for ending up in that situation.

A second point of critique against basic issuantism comes from Jonathan Kvanvig who is an issuantist himself. Kvanvig holds that basic issuantism has a problem in providing finality to a person's choices. If human free choice is the deciding factor for determining one's postmortem destiny, then what is there to say that one cannot freely change one's mind? According to basic issuantism, it must be possible not only for a person in hell to repent and be released but for a person in heaven to apostatize and be cast out of heaven.

According to Kvanvig, basic issuantism cannot guarantee universal salvation because of its inability to account for finality.

[T]hough the ideal is for an individual to cooperate freely with God in the process of redemption, the nature of choice is such that no guarantee of success is possible. As such, for finality to be achieved, God must at some point end the uncertainty either by damning some forever or choosing to redeem a person against their will if need be.¹²²

Finality can only be achieved by God's decision to damn some people or the forced salvation of others.

A third idea to consider in evaluating basic issuantism is that of gratitude. Christians are to follow biblical examples in expressing gratitude to God for their salvation and for growth in grace in their lives.¹²³ As the gift of God,

¹²¹ Stephen Kershner, "The Injustice of Hell" *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 58/2 (2005): 106.

¹²² Kvanvig 2011, 25.

¹²³ Ephesians 1:3-6, 15-19; Colossians 1:3-14; 2 Thessalonians 1:3, etc.

salvation is not something for which a believer can take personal credit.¹²⁴ This is in clear contrast to Eastern notions of karma where, if there is any spiritual growth or progress, one has only oneself to thank. Correspondingly, if I am a total spiritual loser and end up being reborn as a grasshopper, then I have no one to blame but myself.¹²⁵

When it comes to the doctrine of hell, critics are eager to blame God if someone ends up in hell. According to the problem of hell, if anyone suffers in hell, then God must somehow be at least partially impotent, ignorant or immoral. With the issuantist rejection of the Retribution Thesis and insistence on the Self-Determination Thesis, the blame for people ending up in hell is placed squarely back on the heads of the ungodly themselves. God gets the credit for a person's salvation, but not the blame for her damnation. This would seemingly lead to the same type of asymmetry that issuantists reject in insisting that both heaven and hell must issue from the love of God. If humans cannot take credit for their salvation, how can they be blamed for their damnation? If the ungodly bear the sole responsibility for their infernal fate, then why aren't the godly responsible for their eternal life?

One option is to say that God is ultimately responsible for both the salvation of some and the damnation of others, an option found in Calvinism. Another option is to say that God is not responsible for either salvation or damnation. This option not only flies in the face of the Christian belief that salvation is a gift of God that one receives through faith, it also makes God largely redundant. It is on this basis that Moltmann calls issuant views "atheistic".

The logic of hell seems to me not merely inhumane but also extremely atheistic: here the human being in his freedom of choice is his own lord and god. His own will is his heaven – or his hell. God is merely the accessory who puts that will into effect. If I decide for heaven, God must put me there; if I decide for hell, he has to leave me there. ... Free human beings forge their own happiness and are their own executioners. They do not just dispose over their lives here; they decide on their eternal destinies as well. So they have no need of any God at all.¹²⁶

Scholars who supplement basic issuantism with some form of Extra Chance Thesis deal with the question of finality in various ways, as we shall see in chapter five. As Kvanvig mentions, some scholars supplement basic

¹²⁴ Ephesians 2:8-10.

¹²⁵ Ray Baker, "Måndag hela evigheten" *Keryx* 2 (2010): 31-40.

¹²⁶ Moltmann 2001, 45.

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issuantism with what I call the Fixed Character Thesis. Kvanvig himself supplements his basic issuantism with a version of the Middle Knowledge Thesis.

Issuantism developed within late twentieth-century Anglo-American theology because of the perceived failure of non-issuant views – in particular ECT and conditionalism – to provide a satisfactory answer to the problem of hell.

As we have seen, the problem of hell arises in the perceived inconsistency between the following premises:

1. An omnipotent God could create a world in which all moral agents freely choose life with God.
2. An omnibenevolent God would not create a world with the foreknowledge that some (perhaps a significant proportion) of God's creatures would end up in hell.
3. An omniscient God would know which people will end up in hell.
4. Some people will end up forever in hell.

A satisfactory answer to the problem of hell must seek to harmonize these premises. Through its insistence on libertarianism, basic issuantism defines what it means for a person to make a free choice, but does not address the question of which worlds it is logically possible or feasible for God to create. Through its insistence on love as God's dominant attribute even towards people who will end up in hell, basic issuantism affirms God's omnibenevolence, but says nothing about divine omniscience or foreknowledge.

It has not been my desire to create a straw man which I have now swiftly destroyed. Basic issuantism by itself does not harmonize the ostensibly inconsistent premises of the problem of hell. But as a rarefied construction, maybe it was never intended to fulfill this purpose. Because of its failure at solving the problem of hell, most (if not all) issuantists seek to strengthen basic issuantism with the addition of one or more supplements. I shall turn to these supplements in the next chapter.

5

SUPPLEMENTS TO BASIC ISSUANTISM

The capacity to eternally act against all of my motives would introduce into my life a potential for profound irrationality that I would rather do without. And if I exercise my libertarian freedom as described above, dooming myself to the outer darkness without reason, I sincerely hope that God would act to stop me – just as I hope a friend would stop me if I decided to leap from a rooftop for no reason. I would not regard the actions of that friend as a violation of any valuable freedom, but would see it as a welcome antidote to arbitrary stupidity.¹

First, if the fundamental problem of Hell cannot be answered, it is pointless to add to the description of Hell in any way at all. It is simply an untenable doctrine, for the same reason that adding further information to a contradiction doesn't make the inconsistency disappear. Second, if we find an acceptable answer to the fundamental problem of Hell, that answer may inform us as to what additional language can be allowed and how it should be interpreted.²

Issuant views of hell only succeed in rescuing God from the charges of being unloving and/or unjust if people in hell are there of their free wills – precisely the claim implicit in issuantism's libertarianism and rejection of the Retribution Thesis. Yet by itself metaphysical libertarianism may be susceptible to the critique in chapter four that freedom and moral responsibility are dependent upon rationality. In this section, I shall examine a number of theses that some issuantists propose as supplements to basic issuantism for the purpose of reconciling human freedom with hell and thereby providing an answer to the problem of hell. The three trademarks are necessary aspects of an issuantist solution to the problem of hell. As I have shown in chapter four, however, basic issuantism is not adequate as an

¹ Reitan 2003, 137.

² Kvanvig 2011, 4.

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answer to the problem of hell. That's where the supplementary theses come into the picture. None of the supplementary theses is necessary, but in combination with the three trademarks of basic issuantism, they may form a coherent answer to the problem of hell.

The Not-so-Nasty Thesis: People end up in hell because of their free choices. The people in hell are content with their situation since they have received what they genuinely want.

The Less-than-Human Thesis: One natural consequence of a person's rejection of God is the loss of the goods with which God endows people. The loss of these goods means the ultimate loss of humanity for the formerly human denizens of hell.

The Nearly-Empty Thesis: Hell will be populated by only a small number of irredeemably evil beings.

The Extra Chance Theses: In order to counteract the possible disadvantages of religious luck, God provides people with one or more postmortem opportunities to be saved.

The Fixed Character Thesis: The formation of an evil character explains how people can chose to remain in hell.

The Irrationality Thesis: Because of libertarian human freedom, God must allow people to make irrational choices even if those irrational choices entail that they end up in hell.

The Middle Knowledge Thesis: Based on God's middle knowledge of the counterfactuals of creaturely freedom, God actualizes a world in which the optimal ratio of saved to lost is realized.

The Openness Thesis: God's character and actions in creating the world are vindicated by the fact that God did not know prior to the creative act which if any free moral agents would end up in hell.

Of these theses, the Middle Knowledge Thesis and the Openness Thesis are perhaps not supplements to basic issuantism in the strict sense in that they are not expendable features whose purpose is to shore up basic issuantism. They are rather competing metaphysical assumptions about the nature of divine foreknowledge. I include them here because of their implications for the solutions to the problem of hell presented by molinist issuantists and openness issuantists respectively.

I shall now examine these theses with a view to see how well they succeed in helping issuantism reconcile belief in an omnibenevolent, omniscient, omnipotent God with the possibility that at least some people may end up in hell.

The Not-so-Nasty Thesis

A key component of the problem of hell is the difficulty in reconciling the loving God of Christian tradition and theology with the idea that this God would torment people for millions of years in an everlasting hell. As we have seen in chapter four, issuantists deal with this problem by maintaining that hell is not a retributive punishment meted out by a wrathful God, but the natural consequences of a person's free choice when a loving God respects that choice and leaves people to their own devices.

Bertrand Russell famously wrote that "Hell is neither so certain nor so hot as it used to be."³ For some issuantists, hell may not be as hot as it used to be, but not for the reasons Russell had in mind. It is not because threats of hell are no longer effective in controlling people's behavior, but because Christian theologians are turning down the thermostat to make things more comfortable for God!

This is an idea hinted at by C.S. Lewis in his claim that the doors of hell are locked from the inside, and that the residents of hell are "successful rebels to the end."⁴ On Lewis' conception, the denizens of hell may be objectively unhappy while subjectively believing themselves to be happy. Lewis' "ghosts" in *The Great Divorce* who return to hell after their excursion to the outskirts of heaven illustrate this warped sense of well-being.

Among contemporary issuantists, the Not-so-Nasty Thesis is expressed in several ways. Stephen Davis writes for instance, "Having lived their lives apart from God, they will choose – eternally – to go on doing so. So it is not a bad thing that they do not spend eternity in the presence of God." He believes that the ungodly will nonetheless be aware of the consequences of their choices. "Though they freely choose hell and could not be happy in paradise, I believe they will clearly understand what they have chosen to miss."⁵

Buckareff and Plug also speculate that existence in hell may not be all that bad.

But we are sceptical that the well-being of any denizens of hell is negative. This is because we have endorsed an issuant view of hell. On such a view, hell is not retributive in nature but rather it is a place God has provided for those who do not wish to be with Him. Such persons are where they prefer to be and it is also a place they

³ Russell 1957, 195.

⁴ Lewis, *Problem of Pain*, 127.

⁵ Stephen T. Davis, "Free Will and Evil" in Stephen T. Davis (ed.), *Encountering Evil: Live Options in Theodicy* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 87.

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have the option of leaving. On escapism, one enjoys some positive well-being in hell. There is one set of goods that a denizen of hell lacks, and it is of infinite value, viz. full-communion with God and the attendant benefits that it affords an agent.⁶

Walls rejects the images of a medieval torture chamber that the church has inherited from the pseudepigraphical books of Enoch, Dante's *Inferno* and *Paradise Lost*. "[H]ell is a place of misery. It is not, admittedly, as gruesome an account of hell as that held by some notable classical theologians. If it were, I could not plausibly hold that some persons may freely choose it."⁷ In other words, if hell is really as bad as it's always been made out to be, then it is inconceivable that anyone would freely choose it. He writes that the free choice for hell is only credible if the people in hell experience (or believe they will experience) some form of pleasure. For Walls, hell "holds no genuine happiness, but those who prefer it to heaven may savor a deformed sense of satisfaction which faintly resembles real happiness."⁸ Walls thus settles on a hell that is objectively bad, but where people may be happy enough to get what they've always wanted and to enjoy some semblance of beauty, friendship and music even though they have a limited ability to enjoy these gifts of God.

Walls maintains that it would be unloving of God to force people into unbearable suffering in hell even if the purpose is to lead a person to repentance. "If it is objectionable to compel repentance by the sword, it is objectionable to compel repentance by forcibly imposing misery, whether physical, psychological or spiritual."⁹

Walls responds to Talbott's accusation that Walls "takes the hell out of hell"¹⁰ by saying that people in hell lack full insight into the true nature of their condition.

Only one who is fully informed in the ultimate sense I distinguished above and fully formed by the truth about God could truly

⁶ Andrei A. Buckareff and Allen Plug, "Escapism, religious luck, and divine reasons for action" *Religious Studies* 45/1 (2009): 63–72. In another text, they write: "While on escapism it is the case that the denizens of hell enjoy positive (quantitative) well-being and so there is a sense in which hell is not bad, we are hesitant to say that hell is good for persons who reside there without qualification." Buckareff and Plug 2010, 79.

⁷ Walls 1992, 153.

⁸ Walls 1992, 128.

⁹ Jerry L. Walls, "A hell of a choice: Reply to Talbott" *Religious Studies* 40/2 (2004): 208.

¹⁰ Thomas Talbott, "Freedom, damnation and the power to sin with impunity" *Religious Studies* 37/4 (2001): 429.

understand the horror of being separated from Him. Only one who fully understood the goodness of God, and had a deep sense of His beauty, as well the joy of living in His presence, could truly grasp the horror of being separated from Him forever. Only someone who had responded in trust and love to God's grace and had been deeply formed by it could see with full clarity what would be lost for those who rejected it.¹¹

This is the essential dividing line between issuantist Walls and universalist Talbott. Both agree on the three trademarks of basic issuantism, but come to differing conclusions on the relationship between God's love and human rationality.¹²

In light of Talbott's critique, Walls reconsiders his earlier statements that hell might not be so nasty.

I must confess that I overstated the case somewhat in my earlier book when I said those in hell get what they want. What the damned want is to be happy on their own terms. However, that is impossible. The only possible way we can truly be happy is on God's terms. So the damned choose what they *can* have on their own terms, namely, a distorted sense of satisfaction that is a perverted mirror image of the real thing.¹³

In spite of the warped perspectives like those of fun-house mirrors where one appears to be excessively tall or excessively fat or lacking in a torso or head, the people in hell are indeed in "a place of misery but not unbearable misery."¹⁴

For Swinburne, the totally corrupt who end up in hell do not have the good character necessary for entrance to heaven. Without this sanctified character, they do not desire the good of heaven, and thus end up in hell. He reasons that if people do not want the good of heaven, it cannot be a bad thing for them not to have it. Moreover, the beatific vision could even be understood to be a bad state, "if those deprived of that vision desire it all the same. If some do not desire it, it would not be a bad thing if they do not have it."¹⁵ Since the people who have not developed a good character do not desire the beatific vision, it will be no great loss for them to be excluded from heaven.

¹¹ Walls 2004a, 213.

¹² For further discussion, see the section on the Irrationality Thesis below.

¹³ Walls 2004a, 214.

¹⁴ Walls 2004a, 212.

¹⁵ Richard Swinburne, *Is There a God?* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996), 120.

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If someone does form their character in such a way as to be unalterably bad and if that involved their having no residual desire for the good which they cannot choose, they do not then desire the Vision of God; and so it is not a bad thing that they do not get it.¹⁶

Elsewhere he reiterates that “one account of the state of the incorrigibly bad is that they have lost any desire for the good; and so for them the *poena damni* will be in no way a bad thing.”¹⁷

One possible advantage of the Not-so-Nasty Thesis is in providing an answer to the objection commonly raised against the Free Will Defense (FWD) that the FWD only succeeds in explaining why God would allow *some* evil – for the good of preserving human freedom. The FWD is seemingly impotent when it comes to explaining why God would allow the great amount of horrendous evil that is in the world today.¹⁸ Nor does the FWD provide satisfactory answers as to how God would be justified in prioritizing the good of human freedom over the infinite suffering of hell as conceived by ECT. The Not-so-Nasty Thesis may provide an answer to this objection by showing how God can be justified in allowing people to make the free choice for hell if what they are choosing is not all that bad and the people in hell are content with it.

In light of the Not-so-Nasty Thesis’ turning down the thermostat of hell to make things more comfortable for God, one can legitimately wonder why one should view hell as a worse alternative than heaven. If people in hell are totally lacking the beatific vision and have only gotten what they want, how could they know what they’re missing?

After all, it would appear that the only plausible reasons for giving the ungodly a glimpse of the beatific vision would be retribution or some sense of truth – that it would be important for people in hell to see the whole picture. What would be the reason for this full disclosure if not for the purpose of causing suffering? Unless the pains of hell serve as means to some end such as leading a person to repentance and release from hell, then they remain a form of retribution, an idea at odds with the tenets of basic issuantism.

One possibility would be to say that even though people in hell may interpret their situation as reasonably tolerable (albeit objectively bad), they would still have cause to understand that existence in hell is worse than other

¹⁶ Swinburne 1998, 121.

¹⁷ Swinburne 1998, 197.

¹⁸ This is an objection raised by Marilyn McCord Adams, *Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2000) and Gregory A. Boyd in Boyd 2001.

modes of existence, since they may remember common grace from their lives on earth. This memory alone could be enough to help them understand that their condition in hell is much worse than their condition was on earth, even if they lack knowledge that it is infinitely worse than eternal life.

Despite a *prima facie* mitigating of hell for both the ungodly and for God, it would seem that the Not-so-Nasty Thesis does little to aid basic issuantism in providing a satisfactory answer to the problem of hell. It is indeed a hell that according to conditionalist Fudge makes Christ's words "Depart from me" begin "to sound less like a decree of banishment and more like an answer to the question, 'May I be excused?'"¹⁹

The Less-than-Human Thesis

Another approach to harmonizing God's goodness with the possibility of hell is found in the Less-than-Human Thesis proposed by several scholars. People who reject God also experience the loss of the goods with which God endows people. The loss of these goods means the ultimate loss of humanity for the formerly human denizens of hell.

In my discussion of C.S. Lewis in chapter three, I explained how Lewis conceived of the people in hell as remains of what once were humans. To recap briefly, Lewis believed that one's ultimate rejection of God is also a step away from God's design for humanity. When one rejects God, one also rejects all the blessings that God wishes to give to created beings. The only things that remain are one's vices. As one moves further away from God and God's plan for humanity, one also moves down the ontological scale so that one becomes both somewhat less than human and ultimately less real.

N.T. Wright is an issuantist who borrows heavily from C.S. Lewis. For Wright the suffering of hell is the loss of the image of God. He sees the image of God as a gift given to humanity. However, when people worship other gods (*i.e.*, commit any kind of sin), there is a certain atrophy of the image of God.

It is dangerously possible to start reflecting gods other than the true God in whose image we were made. But the other gods are not life-giving. To worship them, and to reflect their image, is to court death: the eventual utter destruction of all that it means to be truly human.²⁰

¹⁹ Fudge 1982, 2001, 351.

²⁰ N.T. Wright, *Following Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 94.

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Like Lewis, Wright speculates that it must be possible for people who persistently choose to reflect the image of their false gods rather than the image of God to finally cease to bear the image of God altogether.

Those who persistently refuse to follow Jesus, the true Image of God, will by their own choice become less and less like him, that is, less and less truly human. ... Nor do I see anything to make me suppose that God, who gave his human creatures the risky gift of freedom and choice, will not honour that choice, albeit through the deep sorrow and sense of loss that any God we can truly imagine must carry at his heart, a sorrow lived out fully on Calvary. This, I think, is the way in which something like the traditional doctrine of hell can be restated in the present day.²¹

Although Wright does not deny the prospect of individuals losing the image of God in an eschatological hell, it is not the main point.

Maybe what we are faced with in our own day is a similar challenge: to focus not on the question of which human beings God is going to take to heaven and how he is going to do it but on the question of how God is going to redeem and renew his creation *through human beings* and how he is going to rescue those humans themselves as part of the process but not as the point of it all.²²

The task of the Christian believer is not primarily to evangelize individuals so they don't go to hell, but to fight against the types of systemic evil that cause people to worship false gods rather than reflect the true image of God.

The Less-than-Human Thesis holds that the natural consequences of a person's free rejection of God is that one also rejects the image of God in humanity with the result that the inhabitants of hell become somewhat less than human. This thesis succeeds in satisfying Kvanvig's objection that basic issuantism by itself does not account for the finality of a person's "eternal" fate in that the deterioration of the former-human in hell is irrevocable.

Yet the Less-than-Human Thesis seemingly adds little of value in providing a solution to the problem of hell. One objection commonly raised against hell (at least as conceived in ECT) is the disproportionality between wrongdoing and punishment. According to issuantism, hell is viewed as the natural consequence of a person's choice to reject God. The Less-than-Human Thesis does nothing to vindicate God's action in allowing people to make this kind of disproportionate choice, especially if the choice entails the permanent, irrevocable loss of personhood. Even if one presupposes both that

²¹ Wright 1994, 95-96.

²² Wright 2008, 185.

moral responsibility is transitive and that the choices and character development that led to hell took place at a time when people were fully human and thus morally responsible, the Less-than-Human Thesis does nothing to explain how it can be apposite for a former human to be bound for millions of years for the choices made during a lifetime of at most 100 years unless one also supplements basic issuantism and the Less-than-Human Thesis with the Not-so-Nasty Thesis, the Irrationality Thesis and possibly the Fixed Character Thesis.

Just because the people in hell cease to be fully human does not mean that they will not suffer (unless one also posits the Not-so-Nasty Thesis). If hell is the eternal equivalent of a person having himself committed to solitary confinement to the point where he loses all grasp of reality and becomes something less than human, then God must still somehow be culpable for setting up such a system since the suffering is out of proportion to whatever wrongdoing for which the person may be responsible.

The Nearly-Empty Thesis

According to the Nearly-Empty Thesis, hell will be populated by only a small number of irredeemably evil beings. Although the Nearly-Empty Thesis is neither a necessary nor an adequate supplement to issuantism, it is sometimes added as a way of showing that God is not to blame if a small number of people choose to reject God forever. Stump comments, “So long as some such speculation is not incompatible with Christian doctrine, it is not at all clear that the majority of people end in hell.”²³

Without explicitly embracing the Nearly-Empty Thesis, Walls comments that “it is not enough for a perfectly good God to minimize the *number* of the damned; he would also have limits as to the *proportion* of persons damned.”²⁴ Walls maintains that the analogy of a military leader who can expect (and accept) a certain percentage of battlefield casualties does not work when it comes to the infinite loss of the ungodly in hell.

I do not see any prospects for our determining by our own lights what proportion of persons a perfectly good God would judge it tolerable to lose. If there is such a specific proportion or number

²³ Eleonore Stump, “The Problem of Evil” *Faith and Philosophy* 2/4 (1985): 412.

²⁴ Walls 1992, 102. Walls makes this comment in regards to William Lane Craig who maintains that it is preferable for God to create a world with a larger overall number of people who will be saved than a world in which a larger percentage of the world’s population will be saved, but which is only populated with a handful of people. See the section on William Lane Craig in chapter six below.

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beyond which a perfectly good God would not go, only God could know it unless he chose to reveal it.²⁵

The strength of the Nearly-Empty Thesis (particularly when combined with the Not-so-Nasty Thesis) is in showing how God could be justified in allowing some suffering in hell without being culpable for allowing the great *amount* of suffering in hell entailed in versions of ECT that do not also accept the Nearly-Empty Thesis.²⁶ The Nearly-Empty Thesis can also be combined with various forms of Extra Chance Theses where the vast majority of people in the postmortem state will gradually turn to God, leaving only a relatively small number of recalcitrant sinners in hell.

In this sense, the Nearly-Empty Thesis may make an important contribution to the Free Will Defense. The FWD shows how God could be justified in condemning some people (or allowing people to exile themselves) to hell in the name of preserving human freedom and moral responsibility. By itself, however, the FWD does not explain how the preservation of human freedom could justify the inordinate numbers of people who will end up in hell if one assumes a traditional reading of verses like Matthew 7:13 where the ungodly greatly outnumber the godly. With the addition of the Nearly-Empty Thesis, the amount of suffering in hell can more plausibly be defended.

While the Nearly-Empty Thesis may have some benefit in explaining the amount of suffering God allows in hell, it does not provide a solution to the problem of hell itself. If God condemns even one person to everlasting torment in hell (or allows even one person to suffer that horrendous natural consequence), then the problem of hell remains. It would be like saying of a suspected mass-murderer, “*Well, as it turns out, he only killed two people after all.*”

The Extra Chance Theses

Another means by which some issuantists seek to supplement basic issuantism is through positing at least one – and possibly an infinite number of – postmortem opportunities for a person to be saved. There are several forms of Extra Chance Theses, including the possibility of escape or release

²⁵ Walls 1992, 103.

²⁶ The Nearly Empty Thesis is neither common nor unheard of among traditionalists; even staunch defender of ECT Charles Hodge concludes his three-volume *Systematic Theology* with the words, “We have reason to believe, ... that the number of the finally lost in comparison with the whole number of the saved will be very inconsiderable.” Hodge 1873, 879-880.

from hell itself, some form of purgatory, or a restorative justice in which a person is purified through a personal encounter with God on judgment day.

One Postmortem Chance

Many people live and die under circumstances in which they have not had access to accurate knowledge about God or a fair opportunity to respond positively to the gospel. It would seemingly be unfair for God to allow these people to suffer the eternal consequences of their failure to respond positively to the gospel if their failure to respond was due to circumstances beyond their control. For this reason a number of issuantists posit the idea that God will provide everyone with a chance to make a decisive choice.²⁷

Eleonore Stump suggests that such a chance is compatible with the Christian belief in a loving God.

As for those who live and die without the religious knowledge necessary for redemption from evil, it is not incompatible with Christian doctrine to speculate that in the process of their dying God acquaints them with what they need to know and offers them a last chance to choose.²⁸

Walls goes one step further by insisting that such an offering of what he calls optimal grace becomes necessary given the Christian belief in the goodness of God. He defines optimal grace as the optimal amount of influence toward good that God can exercise on a person's will without destroying the person's freedom.²⁹

Walls builds his doctrine of optimal grace on a conviction that a choice to reject God is not decisive unless the person has rejected God under the most favorable circumstances. "God ... could bring about the appropriate favorable circumstances during the passage of death, thereby making up for his previous deprivation."³⁰ In other words, due to the effects of bad religious luck, many people have not had the opportunity to make a decisive choice for or against God.³¹ As such, they cannot be held morally responsible for their failure to accept God's gift. In order to provide the necessary basis for a person to respond positively to God, God provides optimal grace. The

²⁷ For a related theory where God presents many (or even an infinite number of) postmortem opportunities to be saved, see the section on escapism below.

²⁸ Stump 1985, 412.

²⁹ Walls 1992, 88.

³⁰ Walls 1992, 90.

³¹ For a discussion of religious luck, see the section on the Fixed Character Thesis below.

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amount of grace necessary differs from one person to another and is granted on a case-by-case basis, as God knows the amount of grace each person would need to respond both positively and freely.

Although he focuses more on the principle than on the mechanics of optimal grace, Walls seems to believe that optimal grace is God's means of providing people with one postmortem chance (though possibly extended in time) to respond positively to God's gift.

The provision of optimal grace does not however stack the deck in favor of belief in God.

[T]hose who may be given further chance after death to receive salvation are given no more than the opportunity to make a *decisive* choice either to accept or to reject God's will. It is not as if God turns the tables by finally giving them *more* than is given to others.³²

Indeed, any person who after death would respond to God purely in response to God's overwhelming self-revelation would respond out of fear, not out of faith and love. Such a choice would thus not count as a genuine acceptance of grace and commitment to God's will. Walls does not believe we have to equate optimal grace with God's overwhelming self-revelation. "I see no reason to assume God's existence must be more evident after death than it is now."³³

Religious luck is not a problem for people who accept God's grace in this lifetime; they have presumably both received and responded positively to optimal grace. While it is not logically problematic to state that the amount of grace a person receives in life *is* optimal for that person and that a person's rejection of optimal grace in this lifetime is a decisive rejection of God, Walls does not believe that everyone does receive optimal grace in this lifetime. Our empirical observation of people shows that some people (particularly the young) die before their moral convictions and life trajectory have taken definitive shape.³⁴ When God sees that people have not had the chance to make a decisive choice, God gives them an extra chance.

Why is death viewed as such an absolute limit on the opportunity to repent? Many people apparently have multiple opportunities to repent in this life, many of which they may spurn, before they

³² Walls 1992, 94.

³³ Walls 1992, 100.

³⁴ Jerry L. Walls, *Purgatory: The Logic of Total Transformation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 144.

finally repent. So why should there be no further chance to repent after death, if numerous opportunities are extended before death, and indeed right up to the very point of death itself?³⁵

One possible objection that may be raised against Walls' theory of optimal grace is that for God to know how much grace would be optimal for each person, one must presuppose that God would know either that a person will respond positively to the gospel at a certain point or at least know how a person would freely respond in any given set of circumstances in which she may find herself. This would seem to presuppose either simple foreknowledge or middle knowledge – two views that Walls rejects.³⁶ Walls could answer this objection by saying that God sees how a person responds to the amount of grace available at any given moment. As a person responds positively, God provides more grace until the point at which the person makes a free and decisive choice for God.

It is nonetheless difficult to see how on Walls' account God could know how much grace would be “too much” (and thus violate a person's freedom) without some form of middle knowledge, an idea that Walls rejects. Likewise, how could God know that a person who has not responded positively to x amount of grace would respond positively if she were given $x+1$ amount of grace?

Sharon Baker posits a chance for people to repent and be restored to fellowship with God in the day of judgment. For her, the love of God is the burning fire that all people encounter on judgment day. The fire of God burns up all the impurities of life. Baker suggests that in judgment people may encounter all those whom they have wronged in life, including Jesus Christ.³⁷ The purpose of this *tête-à-tête* is not retribution but restoration – to help the wrongdoer understand the gravity of his sin with the purpose of restoring a broken relationship through forgiveness and repentance. For those who respond positively to God's forgiveness the fire acts as a purifying agent. For those who refuse to respond to forgiveness by repentance, the fire has the effect of finally incinerating everything that once was a person.

Stephen Davis is an issuantist who also believes in what he calls postmortem evangelism. Davis writes that there is a long tradition in the Christian church of belief that at least some categories of people may have the

³⁵ Walls 2012, 127.

³⁶ Indeed, the segment in *Hell: The Logic of Damnation* in which Walls presents the idea of optimal grace comes in the larger context of his critique against molinism.

³⁷ S. Baker 2010, 115-117.

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opportunity to make a postmortem response to the gospel. He admits, however, that much of this tradition of the harrowing of hell and Christ's descent to hades after the crucifixion is based on rather dubious interpretations of biblical passages like John 5:28-29; Ephesians 4:8-10; 1 Peter 3:18-20 and 1 Peter 4:5-6.

According to Davis, Clement of Alexandria believed that Christ's descent to hades had the purpose of rescuing not only the faithful from the Old Testament, but righteous pagans. With unmistakable influence from Hellenistic philosophy Clement suggested that "souls, although darkened by passions, when released from their bodies, are able to perceive more clearly, because of their being no longer obstructed by the paltry flesh."³⁸ That is, only after death can the soul see things clearly enough to make a positive response. Clement intimated that Jesus was not the only one to preach to the dead; Jesus' disciples followed the example of their master even in this area.

Davis admits that the possibility of postmortem evangelism is a loosely held belief and that it is largely based on conjecture, but he suggests that "if the gospel was once preached to the dead, maybe this practice continues."³⁹

In keeping with basic issuantism, Davis claims "that the denizens of hell are in hell because they freely choose to be there."⁴⁰ It should here be noted that Davis writes in the present tense – the people in hell freely *choose* to be there; they are not there because they at some point in the past made certain choices that led to a certain evil character. This is important for Davis, since he believes that "sin will continue in the afterlife."⁴¹ This version of the Continuing Sin Defense seems to be one of the best means of answering the problem of proportionality in hell. For God to be justified in continuing to punish a person in hell for an infinite period of time (or in Davis' case, for a person to continue to suffer the negative consequences of sin for an infinite period of time), the person must continue to commit an infinite number of finite sins. One problem we have seen with other formulations of the Continuing Sin Defense is that they do not include the possibility of repentance and release from hell.⁴² If people are still free and morally

³⁸ Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* book VI, chapter 6.

³⁹ Davis 2010, 99.

⁴⁰ Davis 2010, 97.

⁴¹ Davis 2010, 95.

⁴² Especially in Carson and possibly in Craig. See the section on ECT in chapter two of the present work and the section on Craig in chapter six below.

responsible in hell then they must also be free to stop sinning and be released from hell.

Be that as it may, Davis states that not every person or class of people may receive a postmortem chance to respond to the gospel. “The opportunities for promotion may not be endless – perhaps there is only one per person. Once one has heard and understood the invitation of heaven and turned it down, there are no more opportunities.”⁴³ He continues, “Nor do I see any need of a ‘second chance’ for those who have freely and knowingly chosen in this life to live apart from God.”⁴⁴ Davis thus believes in only one postmortem chance to be saved, presumably to overcome the effects of bad religious luck.

It would seem that Davis’ theory is somewhat inconsistent at this point. If people will continue to commit an infinite number of sins in hell, then they must be given an infinite number of opportunities to repent and be released from hell. If only certain classes of people receive an opportunity to respond to the gospel after death (and only one opportunity at that), then Davis’ theory loses its explanatory power in answering the problem of proportionality. This is particularly true as it relates to people who made a definitive choice against God in this life who are then not granted a postmortem chance to be saved. They will suffer eternally for the finite choices made in this lifetime. An alternative interpretation is that the ungodly will suffer eternally because they continue to sin in hell, but without the opportunity to repent and be released from hell. Davis would be both more consistent and more effective in answering the problem of hell if he adopted escapism with its endless opportunities for people to be released from hell.

Escapism

Escapism is a variation of Extra Chance Theses whereby people in hell receive a possibly endless number of opportunities to repent and be released from hell.

Buckareff and Plug reject the idea that the inhabitants of hell are wantons. In their escapist version of issuantism, a person must maintain both freedom and moral responsibility in hell with the possibility of the person coming to a point of repentance and being released from hell.

It would be odd if the inhabitants of hell were like the wanton. The wanton is not an autonomous agent. ... If they only reflected on

⁴³ Davis 2010, 101.

⁴⁴ Davis 2010, 102.

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their desires, over time, they would realize that a more desirable state of affairs awaits those who enter into communion with God.⁴⁵

Any diminution of the essentially human traits of freedom of will and freedom of action would work against this possibility.

God's motivation in dealing with humanity is love. "So if God longs for reunion with us this side of the eschaton, then it would be arbitrary and out of character for God to cut off any opportunity for reconciliation and forgiveness at the time of death."⁴⁶ In love God continues to offer an endless number of opportunities for people to give a positive response to the love of God.

According to Buckareff and Plug, a person may enter hell due to bad religious luck. Since God's dealings even with people in hell is motivated by love, God will not allow negative religious luck to be the determining factor for a person's eternal destiny.

[I]n hell the unlucky environmental circumstances would presumably be absent. So, if a person continues possessing the same character traits it would be entirely due to that person cultivating those particular traits. And, since we are dealing with eternity, the amount of luck involved would slowly decrease towards 0. So if a person is in hell for eternity, that continued choice would not be due to luck.⁴⁷

If a person continues to make choices against God, it would not be due to luck but to free choices.

Buckareff and Plug's escapism does not automatically lead to universalism. Indeed, they refuse to speculate on whether all, most, many, some, few or no people will respond positively to God's love and be released from hell.

So escapism is compatible with a species of hopeful or weak universalism, and it is compatible with the view that no one in hell will be saved. But we will only argue for there being a divine *provision* for post-mortem conversion and that persons will have the ability to convert in the afterlife and remain quiet on whether or not anyone actually does accept the offer of salvation after death.⁴⁸

Buckareff and Plug's escapism is not to be regarded as a form of purgatory since it involves neither moral preparation for people who have already

⁴⁵ Buckareff and Plug 2010, 82.

⁴⁶ Buckareff and Plug 2005, 44.

⁴⁷ Buckareff and Plug 2009, 65.

⁴⁸ Buckareff and Plug 2005, 41.

begun a trajectory towards sanctification nor a purgatorial or purifying pain that rectifies whatever wrongs a person has done in life.

Purgatory

Some issuantists have begun supplementing basic issuantism with the idea of purgatory. Walls discerns two foci in classical expressions of the doctrine of purgatory: a sanctification view that sees purgatory as closer to heaven and a satisfaction view that sees it as closer to hell. Those who view purgatory in terms of satisfaction often emphasize the pain and terror experienced there at the hand of Satan and the demons, while those who see purgatory as closer to heaven emphasize the purifying aspects and the hope of eventual salvation.⁴⁹

For issuantists who supplement basic issuantism with some form of purgatory, the purpose of purgatory is clearly sanctification. It is neither the punishment of unshriven sins nor the burning off of the temporal effects of forgiven sins. Since Walls rejects the Retribution Thesis, he is also consistent in maintaining that purgatory is non-retributive. Even though he is a Protestant, Walls sees purgatory as a necessary step in the process of sanctification for the vast majority of people who have not at the time of death developed the holy character requisite for standing in the presence of God.

According to Walls, the person who has not made a decisive choice for or against God in this life will receive optimal grace after death in which to decide. Those who decide against God go to hell, while those who display some initial movement towards God will continue to purgatory where the process of sanctification can continue. Purgatory is also a step in the sanctification process of people who have made a decisive choice for God in this life, but whose character is not yet fully formed.

It is only by initial positive responses to God's grace that people in purgatory have perspicuity and a fuller degree of knowledge as to the implications of their decisions. The decision is however not merely a matter of intellectual insight; it is a matter of moral character development.

And it is because of this character that the saints in heaven spontaneously love God and want to do his will. Those who have responded to God in this fashion and achieved this character can be said to have perfected their moral freedom.

But on the other hand, those who have not achieved this character can resist God's grace. At this stage of moral and spiritual development, knowledge of the connection between God and

⁴⁹ Walls 2012, 24.

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happiness must be relatively unformed. This knowledge must be fully adequate to encourage pursuit of God and the resulting character growth, but limited enough to allow us to deceive ourselves, resist God's grace, and derail our character development.⁵⁰

Human freedom allows for the possibility of self-deception, which Walls defines as "not merely a lack of information, but rather a matter of not attending to what one knows, or of suppressing it and refusing to act on it."⁵¹ For Walls, human freedom entails that one has the ability either to respond positively to the grace of God and develop a moral character or to refuse to respond to God's grace and thus pervert one's moral freedom.

So in the end, one either perfects his moral freedom or he perverts it. In the former case, one has lost all motivation to do evil, whereas in the latter, one has lost all motivation to love God. But initially, I want to stress, moral freedom requires both the ability to respond to God's grace as well as the ability to resist it. And the latter requires the ability to deceive oneself, which entails the ability to avoid clear perception of God's relation to happiness.⁵²

When one develops a moral character one is logically free to do evil, even if one is practically less likely to do so. When one's character has become perverted one has lost all motivation to love God.

Swinburne sees purgatory as an option for people whose characters are neither sufficiently godly as to gain admittance into heaven, nor so totally corrupt as to warrant hell. The totally corrupt (those who have "lost their soul" or developed a fixed evil character) will go to hell. The vast majority of people who have ever lived on earth, however, have an admixture of good and evil actions and character traits. If a person has shown even the slightest inclination towards good in this life, she will find herself in purgatory after death. "Once you get to Purgatory, you cannot finally lose the possibility of Heaven, but it is up to you how long it takes you to get there."⁵³ There is, however, the possibility of a person entering purgatory but never attaining the fixed character for good that is necessary for achieving the beatific vision. For such people, purgatory could remain their eternal state.

⁵⁰ Walls 1992, 130-131.

⁵¹ Walls 1992, 131.

⁵² Walls 1992, 131.

⁵³ Swinburne 1989, 197.

Evaluation of Extra Chances Theses

By way of general comment on the various forms of the Extra Chance Theses, it should be pointed out that the possibility of postmortem repentance is seemingly incompatible with certain perspectives on philosophical anthropology where the “soul” for whatever reason is unable to act autonomously after the death of the body, unless the postmortem chance for repentance comes after the reconstitution of the person at the resurrection of the dead. This does not, however, appear to be a problem for any of the issuantist scholars highlighted in this section.

There are nonetheless two other areas where issuantists who propose some form of Extra Chance Thesis may be open to critique. The first has to do with the question of finality. If people retain libertarian free will even after death such that they can repent and turn to God, why would it not be possible for a person in heaven to fall away and reject God and be cast into hell (or choose to place oneself in hell)? In a worse case scenario, one could imagine elevators eternally shuttling people up and down between heaven and hell.

Kvanvig writes:

[Second chance views] fail to be truly eschatological accounts of heaven and hell. Eschatology is the doctrine of the last things, and one feature of this idea of culmination or consummation is that there is a finality to it. In Christian thought, this idea is expressed vividly in the idea of a final judgment, and any conception of the afterlife that treats residence in heaven and hell in the geographic way in which we think of residence in, say, Texas or California, simply does not fall into the category of an eschatological doctrine at all. If heaven and hell are conceived of as mere extensions of an earthly life, where people can pack up and move at will, such a conception has more affinity to religious perspectives that espouse endless cycles of rebirth than to religions including an eschatological dimension.⁵⁴

One could answer, as does Walls in defending his view of purgatory, that a positive decision for God is of a different nature than the rejection of God. Since a decisive choice for God is profoundly rational and the rejection of God fundamentally irrational, there would be little if any motivation for a person in heaven to change her mind and fall away.

⁵⁴ Jonathan L. Kvanvig, “Heaven and Hell” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/heaven-hell/>. An almost identical formulation is found in Kvanvig, 2008, 413-426.

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There are far deeper and more intelligible motivations for choosing God than for choosing against him, and these make the former choice far more stable in the long run. Indeed, the radical asymmetries between the two choices are such that there is good reason to think the choice for God is not reversible in the same sense that the choice against him is.⁵⁵

A second possible objection to some forms of Extra Chance Theses is that the prospect of a possibly endless number of postmortem chances to be saved belittles the significance of this present life. Failure to make a decisive choice for God in this life has as little consequences as a failure to land a plane safely in a flight-simulator computer game. If a postmortem chance for salvation is all one needs, and if these will be freely given to those who due to bad religious luck have not had the opportunity to make a decisive choice for God in this life, then why should one bother with this life at all?

This objection does not apply directly to Walls or Davis, who do not admit an endless number of postmortem opportunities to repent. One may wonder, however, why a loving God would want to limit the number of opportunities given for a person to repent. Walls answers the charge that the choices of this life become morally insignificant in light of postmortem opportunities to be saved by pointing out that they affect a person and have serious implications for character development and the overall shape of one's life. Moreover, he maintains that the doctrine of purgatory serves to underline the serious implications of the choices made in this life – the farther one has wandered from God through sinful actions, the longer it will take to make one's way back to God in purgatory. "It is precisely the logic of the doctrine of purgatory that it allows the hope of return but does not trivialize the time and process necessary to do so."⁵⁶ With a strong sense of continuity between this life and the next, Walls reasons that "if deathbed repentance is possible, it seems rather artificial to think that such late reversals do not trivialize this life, while repentance two minutes after death would."⁵⁷

On the whole, it may be said that the Extra Chance Theses present valuable supplements to basic issuantism and do much to strengthen the answers presented by some issuantists to the problem of hell.

⁵⁵ Walls 2012, 148.

⁵⁶ Walls 2012, 147.

⁵⁷ Walls 2012, 147.

The Fixed Character Thesis

Both libertarians and compatibilists can agree that moral responsibility is a primary issue in deciding a person's eternal fate. If people are not morally responsible for their actions and choices, it would be unjust for God to condemn them to hell. With this common ground, some scholars want to move beyond the impasse of compatibilism and libertarianism and focus instead on the cultivation of virtues and the formation of a virtuous character.

As I have briefly mentioned, Kvanvig holds that basic issuantism does not provide the sense of finality that is incumbent upon Christian eschatology.

If being in hell is a result of a choice, then a natural view to hold would be that residence in Hell is no more permanent than one's choices are, and those are open to change. In order to avoid this result, the Choice Model must be supplemented in some way or other, and one way to supplement it is in terms of the idea of losing one's soul.⁵⁸

Thus Kvanvig and some other issuantists propose a form of the Fixed Character Thesis as a supplement to basic issuantism to show how the formation of an evil character can explain how people can chose to remain in hell.⁵⁹ In this section I shall examine the implications of character formation for issuant views of hell and assess the value of the Fixed Character Thesis in providing a solution to the problem of hell.

Character formation, freedom and responsibility

How character is formed

Issuantists believe that a person's character is developed not determined. A person makes many decisions in life that may become patterns of behavior. These patterns of behavior or habits become more and more regular. Gradually they solidify into a person's character. The process of forming one's character involves many difficult decisions between alternative courses of action and desires on various levels. As one's character becomes more clearly defined, the process of making decisions in each case becomes relatively easier since a certain precedent has been established. Swinburne writes that "the truly subjectively good agent seeks to make the good come so naturally that he has little opportunity for conscientious action in future

⁵⁸ Kvanvig 2011, 21.

⁵⁹ Some authors call the prospect of developing a fixed evil character "losing one's soul." Swinburne 1989, 177, 180-181; Kvanvig 2011. Kvanvig states explicitly that losing one's soul or the Fixed Character Thesis "attempts to supplement the most popular way of abandoning the traditional conception of Hell." Kvanvig 2011, 21.

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[sic].”⁶⁰ Although a person’s character is fairly consistent and predictable, a fixed character does not determine a person’s course of actions; it is merely probabilistic. There is always the possibility of a person acting in ways that are atypical, akratic or “out of character.”

According to Swinburne, all people have both the freedom and the natural capacity to develop a good character. Because of this freedom people are able to make bad choices. This leads to a cognitive dissonance between what one knows to be right and what one actually does. This will inevitably lead to several possible responses. First, a person may try to justify his actions. He does this by showing that his actions are not really all that bad, that his actions relate in some positive way to other, good actions, that there is a dissimilarity between his actions and other, bad actions, or that this particular set of circumstances allow that he behave in such a way. A second possible response is to admit that the action is bad, but to reconcile himself with the idea that he will be a bad person.⁶¹

Although Swinburne does not admit a third possibility in this context, a person could admit that her actions were bad, but show regret and learn from her mistakes. It is tempting to assume that only virtuous actions contribute to the formation of a good character. Even though a person in moments of akrasia may make bad or sinful choices, the wise person will reflect on her past actions and will benefit from the lessons she learns, perhaps with greater resolve not to allow herself to repeat the mistakes of the past.

Character formation and finality

According to Kvanvig, one major problem with many proposed solutions to the problem of hell is their failure to provide some kind of finality. This is particularly true of issuantist views that include some form of Extra Chance Thesis, but is also true to some extent of other issuant views of hell.⁶²

The issue of finality is not a problem for views of hell where one’s destiny is determined by God or where the choices people make in this lifetime are definitive. These views face their own challenges in reconciling human freedom with the finality of choice, regardless of whether the choice is divine or human.

⁶⁰ Swinburne 1989, 165.

⁶¹ Swinburne 1989, 174.

⁶² Kvanvig 1997; Kvanvig 2003b; Kvanvig 2008; Jonathan L. Kvanvig, “Resurrection, Heaven, and Hell” in Charles Taliaferro and Paul Draper (eds), *A Companion to the Philosophy of Religion*, Second Edition (Boston: Routledge, 2010).

The stronger claim that it is metaphysically impossible to leave heaven or escape hell presents greater challenges, however, for such a position is harder to reconcile with the presence of freedom and autonomy so central to our conception of survival of death as persons; and yet, such metaphysical impossibility is the most natural position to endorse when one's conception of the afterlife is a truly eschatological perspective involving the ideas of finality and culmination.⁶³

The task the issuantist faces is in explaining how the choice for hell can be final while truly remaining an issuant view of hell.

Moreover, any version of the choice model will need either to jettison the eschatological ideas of finality and consummation or offer some explanation of how these ideas can be affirmed in the absence of the kind of finality that rests ultimately on a divine decree.⁶⁴

A fixed character can provide the finality Kvanvig calls for. A fixed character entails that a person no longer has the same range of free choices that is available to someone without a fixed character, but since it is self-imposed, the fixed character can provide both the finality and the moral responsibility necessary in a solution to the problem of hell.

Since this incapacity is self-imposed, a solution to the problem of Hell in terms of what people freely choose might be able to be combined with an account of Hell that involves suitable finality, thus blocking one of the deepest difficulties facing approaches to the problem of Hell that focus on free choice.⁶⁵

Kvanvig argues that just because a person can be on a certain trajectory towards the development of a fixed character, there is no guarantee that he or she will finally arrive at the state in which the character becomes fixed. Without the fixation of character, there is still no finality in the choice for hell. "Merely describing a process that has as its logical end point the loss of soul doesn't properly explain the finality of Hell unless those in Hell have actually lost their souls."⁶⁶ The finality only comes when the person judges himself.

In keeping with his rejection of the Retribution Thesis, Kvanvig writes that the final judgment is "final in terms of something persons do to

⁶³ Kvanvig 2003b.

⁶⁴ Kvanvig 2003b; Kvanvig 2008, 421.

⁶⁵ Kvanvig 2011, 21.

⁶⁶ Kvanvig 2011, 35.

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themselves.”⁶⁷ There is finality and judgment, but they don’t come from God; both judgment and finality are immanent.

Character formation and freedom

Issuantists maintain that people must have libertarian freedom in order to be morally responsible. Swinburne is also clear that the character one forms in life is a direct result of the person’s free will. Be that as it may, he is less clear as to how much freedom people have once their character has been freely formed. He does write of the saints that “[a]lthough the inhabitants of Heaven retain their free will, the range of choices open to them changes. Having no desires for the bad, they inevitably pursue only what they (correctly) believe to be good.”⁶⁸

As such, it would seem that a person has the freedom to form her character, but once the character is fixed, she is no longer free in a libertarian sense if one defines libertarian freedom in terms of PAP. Once a person’s character has been fixed, her sense of freedom is no different than that of the compatibilist; she is free to act according to her desires, but her good character dictates that she only desire the good.

Likewise, the person who is in the process of forming a totally corrupt character is also in danger of losing his freedom.

The man who has blinded himself to the goodness of things is no longer an agent, one who chooses what to do in the light of beliefs about its worth. He has become, as well as a passive subject of sensation and thought, merely an arena of conflicting desires of which the strongest dictates his bodily movements. He no longer chooses between desires. If we think of the soul in its active capacity as the choosing agent, there is no soul left. The man has ‘lost his soul’. Although there is no maximum to human goodness, there is a minimum; and this is it.⁶⁹

According to Swinburne, the person who has lost his soul will either become a wanton with a collection of loose and often conflicting desires, the strongest of which at any time determines his course of action, or he will become an obsessive whose actions are almost wholly guided by one overarching desire.

Kvanvig drives home the implications of the Fixed Character Thesis for freedom: “... through a series of choices, one can get oneself in a position

⁶⁷ Kvanvig 2011, 31.

⁶⁸ Swinburne 1989, 190.

⁶⁹ Swinburne 1989, 177.

where one no longer has choices, where all options but one are impossible.”⁷⁰ He describes it as a contraction of options.

A fixed character represents a loss of will, not a loss of physical ability. For instance, let's say that a certain middle-aged theologian lacks the physical condition necessary to be able to run a marathon. He could begin a training regimen to improve his physical condition and ability so that he might be able to run a marathon in a year or two. This will never happen, however, as long as he lacks the will to do so. This is how it is with people who have a fixed evil character; while they may in theory have the freedom to do good, they lack the necessary will.

Character formation and moral responsibility

If a person with a fixed character is no longer free in the libertarian sense, how can she be morally responsible for her actions? Libertarians maintain that moral responsibility presupposes libertarian freedom.

One possible solution to this problem is by positing that moral responsibility is transitive. That is, a person who is not free in the libertarian sense can still be morally responsible for her actions if she is also responsible for her state of not being free.

An example may help explain this point. Suppose that Fabian is a successful businessman. On Monday he will fly to London to negotiate an important deal that could mean millions of euros in profit for his company. Sunday afternoon Fabian receives a call from an old university buddy whom he hasn't seen in years. The friend is only in town for the day, so they decide to meet up. One thing leads to another and by the time Fabian crawls into bed at 3:30 a.m., he is in a drunken stupor. When he awakens at 9:30 Monday morning, he discovers that not only has he missed his early morning flight to London, but the important meeting is about to start in half an hour. In this case Fabian is not free to attend the meeting; even if he wants to be there, it is not physically possible. Regardless of whether one is a compatibilist or libertarian, Fabian is not free. He is neither able to be at the meeting nor to act according to his desires to be at the meeting.

According to the transitivity of moral responsibility, Fabian is morally responsible for what does or does not happen as a result of his not attending the meeting. Although he is not free, he is still morally responsible since he not only placed himself in a situation whereby he could not attend the meeting, but was in a position where he could reasonably have predicted the outcome of his actions.

⁷⁰ Kvanvig 2011, 29.

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In relation to character formation and moral responsibility, an issuantist could claim that even though a person with a fixed character may no longer be free in a libertarian sense, he is nonetheless morally responsible since he is responsible for the fixed character he has developed. Although one could debate the question of what possibility the person in hell had to reasonably predict the results of the formation of a fixed evil character, he was at least responsible for its formation.

Character formation and issuantism

Universalism can provide the dimension of finality that Kvanvig deems necessary for a Christian eschatology, but Kvanvig rejects universalism on other grounds.⁷¹ Basic issuantism can account for libertarian human freedom, but does not provide finality. He sees the Fixed Character Thesis as a necessary supplement to basic issuantism to provide for both libertarian freedom and finality.

Issuantists reason that a person who through his free choices has formed a consistent, evil character would be neither suitable for an eternity in heaven nor happy there. As such, the only appropriate dwelling place for a person with an evil character is in hell.⁷² Michael J. Murray writes:

We might then think of those in heaven and hell as those who are *maximally set in their ways*. That is, they are disposed to act as lovers of God or lovers of self *without fail*. The result is that those who are in heaven are no longer able to break the hold of the dispositions which they have acquired and likewise for those in hell.⁷³

For Swinburne, "Human free will is not just free will; it involves what I may call a choice of destiny."⁷⁴ According to Swinburne, people use their libertarian freedom to make choices that gradually solidify into good or bad characters. God assists people who have shown an openness or proclivity towards the good by giving them ample opportunity, possibly in a purgatorial

⁷¹ See chapter 2, "Simple Alternatives to the Strong View" in Kvanvig 1993.

⁷² However Swinburne sees purgatory as a possible eternal dwelling for people whose characters are neither sufficiently godly as to gain admittance into heaven, nor so totally corrupt as to warrant hell. Since Swinburne does not believe in the inherent immortality of the soul, he argues in chapter 13 of *Responsibility and Atonement* that God may allow some of the ungodly who so desire to pass out of existence. He reasons that the conservation of the totally corrupt would require a special divine action, whereas allowing the mortal soul to follow its natural course and die does not.

⁷³ Murray 1999, 298.

⁷⁴ Swinburne 1989, 178.

postmortem state, to develop the godly character requisite for achieving the beatific vision.

Regarding “men of good will” Swinburne writes:

Despite his lack of good desires and important true beliefs, he deserves reward for the firmness of his good will. And the most appropriate and best reward would be to allow him to acquire the true moral beliefs and right unfrustrated desires which will give full blessedness.⁷⁵

God does not, however, do anything to prevent the hell-bent sinner from developing a totally corrupt character, since God’s necessarily overwhelming interference would violate a person’s freedom.

Swinburne recognizes that when a person’s character has become totally corrupt, he is no longer either completely free nor fully human.

[I]t is a possibility that a man will let himself be so mastered by his desires that he will lose all ability to resist them. It is the extreme case of what we have all too often seen: people increasingly mastered by desires, so that they lose some of their ability to resist them. The less we impose our order on our desires, the more they impose their order on us.

We may describe a man in this situation of having lost his capacity to overrule his desires as having ‘lost his soul.’⁷⁶

For Swinburne, the Fixed Character Thesis is closely related to the Less-than-Human Thesis. Swinburne’s sense of having lost one’s soul is similar to Lewis’ idea that the denizens of hell are the remnants of what once were human beings.

Evaluation of the Fixed Character Thesis

The Fixed Character Thesis is a prominent feature in many issuant views of hell. There are nonetheless a few things that should be said in evaluating the contributions of the Fixed Character Thesis to basic issuantism’s ability to answer the problem of hell. In this section, I shall look at four issues raised by the lack of libertarian freedom: the lack of moral responsibility that comes from a concomitant Less-than-Human Thesis, the problem of people who die before their character is fully developed for either evil or good, God’s role in character development and the inequity of religious luck for character formation.

⁷⁵ Swinburne 1989, 191.

⁷⁶ Swinburne 1983, 48-49.

Lack of freedom and moral responsibility

Scholars who supplement basic issuantism with the Fixed Character Thesis face a difficult situation: if the soul with a fixed evil character has finality, there is no longer libertarian freedom. In this case, one could legitimately raise the same objections that are commonly raised against compatibilism about why God just doesn't fix everyone's character for the good. Issuantists could answer this objection that the decisive difference is that according to the Fixed Character Thesis the individual bears the responsibility for the fixed character one has developed through one's free choices, whereas the individual would not be free or morally responsible in any transitive sense if God were unilaterally to fix a person's character for good or evil.

Another solution to the difficulty would be to agree with Kvanvig's speculation that there are no guarantees that a person finally achieves this kind of fixed character. Without a fixed character, however, there is no finality. This may not be a problem in itself; some issuant views of hell that include some form of Extra Chance Thesis readily acknowledge the lack of finality, while others maintain that a fixed good character is final since it is rational.

Ex-men and moral responsibility

There are two means for issuantists to preserve moral responsibility for people in hell. First, one can reject the Fixed Character Thesis. As Buckareff and Plug exemplify, it is not necessary or even desirable to postulate that the denizens of hell have developed a fixed character that has made them something less than human. For Buckareff and Plug, the possibility of repentance and release from hell entails both full libertarian freedom and full moral responsibility.⁷⁷ Moreover, it would be consistent with issuantism to posit a form of the Continuing Sin Defense whereby a person in hell chooses to use her libertarian freedom to continue in her rebellion against God for all eternity. As a result, she will continue to experience the negative natural consequences of an afterlife separated from God and all the good things that God wants to give to human creatures.

A second means of affirming moral responsibility in a person with a fixed character is by positing the transitivity of moral responsibility. This is to say, that a person is morally responsible even for situations in which she could not have done otherwise if she is morally responsible for being in that situation in the first place. One can, however, debate whether moral responsibility is

⁷⁷ Buckareff and Plug 2005, 45; Buckareff and Plug 2009, 65.

transitive if a fixed character also means that a person becomes less than human.

Characters that are not fully formed

Another difficulty facing the Fixed Character Thesis is the question of people who die without a fixed character. If heaven is only granted to those who have a godly character and hell is reserved for those who have a totally corrupt character, what can one say about the great majority of people who die before their character is totally fixed? Not only those who die in infancy or childhood, but also the akratic? What can one say about people who experience death-bed conversions?

One problem is that people's characters are rarely so consistent that they are either wholly virtuous or wholly vicious. People are an admixture of good and evil. As we have seen, Swinburne postulates that perhaps most people have at some time expressed some movement, albeit incomplete, towards the good. He posits a purgatory where people whose good character is not yet fully fixed can continue in the process of sanctification before finally being granted the beatific vision. He is not clear, however, regarding those who are on a trajectory towards evil, but whose character at the point of physical death is not yet totally corrupt. If hell is only for the "totally corrupt" who have destroyed their "God-given capacity for moral awareness", then the population of hell must be very small, while perhaps the greater part of humanity faces either an eventual admittance to heaven, an eternal purgatory or an eventual cessation of existence. While this is not necessarily a problem for Swinburne's view, it is a question about which he is not totally clear.

God's role in character development

Moltmann's critique that basic issuantism is essentially atheistic is perhaps particularly apposite to the Fixed Character Thesis.⁷⁸ What role does God play in the formation of a fixed character? Talbott challenges the common assumption among issuantists that on the basis of libertarian human freedom a person is responsible for his virtuous character.⁷⁹ For Talbott, one cannot take personal credit for the development of a good character; a good character is a result of the grace of God in a person's life. As a universalist, Talbott believes that God's grace is both irresistible and that every person will eventually receive God's grace and be saved.

⁷⁸ Moltmann 2001, 45.

⁷⁹ Talbott 2005.

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Notwithstanding, some issuantists like Walls and Swinburne include God's role in character development as part of their systems.⁸⁰ God must be actively involved in the perfecting of each human being, otherwise God would be either unconcerned about human moral imperfection or unmotivated to help correct human moral defects. Both options are inconsistent with an adequate view of God within Christian theism. If God is both concerned about human moral imperfection and motivated to help humans correct their moral defects, then Talbott's question becomes all the more pertinent: Why doesn't God extend that irresistible grace to everyone? In particular, why doesn't God do something (or *more*) to stop those who are in the process of developing an evil character?

Pawl and Timpe provide a possible answer by maintaining that God's grace is a logical necessity for salvation, even though it is causally insufficient condition for final salvation.⁸¹ It is also *necessary* for a person to freely cooperate with God in the development of a virtuous or holy character. But how does this save issuantism from the objection raised against retributive theories of hell that God could have shown grace to everyone? Maybe God *does* extend grace to everyone, but not everyone responds positively. Even if the internal constraints of a fixed character mean that one is not free to commit sin, it does not mean that one is determined in all areas, since the ability to sin is accidental, not essential to free will.

The Fixed Character Thesis also raises the question of whether whatever freedom that remains in heaven is only trivial, or if it is indeed a "significant" free will. Plantinga defines significant free will as the freedom a person has who is "free with respect to an action that is morally significant for him."⁸² According to this definition, the choice between two morally neutral options could be considered free, but not morally significant. That is, the choice between giving money to the Red Cross or to the local homeless shelter would be morally insignificant since the choice does not stand between a good option and a bad one. Instead of morally significant freedom, Pawl and Timpe suggest that one only needs morally relevant freedom, which they define as a free choice that is morally relevant to the person making the choice.

⁸⁰ Walls 2004a, 210. "So God's grace is indeed a necessary condition for the beginning as well as the completion of the formation of a good character." Swinburne 1989, 172.

⁸¹ Timothy Pawl and Kevin Timpe, "Incompatibilism, Sin, and Free Will in Heaven" *Faith and Philosophy* 26/4 (2009): 414.

⁸² Plantinga 1977, 30; Plantinga 1974, 166.

[A] choice is morally relative iff the person is free to choose among at least two options, and at least two of the options, say, A and B, are related to each other such that either A is better than B or B is better than A. Similarly, we say that a person has *morally relevant freedom* if she is free with respect to a choice that is morally relevant to her.⁸³

Pawl and Timpe reason that not even God would have morally significant freedom according to Plantinga's definition and that it would thus be unreasonable to expect that people would have a kind of freedom that God does not have.

Religious luck

The question of God's active role in character development raises further questions about religious luck. Religious luck is when a person's degree of personal responsibility for her religious faith or lack thereof goes beyond the degree to which she controls it. That is to say, a person is held morally responsible for believing or not believing even though the preconditions for belief lie at least partly outside the person's control.

On issuantism, people are ultimately responsible for the character they develop, yet the conditions for character development often lie beyond the realm of a person's control. If one cannot ultimately take personal credit for the formation of a virtuous character, then to what extent is the individual responsible for its development? The problem of religious luck is not limited to the inequities that exist between various individuals, but also between the person's circumstances in the actual world and what she would have done or what character she would have developed in a different set of counterfactual circumstances. Simple variables such as the parents one grows up with – whether they were believers or not, loving or abusive – show the wide-ranging implications of luck for religious belief and moral character development.

Religious luck raises several questions about God's putative interest in human character development. If the formation of a virtuous character is ultimately attributable to the grace of God, then how can the person be responsible for its formation? When the possibly eternal destinies of heaven or hell are at stake, then why does it seem that God gives some people a distinct advantage that other people do not enjoy?

⁸³ Pawl and Timpe 2009, 416.

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Linda Zagzebski summarizes and ultimately rejects five possible solutions to the question of religious luck as it relates to the issue of heaven and hell.⁸⁴ The first solution is that God judges people on the overall balance of what they would have done in every set of possible worlds. The problem with this solution, according to Zagzebski, is that the real world would then have no greater moral significance for the individual than other merely possible worlds. The second solution is that God only judges people for what is in their control, a proposal that Zagzebski rejects on the grounds that it is doubtful that there is a determinate degree of control that makes a person morally responsible. A third proposal is that one could admit that luck makes it easier for some people to develop a virtuous character, and that inequities in luck are compensated by inversely proportional inequities in reward or punishment. That is, the more “bad luck” one must overcome in becoming virtuous, the greater the reward. Zagzebski rejects this idea on similar grounds to her rejection of the second solution, *viz.*, that there is no determinate degree of how difficult it is for a person to achieve a virtuous character. Moreover, the inequities of luck still entail that the risks one takes in life are of uneven balance. The fourth solution to the problem of religious luck is to posit that God gives extra grace to balance out any bad luck a person has encountered.⁸⁵ Zagzebski writes that this solution is counterintuitive since we do not assume that people who have experienced bad luck have received extra grace from God. Likewise, this view would lead to the tendency to judge people more harshly since those who have failed have also received extra grace from God. Finally, Zagzebski rejects universalism as a solution to the inequities of religious luck on the grounds that it divorces salvation from moral considerations and stands outside the dominant views of the Western Christian tradition.

Issuantist Russell E. Jones proposes a solution to the problem of religious luck by combining Zagzebski’s fourth solution with a version of escapism. According to Jones, Buckareff and Plug’s escapism by itself “simply pushes the problem forward into the afterlife.”⁸⁶ The inequities of religious luck in this life continue in the next unless God does something to counterbalance them in the form of grace. On Jones’ solution, after death people receive some degree of grace such as is necessary to counteract whatever bad religious luck

⁸⁴ Linda Zagzebski, “Religious luck” *Faith and Philosophy* 11/3 (1994): 397–413.

⁸⁵ This perspective is also proposed by Joseph Corabi in “Hell and character” *Religious Studies* 47/2 (2007): 233–244.

⁸⁶ Russell E. Jones, “Escapism and luck” *Religious Studies* 43/2 (2007): 209.

they may have encountered in life. Even in hell it is possible for these free moral agents to make the necessary decisions to be released from hell. He believes this solution avoids the pitfalls of Zagzebski's fourth proposal since it makes no empirically verifiable claims about what might happen in this life. Likewise, it avoids Zagzebski's second objection since people in the afterlife will not be tempted to judge other people unjustly.

Jones' proposal is somewhat similar to Walls. Walls posits that God gives every person the optimal grace she needs to make a positive decision for faith in God. Whereas Jones believes the open-ended opportunities to be reconciled to God also extend to those in hell, Walls appears to limit the possibility of repentance to some indefinite period of time after death until a person either makes a decisive choice against God (thus consigning oneself to hell) or takes initial steps towards faith in God, at which time the person enters purgatory where the process of sanctification can continue until such a time as the person has a character that would warrant heaven.

In this section I have explored some of the implications of the Fixed Character Thesis for issuantism. In particular it should be noted that according to most versions of the Fixed Character Thesis, a person with a fixed character is no longer free in a libertarian sense. Rather than solving the problem of hell, this supplement to basic issuantism only succeeds in postponing it by making issuantism with the Fixed Character Thesis susceptible to the same objections raised against compatibilism: the question of moral responsibility in the absence of libertarian freedom and the question of God's putative culpability in not aiding more (or all) people in the development of a virtuous character. Furthermore, I have shown that religious luck has implications for both personal moral responsibility in character development and God's role in the development of a virtuous character.

The Irrationality Thesis

Libertarian freedom entails that people could freely choose to reject God forever. On issuantism, people must have this freedom even with full knowledge that the effects of their choices will be harmful to themselves (unless one also posits the Not-so-Nasty Thesis). Moreover, people must make the choice to reject God even when they have no motivation to do so, and every motivation not to do so. This is an irrational choice that, on some accounts of issuantism where extra chances are granted, a person must continue to make forever. According to the Irrationality Thesis, because of

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libertarian human freedom, God must allow people to make irrational choices even if those irrational choices entail that they end up in hell.⁸⁷

The Irrationality Thesis may shed light on two related questions: why God would allow anyone to make the irrational choice for hell, and why any person would make the irrational choice for hell if the person were truly free.

Concerning the first question, both Swinburne and Walls claim that there is a certain epistemic distance between God and human creatures. Without this epistemic distance, God's self-revelation could easily nullify human freedom.

Swinburne writes,

We will be in the situation of the child in the nursery who knows that mother is looking in at the door, and for whom, in view of the child's desire for mother's approval, the temptation to wrongdoing is simply overborne. We need 'epistemic distance' in order to have free choice between good and evil.⁸⁸

Walls develops a similar line of thought:

Those who have not achieved this character [a character of spiritual and moral maturity] can resist God's grace. At this stage of moral and spiritual development, knowledge of the connection between God and happiness must be relatively unformed. This knowledge must be fully adequate to encourage pursuit of God and the resulting character growth, but limited enough to allow us to deceive ourselves, resist God's grace, and derail our character development.⁸⁹

If God were to give people full disclosure, it would violate people's ability to make a free choice. Furthermore, Walls claims that full disclosure is only made available to people who have responded positively to God's grace. "In my view, the knowledge that God is the source of happiness, whereas sin is the source of misery, is acquired in its full clarity only through free response to God's grace."⁹⁰ In fact, faith means that a person makes a positive response to God's grace *before* a person has achieved full knowledge of God's nature. That is, only a person who has shown some inchoate positive response to God can begin to understand the implications of her choice. "Such absolute clarity

⁸⁷ Only mentioning it in passing, issuantist Stephen Davis seems to indicate something like the Irrationality Thesis. He writes that "people who continue voluntarily to choose hell ... will not be sensible. Their hatred of God will have overcome them." Davis 2010, 96.

⁸⁸ Swinburne 1998, 206.

⁸⁹ Walls 1992, 131.

⁹⁰ Walls 1992, 130.

of vision is only achieved as we progressively respond with trust and love to God's self-revelation."⁹¹ Indeed, this is the very nature of trust, "that it is exercised in a context of less than full disclosure."⁹² The choice for hell is indeed irrational, but a loving God is not willing to interfere with that free choice regardless of how irrational or self-destructive it may be.

The second question deals with why anyone would choose to go to hell if the person were truly free to decide. In other words, is it an intelligible notion to believe that some people could freely choose to do evil or to damn themselves if they really knew what they were doing? What could possibly motivate anyone to make such a choice?

The reasons that lead people to commit individual sins against their better judgment – temporary pleasure, a sense of control or power, desire for vindication or the belief that sin will go undetected – provide a possible explanation as to how a definitive choice for damnation could be psychologically possible.

[T]he choice of evil is ultimately irrational, although it has its own twisted sort of logic. The heart of this perverse logic is famously stated by Milton in words attributed to Satan: 'Better to reign in hell than serve in heaven'. The damned are not, then, altogether irrational. The [*sic*] have certain preferences and they make choices that make sense in light of those preferences. In short, the damned find a certain distorted sort of satisfaction in evil and they perversely prefer that satisfaction to the true happiness of heaven.⁹³

Some people, by force of continuing in sin, begin to view evil as good and good as evil, so that "good" becomes a despicable, horrifying thought to them. People in hell could even be considered happy if one defines "happy" as getting what one wants.

This twisted sense of logic may help explain how self-deception could be fully compatible with being sufficiently informed about the nature of God and the nature of sin. "Self-deception is not a matter of lacking information, but rather a matter of not attending to what one knows, or of suppressing it and refusing to act on it."⁹⁴ For Walls, it must be psychologically possible for people to deceive themselves regardless of the amount of information or revelation available to them. There are several possible reasons why a person

⁹¹ Walls 2004a, 210.

⁹² Walls 2004a, 211.

⁹³ Walls 2004a, 212.

⁹⁴ Walls 1992, 131.

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may perceive the choice for hell to be better than the choice for God: the desire to pleasure, the desire to exert control over one's own fate or the desire for vindication.⁹⁵

Regarding the desire for vindication, Walls writes that some people just want to be "right" regardless of the cost. He cites the story of the rich man and Lazarus, where the rich man is not repentant; he seems to be more concerned about justifying himself. When he makes a plea for a messenger to be sent to warn his brothers, the underlying idea is that the rich man thought he'd not been sufficiently warned. If only he'd been warned, he wouldn't have ended up in hell. Even though he felt wronged by not having been sufficiently warned, he wanted his brothers to have a proper warning.

In this example, and others like it, hell seems to afford its inhabitants "a kind of gratification which motivates the choice to go there. ... That belief is what finally justifies and makes intelligible the choice of hell."⁹⁶

Talbott's main objection to Walls' view of hell is that a loving God would see to it that everyone receives full disclosure of all the information needed about God and the consequences of human choices to be able to make a fully rational choice. No fully rational person would ever choose an eternal hell. He sees a distinction between what is within the power of a person to do and what is psychologically possible for the person to do. He contends that even in heaven, where people will have a clearer, more unobstructed view of God, they will have the power to rebel against God. They remain free, but the choice to rebel is psychologically impossible.⁹⁷ Talbott rejects the idea that freedom must also entail the psychological possibility of acting irrationally. "For if that were true, then God Himself would never do the right thing (or act in a loving, as opposed to a hateful, way) *freely*."⁹⁸ For this reason Talbott claims that it is psychologically impossible for people to choose damnation even if they have full insight into the destructive nature of sin.

In defending the Irrationality Thesis, Walls maintains that Talbott's thinking is a seemingly reasonable conclusion in a perfect world. Yet in the

⁹⁵ In an unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, David L. Guevara argues that a person's rejection of God may actually be a rational choice on the basis *inter alia* of divine hiddenness. If the rejection of God is truly rational, Guevara reasons, then the person making the rational choice should not be held morally culpable even though the rational choice was objectively mistaken. Guevara 2003.

⁹⁶ Walls 1992, 128.

⁹⁷ Thomas Talbott, "On the divine nature and the nature of divine freedom" *Faith and Philosophy* 5/1 (1988): 13.

⁹⁸ Talbott 2001, 426.

real world, one must apply his thinking even to small, sinful choices – not simply the large, destiny-sealing choice for damnation. If we understand the destructive nature of sin, why do we sin at all? The truth is that we do in fact understand the destructive nature of sin, but choose for whatever reason to sin anyway.

Talbott claims that it is conceivable that a loving person would do anything in his power to prevent someone he loves from inflicting irreparable harm to herself or others. For example, a loving father would do everything possible to prevent his daughter from committing suicide, even if it means violating her freedom to harm herself. Walls counters that there is a major difference between Talbott's example and the definitive choice for hell. In the case of a daughter who wants to commit suicide, the father can reasonably conclude that the daughter is suffering from a temporary loss of perspective due to depression or various circumstances that may very well heal with a little time and therapy. At first glance this appears to be similar to Talbott's idea that if people are only given sufficient information, they could not reasonably choose damnation. Walls doesn't think it's the same thing, however, since the choice for hell is not a rash impulse that one will later regret, but rather a long-lasting series of chronic choices.

The Irrationality Thesis would seem to be an important supplement to any doctrine of hell that rejects universalism. One possible corollary for issuantists who posit both the Irrationality Thesis and the Not-so-Nasty Thesis is that the denizens of hell would be kept in the dark of ignorance about the blessings they're missing through their rejection of God. Because of the limited insight a person has in hell, it is "impossible for anyone fully to experience the horror of being separated from God."⁹⁹

Full disclosure is incompatible with the Not-so-Nasty Thesis. This does not, however, present a major concern for either Walls or Swinburne. For Walls, full disclosure is only given to those who respond positively to God's grace. For Swinburne, full disclosure is only given in the beatific vision since full disclosure to people in this lifetime would nullify a person's freedom.

By itself, however, the Irrationality Thesis leaves open the possibility that even people in heaven could make the irrational choice to rebel against God and thus forfeit one's eternal life. The finality of one's status would thereby be jeopardized and one's salvation would never be assured. One way around this problem would be to posit – as do both Swinburne and Walls – the Fixed Character Thesis as an explanation of how a person in heaven could be secure

⁹⁹ Walls 2004a, 214.

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in her salvation while a person in hell could continue to make the irrational choice to reject God.

The Middle Knowledge Thesis

The question of divine foreknowledge has been hotly debated in Anglo-American evangelical circles since the end of the twentieth century. The debate has not been limited to academic circles, but has also been featured in popular magazines and engaged many active lay people within the church. The issue of divine foreknowledge has implications for other areas of theology, including the nature of divine sovereignty and the nature of human freedom. All of these issues of course relate to the broader question of the problem of evil and the specific soteriological problem of evil, the problem of hell.

In this section and the following I shall examine two main perspectives on divine foreknowledge as they relate to issuant views of hell. Neither the Middle Knowledge Thesis nor the Openness Thesis is in the strict sense a supplement to basic issuantism. That is, they are not expendable features whose purpose is to shore up basic issuantism. Rather, they can both be seen as competing metaphysical starting points about the nature of divine foreknowledge that have implications for the doctrine of hell.

Some scholars supplement basic issuantism with a form of molinism whereby God has middle knowledge of how people would act should they be found in a certain set of circumstances. Molinism (after Spanish Jesuit Luis de Molina, 1535-1600) claims that God has middle knowledge (*scientia media*) of the counterfactuals of creaturely freedom. This middle knowledge stands logically between God's natural knowledge and God's free knowledge. God's natural knowledge is God's pre-volitional knowledge of necessary truths. God's free knowledge is God's post-volitional knowledge of facts that are true in virtue of God's creative choice. Middle knowledge of the truth value of counterfactuals of creaturely freedom is both pre-volitional (like God's natural knowledge) and knowledge of contingent truths (like God's free knowledge).¹⁰⁰ That is, God knows logically prior to the decision to actualize a possible world which propositions about what any person would freely do in a given set of circumstances can be said to be true or false.

The Middle Knowledge Thesis is the idea that God, on the basis of middle knowledge of the counterfactuals of creaturely freedom, actualizes a world in which the optimal ratio of saved to lost is realized.

¹⁰⁰ Pawl and Timpe 2009, 404.

By way of contrast, one may compare molinism with two other perspectives on divine foreknowledge. Simple foreknowledge is the view that an omniscient God infallibly knows everything that will happen. According to open theism on the other hand, God is still omniscient, but only knows everything that is logically possible for God to know. On this view, however, the counterfactuals of creaturely freedom do not have a truth value and God does not know what a person will do in a given set of circumstances until the person actually makes those choices.

Going back to an earlier example, if the CEO of a company had known that Fabian would lose a multimillion euro contract in London due to his drinking binge with an old college buddy, she would not have hired him. According to simple foreknowledge, God knew that Fabian would go drinking and lose the contract. Open theists, by contrast, would say that not only did the CEO not know what would happen; God had no way of knowing it either. Molinists would say that God's middle knowledge entails that God not only knows whether Fabian would lose the contract if he should happen to miss his flight, but also whether he would go drinking with his friend if the friend should happen to call, and whether the CEO would hire Fabian in the first place if she had had the middle knowledge of what Fabian would freely do in this set of circumstances.

One objection against Christian faith initially raised by J.L. Mackie was that an omnipotent and omniscient God could have created a world such that free moral agents would only ever choose to do good.¹⁰¹ Plantinga argued that if the truth value of future contingents or counterfactuals is not dependent on God's will (that is, God does not *cause* people to act in certain ways), then there is no way that even an omnipotent God could cause a person to act freely in one way or another. Apart from creating a deterministic world, the best God can do is to create a world in which the proper conditions obtain for God's plan for the world to be best served by an optimal balance of good and evil free choices humans make.¹⁰² Following Plantinga's lead, this molinist line of reasoning has become a standard argument among Christian apologists.

The issuantist who has most explicitly emphasized the Middle Knowledge Thesis is Jonathan Kvanvig. In *The Possibility of an All-knowing God* (1986), Kvanvig defended a classic form of molinism. In *The Problem of Hell* (1992), Kvanvig applied the Middle Knowledge Thesis to basic issuantism. In

¹⁰¹ J.L. Mackie, "Evil and Omnipotence" *Mind* 64/244 (1955): 200.

¹⁰² Plantinga 1974, 164-195.

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subsequent texts, however, Kvanvig calls into question some of the basic assumptions in classic molinism as having more in common with deism than with historical Christian theism.¹⁰³ Kvanvig ultimately rejects the Middle Knowledge Thesis as a supplement to basic issuantism. I shall nonetheless include it here because of the role it plays in Kvanvig's classic work *The Problem of Hell*.

In *The Problem of Hell*, Kvanvig examines and ultimately rejects Plantinga's argument that there are certain logically possible worlds that God could not feasibly create. This comes in the context of critiquing Talbott's claim (echoing Mackie) that God could have created a world in which every person freely chooses salvation. The intricacies of Kvanvig's critique of Plantinga's argument are more detailed than we need concern ourselves with in this current discussion. The important point is that Kvanvig goes on to apply the Middle Knowledge Thesis in arguing that there are certain states of affairs that a God possessing middle knowledge would know to be true which would justify God's decision not to override a person's choice for hell.

Talbott argues that a loving God should interfere with a person's freedom if that person uses her freedom to make the self-destructive choice for hell. For Talbott, love is more important than freedom. Using Talbott's example of interfering with a person who wants to commit suicide, Kvanvig agrees that there may be circumstances under which it would be legitimate to interfere: if the desire to end one's life were due to temporary depression and the person would not wish to end her life in less trying circumstances, if a medical condition or physical pain is clouding the person's judgment, when the person underestimates her prospects for the future, or if she would one day thank us for having intervened.

What justifies our intervention is the fact that the person will come, or will likely come, to see that [her] choice of death was not what [she] really wanted or would have wanted if [she] had reflected carefully. Alternatively, if we are fully convinced and it is true that the person is competent to choose, is rational in choosing suicide, and cannot be persuaded otherwise, then, from a purely moral point of view, interference is not justified....¹⁰⁴

We may be justified in erring on the side of caution (and intervening) simply because we do not have infallible knowledge of a person's present and future

¹⁰³ Jonathan L. Kvanvig, "Conservation, Concurrence, and Counterfactuals of Freedom" in Kevin Timpe (ed.), *Metaphysics and God: Essays in Honor of Eleonore Stump* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 113.

¹⁰⁴ Kvanvig 1993, 84.

mental states and because the effects of a suicide are irrevocable. That cannot be said of God, who knows the truth value of all counterfactuals of creaturely freedom. Kvanvig writes, “My argument that God should not always override the freedom of rebellious individuals to secure their presence in heaven depends on the assumption that God foreknows what free individuals will want, desire, and choose in the future.”¹⁰⁵

So rather than using molinism to argue for which possible worlds it would be feasible for God to create (as do Plantinga and Craig), Kvanvig uses it to explain how God could be justified in not overriding a person’s free choice – God knows that the person would choose to reject God in any given set of circumstances.

In recent years Kvanvig has begun to call into question the existence of true counterfactuals on the basis of what he calls the grounding objection. In two almost identical worlds, Kvanvig writes his book *Destiny and Deliberation*. On molinism, God knows it to be true that if Kvanvig were offered \$100,000 he would write *Destiny and Deliberation*. God also knows it to be true that in a world that in every respect is the same as the first example except that Kvanvig is not offered \$100,000, he would still write *Destiny and Deliberation*. In a non-deterministic world it is possible that in either of those situations Kvanvig could choose to sit and watch TV all those hours instead of writing *Destiny and Deliberation*. In a deterministic world, there are grounds for the truth of both counterfactual statements. In a non-deterministic world, however, it would be more accurate to regard counterfactuals as probabilistic. Kvanvig sees this as a problem for classic molinism as it undermines finality.

Here’s what we’re left with if we stick with the Choice Model. Either some other intermediate position must be found – a position that retains full providence and libertarian freedom, and does so in a way that avoids whatever difficulties arise for Molinism because of the grounding objection – or full omniscience has to be abandoned, since exhaustive foreknowledge of the future will no longer be within God’s reach.¹⁰⁶

He thus concludes that molinists must either abandon molinism in favor of a “truncated” view of divine omniscience or find other means of grounding the truth value of counterfactuals.

Kvanvig doesn’t believe that the truncated view of omniscience found in open theism provides the kind of finality he seeks.

¹⁰⁵ Kvanvig 1993, 85-86.

¹⁰⁶ Kvanvig 2011, 12.

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One's presence in Heaven or Hell might initially be something we choose, but the inability to leave will not. One might imagine a position where the option of leaving Hell is closed off, but it is hard to see how any point chosen will make the position better at dealing with the problem of Hell than the traditional retributivist understanding for which an alternative is thought to be needed.¹⁰⁷

Be that as it may, Kvanvig seeks to develop a theory that has a grounding for finality and not a mere accidental generalization. He does this through a combination of basic issuantism with a modified form of molinism where there is a better grounding for the truth value of counterfactuals together with annihilationism. Otherwise,

the unending separation would never, at any point, be final in any modally strong way. Finality results only when union with God is achieved or annihilation occurs; short of that is the intermediate state of, to put it a bit misleadingly, never-ending uncertainty.¹⁰⁸

Kvanvig calls this a destiny, but one that in the name of libertarian freedom is not imposed by some outside force.

He maintains that the truth of counterfactuals of freedom is better defended by descending from the metaphysical mountaintop to the quotidian experience of epistemic inference. By this means the molinist can come closer to accounting for finality and destiny in a person's free choices.

This is where the Fixed Character Thesis comes in. When a person develops a fixed evil character (or "loses his soul"), he is both psychologically unable to act against his fixed character and responsible for placing himself in that state.

Yet Kvanvig questions whether the addition of the Fixed Character Thesis succeeds in rescuing the Middle Knowledge Thesis from the grounding objection that counterfactuals of creaturely freedom are only contingently true. For there to be a sense of finality, the issuantist who also affirms the Fixed Character Thesis must show how the fixed character results in the loss of libertarian freedom – something that Kvanvig says they have failed to do. Without the loss of libertarian freedom, there is no finality. The Fixed Character Thesis is thus faced with a dilemma. On the one hand, if there is finality, there is no longer libertarian freedom. Then one could legitimately raise the same objection that is directed against compatibilists about why God doesn't just fix everyone's character for the good. The other option would be

¹⁰⁷ Kvanvig 2011, 13-14.

¹⁰⁸ Kvanvig 2011, 17.

to capitulate to Kvanvig's critique that even with the Fixed Character Thesis there are no guarantees that a person actually achieves the kind of fixed character that would rule out the possibility of acting out of character. Without this type of fixed character, there is still no finality.

As his own worst critic, Kvanvig moves on to propose a "maverick" molinism in which the truth values of counterfactuals exists logically prior to God's acts of will (pre-volitional), but where in contrast to classic molinism, they are under God's control. Kvanvig argues that they are under God's control because there may be a world in which God could do something to make a false counterfactual true.

Ultimately, however, Kvanvig rejects all attempts at supplementing basic issuantism with the Middle Knowledge Thesis on the grounds that the molinist fails in showing how the truth value of counterfactuals can provide the sense of finality needed in a Christian doctrine of hell. It is his considered conclusion that the Middle Knowledge Thesis adds nothing to basic issuantism's ability to answer the problem of hell.

The Openness Thesis

Open theism is an arminian view of divine foreknowledge whereby God is said to have complete and infallible knowledge of the past, exhaustive and accurate knowledge of the present, and even some knowledge of future events. What God does not know, however, according to open theists, are the future choices and actions of free moral agents.

This does not mean that God cannot be considered omniscient. Just as divine omnipotence does not mean *God can do anything*, divine omniscience does not mean *God knows everything*. Even an omnipotent God cannot act in ways that are contradictory God's perfect nature or do things that are logically impossible. By the same token, an omniscient God cannot know those things that are logically impossible to know. Stated more positively, an omniscient God knows everything that is logically possible for God to know.

For open theists, the future is partially settled and partially open. Some aspects of the future are settled, such as divine prophecies of future events – where God declares his eternal purposes and will for humanity. These future events are those that are not dependent on the actions of free human beings. There is a category of statements about the future about which God has infallible knowledge – prophecies of events that God determines to be true.

Openness theologians maintain that the counterfactuals of creaturely freedom have no truth value. Let us take two related statements as examples:

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1. If Johannes were to be hired as a waiter for the Nobel Prize dinner, he would poison the King of Sweden.
2. Next year on December 10, Johannes will poison the King of Sweden at the Nobel Prize dinner.

A counterfactual statement like (1) has no truth value according to open theism. Since Johannes has not been hired as a waiter for the Nobel Prize dinner, the statement is neither true nor false. Even if Johannes were hired as a waiter for the Nobel Prize dinner, God would not know what Johannes will do in the future. Nor do future-tense statements like (2) concerning the free actions of creatures have any truth value. They are also impossible for God to know. The truth value of future-tense statements is only known when the future becomes the present – on December 10 both we and God will know whether the statement is true that Johannes will poison the King of Sweden.

With this introduction to open theism, let us now see the implications of the Openness Thesis for the problem of hell.

On the Openness Thesis, God's character and actions in creating the world are vindicated by the fact that God did not know prior to the creative act which if any free moral agents would end up in hell.

If the molinist is correct in believing that God possesses middle knowledge, then God took very little risk in creating the world, since God knew how people would freely act in the set of circumstances they would face in the actual world. Although the creative act meant little risk, a God who has middle knowledge would appear to bear a greater moral responsibility for the world.

If the open theist is correct in believing that God could not know what choices free creatures would make, then God took a greater risk in choosing to create the actual world, but bears less moral responsibility for what happens in it. Openness theologian David Basinger recognizes that the potential negative results of the risk that God takes in creating the world present at least as great a problem as that faced by molinists who believe in ECT.

[T]o posit that an all-loving God – especially one who has an *a priori* commitment to allowing individuals to go to hell under certain conditions – would gamble in this way seems to me to be no less serious a problem than any faced by a Traditionalist who believes God possesses middle knowledge and on this basis affirms

a soteriological theodicy based on something such as [the transworld damnation theory].¹⁰⁹

In spite of the risk that God takes in creating this world, Basinger concludes that the potential benefit of creating this world is better than creating a world in which people do not possess libertarian freedom.¹¹⁰

Although Basinger claims that the actual world is better than a less-risky alternative where God knows that some people will end up in hell, one may question these conclusions on the grounds that one may never know how this world would compare to any other possible world. Basinger understands this objection, but maintains that it is nonetheless within the epistemic rights of a person to make this claim.

If God has no middle knowledge of the truth value of counterfactuals of creaturely freedom and no simple foreknowledge of what free people will do in the future, then God takes a risk in creation that the world may turn out to be a place where no one would be saved at all. Walls asks whether a good God would create a world in which this is even a possibility.¹¹¹ This raises the related question of proportions – what percentage of people must be saved in order maintain God’s goodness?

Let’s say that at least 50 percent of all people who ever live on earth must be saved in order for God’s goodness to be preserved in light of God’s choice to create a world populated by free human beings. Let’s say further that on average only 30 percent of the world’s population ever responds positively to God’s grace and is saved. Does this mean that in the generation leading up to the *telos* of world history that God must override the freedom of some people in order to bring the average up to an acceptable level of 50 percent? Without overriding some people’s freedom, one could call into question the goodness of God. If God could be justified in overriding the freedom of some people for the sake of preserving the goodness of God, then why couldn’t God be

¹⁰⁹ Basinger 1992, 17.

¹¹⁰ Basinger 1992, 1-18. Some other perspectives on divine foreknowledge do not automatically exclude the possibility of libertarian freedom. Many molinists, for example, would consider themselves libertarians.

¹¹¹ Although Walls seems to argue from the viewpoint that God only has general foreknowledge (i.e., no knowledge of the future actions of free moral agents), it is far from clear that he actually embraces open theism. He writes that the general foreknowledge view (what I call the Openness Thesis) “cannot claim to be exempt from moral problems.” Walls 1992, 53. I include his line of reasoning here because he does indeed show some positive implications of general foreknowledge for the problem of hell, even though it may simply be an experiment in thought. He has not responded to my requests for clarification.

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justified in overriding the freedom of *all* people to create the optimal balance between saved and lost – 100% saved; 0% lost?

Walls answers that rather than setting a specific number on the percentage of people who must be saved in order to preserve God's goodness, it is enough to say that God will give everyone the optimal grace needed to make a positive response to God, and that God will save all who respond positively to this offer of optimal grace.

His perfect goodness consists essentially in the fact that he saves the highest number or proportion he can, while giving all persons an optimal measure of grace. ... God's goodness is in no way dependent upon his ability to save a particular percentage of free persons.¹¹²

Because God has infallible knowledge of a person and his needs, God can ensure that every person is given optimal grace at some stage of existence.

Swinburne rejects both simple foreknowledge and molinism in favor of a form of the Openness Thesis.¹¹³ In the case of simple foreknowledge, can God foreknow anything without determining that which God foreknows? Simple foreknowledge and human freedom are seemingly at odds. If God knows for instance that I will eat soup for lunch tomorrow, am I really free to eat a salad instead? If I eat a salad, then does my free choice mean that God had a false belief in "knowing" that I would eat soup? If God infallibly foreknows what I will eat, is my choice of what to eat for lunch determined?

[T]here do seem to be substantial philosophical difficulties in supposing that God can have now complete foreknowledge of that which is not yet determined. For if I am freely (i.e. not determinedly) to choose tomorrow what I shall do then, I shall then have it in my power to make false anyone's beliefs of today about what I will do tomorrow. So how can anyone, even God, already know what I will do?¹¹⁴

One possible way around this would be to say that God is timeless. This is not completely without complications. Swinburne admits, however, that if one can make sense of God's timelessness, then the doctrine of predestination *post praevisa merita* will thereby also be rendered coherent. Swinburne does

¹¹² Walls 1992, 104.

¹¹³ See the chapter entitled "Omniscient" in Swinburne 1995, 167-183.

¹¹⁴ Swinburne 1989, 194.

not, however, believe the doctrine of divine timelessness can be rendered coherent.¹¹⁵

Likewise, Swinburne rejects molinism because of what he believes to be insufficient grounding of the truth-value of the counterfactuals of creaturely freedom.¹¹⁶

Middle knowledge, however, would still be impossible. For if there is to be a necessary correlation between what agents do and what God believes about what agents do, it must be sustained either by the actions of agents causing God's beliefs, or by God causing the actions of agents, or by God's beliefs and the actions of agents having a common cause.¹¹⁷

Reverting to an earlier example of the (potential) waiter Johannes at the Nobel Prize dinner, what makes a counterfactual statement like (1) true? If the world were deterministic, then the laws of nature and the state of affairs in the world up to that point would make it true. But then it would not be a counterfactual of *freedom*. Nor can Johannes be the guarantor of the truth of (1), since he is not in a position to make it true because he is not in a position to hire himself as waiter for the Nobel Prize dinner. Yet if it is not Johannes who makes the counterfactual true, then what or who does? After all, it must ultimately be Johannes' action that determines whether the statement is true or false. If it is God who makes it true by virtue of creating the world in such a way that if Johannes were to be hired as a waiter for the Nobel Prize dinner, he would poison the King of Sweden, then God would in effect be determining that Johannes would poison the king – but only if God were to create the world such that Martin would hire Johannes as a waiter if Johannes were to apply for the job, which he would only do if he were to be fired from his previous job as a waiter at the royal palace, which would only happen if Johannes were caught stealing wine from the king's wine cellar, which would only happen if.... Regardless of how many steps back in time one traces the chain of events leading to the Nobel Prize dinner, God's knowledge of the truth-value of counterfactuals of creaturely freedom must be contingent upon the free choice of the person or people in question.

¹¹⁵ Swinburne 1989, 194.

¹¹⁶ Swinburne 1998, 127-134.

¹¹⁷ Swinburne 1998, 256.

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Swinburne concludes that “God cannot have incorrigible middle knowledge, and so ever be in a position to choose to create a world in which, be knows incorrigibly, free agents will always choose the good.”¹¹⁸

In rejecting both simple foreknowledge and molinism, Swinburne advances a view of divine foreknowledge and omniscience that is in keeping with open theism.

An omniscient being is one who knows everything logically possible for him to know, anything the description of his knowing which does not involve a contradiction. He would know everything that has happened, everything that is happening or could happen. But, in my view ... he will not necessarily know everything that will happen unless it is already predetermined that it will happen. For there is a logical inconsistency in supposing that any being knows necessarily what is yet to happen when that has yet to be determined (i.e. when it is not already fixed by its causes). But if the omniscient being is God and so also omnipotent, it will be through his own choice that there is anything not already predetermined and so that there is any limit to his knowledge.¹¹⁹

He reaffirms this belief later in the same work.

Since Christian tradition has on the whole affirmed that humans have free will ... God’s omniscience must, I suggest, be understood ... as knowledge at every time of all that is logically possible for God to know at that time. This knowledge does not include knowledge of the true propositions about the future actions of free agents.¹²⁰

Since God could not possibly have known how the world would turn out or how people would use the freedom God granted them, God cannot be blamed for either the evil that takes place in the world or the regrettable fact that some people will use their freedom to develop a totally corrupt character, thus making themselves fit only for existence in hell.

It is difficult to evaluate the contributions of the Openness Thesis for the issuantist understanding of hell without critiquing open theism as a basis for understanding divine foreknowledge.¹²¹ It is beyond the scope of the present work to give a full-fledged presentation and critique of open theism. My purpose has simply been to highlight the possible contributions of open

¹¹⁸ Swinburne 1998, 256.

¹¹⁹ Swinburne 1998, 3-4.

¹²⁰ Swinburne 1998, 133-134.

¹²¹ The same was true of Kvanvig’s critique (and ultimate rejection) of molinism.

theism to a solution to the problem of hell. Notwithstanding, a few comments may be in order.

First, an omnipotent, omniscient, omnibenevolent God could and would do something about evil unless there were overriding reasons for God not to do so. On open theism there are certain things God cannot know (not because of a limitation in God's omniscience, but due to the very nature of much of the future as unknowable). As such, God does not know what evil morally free beings will cause. This would seemingly set limits for God's knowledge of how divine omnipotence could be used to stop such potential evil. If God will not interfere with human freedom to stop evil now, what guarantee do we have that there will in the end ever be a final triumph of good over evil? Open theists must answer that it stands within God's power to judge the free choices of people and the devil, but this answer leads directly back to the original question – if it is within God's power to secure a final victory of good over evil, why doesn't God use that power to defeat evil on a small scale now?

Second, Walls says that God had no way of knowing before the creative act how many people would respond positively to his grace, but “based on his knowledge of human nature” God could know what percentage of people would *likely* be saved.¹²² One may question whether God could even know this prior to the creative act. If Adam and Eve's free choice to sin lay in the future and God couldn't foreknow this event, then God could not have known what human nature would become as a result of sin.

Third, since God does not know the future as it relates to the free choices of humans, then God cannot know which course of events would be for the greatest good of his people. This has implications not only for the soul-building and greater-good theodicies, but even for pastoral theology. It would become meaningless to pray that a person would have a safe trip since the safety of that trip can be jeopardized by the free actions of a drunk driver. We can't pray for peace in Syria because the civil war there lies completely in the hands of the various factions. I can't pray that my brother will get the job he is applying for, since that decision is the free choice of a human resources director.

Finally, although open theists claim that God is omniscient, sometimes the writings of open theists present what to some may be a less than favorable portrait of God. Open theists claim that God cannot reach into a situation to stop evil because the future is unknowable. Yet that must make God stupid –

¹²² Walls 1992, 103.

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or at least irresponsible. If God has complete and perfect knowledge of the past and the present, then God must have known what lay in the hearts of the terrorists who hijacked four airliners on September 11, 2001. If God heard their conspiratorial conversations and saw their behavior, then God must be either stupid or irresponsible for not doing anything to stop their acts of terrorism. God doesn't need exhaustive or infallible knowledge of the future to be able to do something about evil; God only needs to be a good guesser – an answer that is sometimes presented as an explanation of Jesus' predictions of Judas' betrayal and Peter's denials.¹²³ To me then, open theism does not provide a satisfactory solution to the problem of evil.

It would appear that in the absence of a deterministic universe, any world God could have created involved a certain amount of risk. The Openness Thesis offers a defeasible explanation as to why God is not culpable for allowing evil in the world, but, despite the claims made by openness theologians to the opposite, would seem to leave us with a deistic god that does not interfere with human affairs when it really matters. All Christians believe that in the end God will triumph over evil, but how many people will be lost in the process? This, along with the truncated view of God offered by open theism, would appear to be a Pyrrhic victory.

Conclusion on Supplemented Forms of Issuantism

By itself basic issuantism doesn't solve the problem of hell because God must still by all reasonable accounts be held responsible for setting up a system whereby people who reject God will suffer some sort of horrible eternal fate. In recent decades issuantists have presented a wide range of supplements to basic issuantism whose purpose is to strengthen the tenets of basic issuantism in providing satisfactory solutions to the problem of hell.

Most combinations of these supplements are possible (thus explaining the wide array of views present among scholars who could broadly be construed as issuantist). However, not all combinations are helpful. For instance, a combination of the Not-so-Nasty Thesis and escapism is logically possible, but what would be the point? Why would anyone want to leave a hell where one gets exactly what one wants?

The Less-than-Human Thesis is a supplement to metaphysical libertarianism that has much potential at helping issuantism answer the problem of hell, but it is not compatible with escapism. The Less-than-

¹²³ Gregory A. Boyd, "The Open-Theism View" in James K. Beilby and Paul R. Eddy (eds), *Divine Foreknowledge: Four Views* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 20-22.

Human Thesis may be applied to the inhabitants of hell, but does not work with purgatory; why would God make people (or allow people to become) less than human if they are only to be restored to full humanity through the sanctifying processes of purgatory?

The Fixed Character Thesis is compatible with the possibility of one extra chance after death (in particular as a counterbalance to bad religious luck) and may explain how a person can make a persistent choice to reject God, but at the possible expense of losing true libertarian freedom. This, however, need not be an insurmountable problem if one also posits the transitivity of moral responsibility.

The Middle Knowledge Thesis is logically compatible with the Extra Chance Theses, but one may ask what benefit would come from extra chances if one also posits the idea of transworld damnation.

The Extra Chance Thesis is perhaps one of the most helpful supplements to basic issuantism. In its escapist version, it is nonetheless incompatible with the Less-than-Human Thesis and the Fixed Character Thesis.

In the next chapter I shall show that although some versions of basic issuantism provide possible or even plausible answers to the problem of hell, much of the same result can be gained by adding the same supplements to non-issuant views of hell advanced by some traditionalists and conditionalists.

6

NON-ISSUANT VIEWS OF HELL WITH SUPPLEMENTARY THESES

While it is true that any account of Hell can be supplemented with the idea of loss of soul, the theory I am concerned with here attempts to use the idea of loss of soul to shore up a difficulty faced by the Choice Model when universalism is rejected.¹

In previous chapters I have distilled from the works of many issuantist scholars what I believe to be the essence of issuantism – a concept of hell that does not end in universal salvation, where hell is seen as an expression of the love of God, where human freedom is defined in libertarian terms, and where the purpose of hell is interpreted along non-retributive lines. I have also shown that by itself, this “basic issuantism” is unable to provide a satisfactory answer to the problem of hell. This should not, however, be taken as sufficient reason for an outright rejection of issuantism’s ability to explain the duration, quality, purpose and finality of hell in ways that provide an adequate solution to the problem of hell. Issuantists themselves, as I have shown in chapter five, supplement basic issuantism with a number of theses whose purpose is to fortify the prospects of answering the problem of hell from an issuantist perspective – with the result that some augmented versions of issuantism present plausible solutions to the problem of hell.

In this present chapter I shall show that some non-issuantist scholars also present accounts of the duration, quality, purpose and finality of hell such that classic formulations of ECT and conditionalism are shored up with some of the same supplements as are used to strengthen basic issuantism – also with the result that some augmented non-issuantist accounts of hell present coherent, possible solutions to the problem of hell.

¹ Kvanvig 2011, 22.

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In particular, I shall look at the work of William Lane Craig, Charles Seymour, Michael Murray and Clark Pinnock.² Craig supplements his ECT with the Middle Knowledge Thesis, the Fixed Character Thesis and the Continuing Sin Defense.³ Seymour and Murray both present views of hell that come close to being issuant views – with the exception that they do not completely reject the Retribution Thesis. Seymour adds the Extra Chance Thesis, the Middle Knowledge Thesis, the Continuing Sin Defense, the Not-so-Nasty Thesis and possibly the Fixed Character Thesis. Murray supplements his version of hell as a hybrid between issuantism and ECT with the Fixed Character Thesis (and, with the help of Justin Barnard, the Less-than-Human Thesis). Finally, Pinnock supplements his conditionalism with the Extra Chance Thesis, the Nearly Empty Thesis and the Openness Thesis.

Although I included universalism as a non-issuantist view of hell in chapter two, I shall not directly address the contributions of universalists in this chapter. Whereas the rejection of the No Escape Thesis is central to universalism, it is only a possible supplement to ECT, conditionalism and issuantism. As such, the universalist solution to the problem of hell does not rely upon supplements to some basic form of universalism, as is the case with basic issuantism or classic formulations of ECT and conditionalism. Hell, to the extent that it exists at all within universalism, fills more of a rehabilitative or purgatorial function.

William Lane Craig

One well-known defense of ECT with the addition of the Middle Knowledge Thesis is found in a now classic text by William Lane Craig.⁴ In this defense of Christian particularism, Craig tackles several difficult questions that arise in response to the exclusive claims of Christ and of the church on behalf of Christ. These questions include: *Why doesn't God supply special revelation to people who reject general revelation but who would respond positively to the*

² Whereas my presentation of basic issuantism and its supplements in chapters four and five has been thematic, in this chapter I shall present the work of each scholar as a separate unit. My purpose is to show how the supplements highlighted in chapter five can be integrated into theological frameworks that do not necessarily share the starting points of basic issuantism.

³ The Continuing Sin Defense is not to my knowledge used by any issuantist to supplement basic issuantism. It is, however, a common supplement used by traditionalists.

⁴ Craig 1989, 172-188. Craig has also presented a similar line of reasoning in somewhat more popular form in chapter 8 “Christ, the Only Way” in *Hard Questions, Real Answers* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2003) and chapter 10 “Is Jesus the Only Way to God?” in *On Guard* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2010).

*gospel of Jesus Christ if they were sufficiently well-informed about it? Why did God create this world when God knew that so many people would not receive Christ and would therefore be consigned to an everlasting hell? Why did God not create a world in which everyone freely receives Christ and so is saved?*⁵

Craig makes several preliminary statements, including an affirmation of Jesus' belief that "most of mankind would be damned, while a minority of mankind would be saved."⁶ For Craig, however, the primary issue is not how much knowledge people have of God, but what kind of knowledge God has about people. Indeed, if lack of information (or misinformation) about God were the main problem, then one could legitimately criticize God for condemning someone to hell who through the fortuities of bad religious luck lacked the necessary information to place her faith in Jesus Christ. Craig leaves open the possibility that a person who has never heard of Christ may nonetheless be saved by Christ's atoning work by giving a positive response to the limited amount of revelation available. He concludes however that this is an unlikely scenario since the "testimony of Scripture is that the mass of humanity do not [*sic*] even respond to the light that they do have..."⁷

The soteriological problem of evil or problem of hell entails an inconsistency between propositions (1) and (2):

1. God is omniscient, omnipotent and omnibenevolent.
2. Some persons do not receive Christ and are damned.

Craig proceeds to posit a number of additional propositions that would seek to harmonize the two propositions. He states for instance that it is logically possible for God to create any possible world (including a world in which all people freely place their faith in Christ), but not every possible world is feasible. "A world is *feasible* for God to actualize if and only if it is a member of that proper subset of all possible worlds determined by the counterfactuals of creaturely freedom which God knows to be true."⁸ That is, if God knew that it were counterfactually true that in some possible world every person would freely be saved, then God would actualize such a world. The problem is that even if God knows that there is some possible world in which any individual person would be saved, God knows the counterfactuals to be such

⁵ Craig 1989, 176.

⁶ Craig 1989, 174.

⁷ Craig 1989, 176.

⁸ Craig 1989, 188.

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that there is no world in which *all* people will be saved. Thus, a world in which every person is freely saved is not a feasible world.

Hence, even if it were the case that for any individual He might create, God could actualize a world in which that person is freely saved, it does not follow that there are worlds which are feasible for God in which all individuals are saved.⁹

Craig calls into question the proposition that there is some feasible world in which each person could be saved. Even granting the possibility that for any individual there is a world in which he or she will freely be saved, Craig maintains that there is no feasible world in which the counterfactuals are true that person *P* would freely be saved while the counterfactuals are also true that every other person who exists in that world would also freely be saved.

For Craig, the only feasible worlds in which every person who exists will be saved would only contain a handful of people. If the world is populated with a total of one person, there is a 50% chance that the person will be saved.¹⁰ With a world population of two, the chances fall to 25% or 1:4 that both will choose salvation. In a world with a population of five, the chances fall to 3.1% or 1:31 that all would freely be saved. The chances that every person in a world of 100 inhabitants would freely be saved are $7.88860905 \times 10^{-31}$. In layman's terms, a snowball's chance in hell. Craig thus insists that a world with only a few inhabitants in which all will be saved "is less preferable to God than a world in which great multitudes come to experience His salvation and a few are damned because they freely reject Christ."¹¹ Craig then goes beyond the claim that God would prefer a world in which there is collateral damage for the sake of the greater good to the claim that the actual world represents the optimal balance between saved and lost.

We have seen that it is possible that some persons would not freely receive Christ under any circumstances. Suppose, then, that God has so ordered the world that all persons who are actually lost are

⁹ Craig 1989, 182.

¹⁰ Although the chance that any individual would freely choose salvation is 50% regardless of the number of inhabitants on earth, the chance that every person that exists would freely choose salvation decreases exponentially as the population increases. For the sake of calculation, I am assuming that no other probabilistic causes would sway the person's decision for or against any particular option. This is of course not the case with salvation, where a loving God does everything possible to call a person to salvation short of interfering with that person's free will. My thanks to Andreas Hasselberg for his help with the math in this section.

¹¹ Craig 1989, 182.

such persons. In such a case, anyone who actually is lost would have been lost in any world in which God had created him.¹²

This is an idea Craig calls transworld damnation. Although Craig's article is written in the missiological context of those who have never heard of Jesus, he doesn't see any reason why this should not be the case for any person who ends up in hell.¹³

In summary, Craig answers his three introductory questions thus: *Why doesn't God supply special revelation to people who reject general revelation but who would respond positively to the gospel of Jesus Christ if they were sufficiently well-informed about it?* Because "[t]here are no such persons. ... Those who have only general revelation and do not respond to it would also not have responded to the gospel had they heard it."¹⁴ Anyone who would respond positively to a higher level of (special) revelation will be granted it. Those who are not given additional revelation would not have responded positively in any feasible world in which they exist.

Why did God create this world when God knew that so many people would not receive Christ and would therefore be consigned to an everlasting hell? Craig replies that God has in fact created the world with the optimal balance between the number of people saved and the number who are damned. "Given the truth of certain counterfactuals of creaturely freedom, it was not feasible for God to actualize a world having as many saved as but with no more damned than the actual world."¹⁵

Finally, in answer to the question *Why did God not create a world in which everyone freely receives Christ and so is saved?* Craig responds,

[God] would have actualized such a world were this feasible, but in light of certain true counterfactuals of creaturely freedom every world realizable by God is a world in which some persons are lost. Given His will to create a world of free creatures, God must accept that some will be lost.¹⁶

A world in which everyone is freely saved is simply not feasible.

In this section I have presented William Lane Craig's defense of ECT with the addition of the Middle Knowledge Thesis. It is not my purpose to critique

¹² Craig 1989, 184.

¹³ This clarification comes in response to a question I asked him over lunch in Stockholm on April 20, 2012.

¹⁴ Craig 1989, 185.

¹⁵ Craig 1989, 185.

¹⁶ Craig 1989, 185.

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his proposal to the problem of hell. Indeed, few academic articles have engendered so much discussion and critique over such a long period of time as has this one.¹⁷ Craig himself believes that his understanding of God's middle knowledge as it relates to hell is *probably* true, but is willing to settle for the less stringent demands of possibility. In spite of some possible problems related to the rationality of the choice for hell, as raised by Craig's critics, it would seem that Craig's version of ECT with the addition of the Middle Knowledge Thesis plus a Continuing Sin Defense with the logical possibility of escape or release from hell constitutes at least a possible answer to the problem of hell.

Charles Seymour

Charles Seymour defends a "freedom view" of hell¹⁸ which bears striking similarities to that of William Lane Craig, including Craig's molinism, metaphysical libertarianism and speculations on transworld damnation.¹⁹ The main difference is that the Extra Chance Thesis plays a much more central role in Seymour's theodicy than it does in Craig, who only admits the possibility of release from hell as a metaphysical possibility.²⁰

¹⁷ Among others, one may name the following articles and texts: Thomas Talbott, "Craig on the Possibility of Eternal Damnation" *Religious Studies* 28/4 (1992): 495-510; Basinger 1992, 1-18; Walls 1992, 96-97; Adams 1993; Charles Seymour, "On Choosing Hell" *Religious Studies* 33/3 (1997): 249-66; Charles Seymour, "A Craigian Theodicy of Hell" *Faith and Philosophy* 17/1 (2000): 103-115; Seymour 2000; Raymond J. Van Arragon, "Transworld Damnation and Craig's Contentious Suggestion" *Faith and Philosophy* 10/2 (2001): 241-259. David B. Myers, "Exclusivism, eternal damnation, and the problem of evil: a critique of Craig's Molinist soteriological theodicy" *Religious Studies* 39/4 (2003): 407-419; Kershner 2005, 103-123; Gregory MacDonald, "A Reply to William Lane Craig's Argument that Molinism is Compatible with Non-Universalism" in MacDonald 2008; Moreland 2009; and Knight 2010.

¹⁸ Kvanvig classifies Seymour as an issuantist alongside Adams, Kvanvig, Lewis, Stump, Swinburne and Walls in Kvanvig 2008, 425. Seymour states very clearly: "I will also reject ... the strategy of contemporary authors who deny one of the crucial assumptions of the argument from justice – that hell is a punishment." Seymour 2000a, 38. He further characterizes issuantism (which he calls separationism) as "too humane to be considered a serious alternative." Seymour 2000a, 83 and affirms: "We must retain the traditional notion of hell as a place of punishment, while remedying the faults in this view which make it susceptible to the argument from justice." Seymour 2000a, 84.

¹⁹ Craig 1989, 172-188. For the main differences between Craig and Seymour, see Seymour's critique of Craig in Seymour 2000b, 103-115.

²⁰ In a private conversation with the present author over lunch on April 20, 2012, William Lane Craig admitted that this account of the justice of everlasting punishment demands at least the theoretical possibility that someone in hell could cease to rebel against God and be released from hell, even if he doubts that anyone in fact ever will repent and be released. As far as I know, Craig has not committed this tentative rejection of the No Escape Thesis to writing.

Seymour rejects ECT because of what he perceives to be the problem of injustice inherent in traditional forms of ECT. He does not believe that the sins one commits in a lifetime of at most 100 years can warrant unending torment in hell. Seymour rejects attempts by traditionalists to defend ECT by analogies to the legal system where a criminal may be imprisoned for a much longer period of time than the time it took to commit the crime. For Seymour, the main issue is not the duration of either the wrongdoing or the punishment, but the seriousness of the wrongdoing – a factor that reaffirms the principle of proportionality. Moreover, Seymour dismisses the idea that because the reward for the godly in heaven is out of proportion to their merit, God could be defended for punishing the ungodly out of proportion to their desert. Seymour points out first that salvation is not something that one merits, and second, that one may always “err” on the side of grace. That is, God treating a person better than she deserves is not a violation of justice, whereas treating a person worse than he deserves is.

Likewise, Seymour rejects issuantism as a view “too humane to be considered a serious alternative.”²¹ This is because many atheists seem to be happy to live their lives without God. For God to allow them to be separated from God forever seems to go against the basic definition of hell, which Seymour defines as “an everlasting existence, each of whose moments is on the whole bad.”²² An issuantist may respond to Seymour that even atheists are the beneficiaries of God’s common grace during their life on earth, but that God will totally remove all traces of beneficent activity from the ungodly in hell. Seymour retorts that God could only do this for a limited period of time commensurate with the evil done by the ungodly; for God to remove common grace permanently from the ungodly would once again be a violation of the same principle of proportionality that Seymour criticized in ECT. If not for the purpose of retribution (which issuantists reject), then it’s not completely clear to Seymour why God would remove common grace from the ungodly.

In his freedom view of hell, Seymour creates a hybrid between ECT and issuantism supplemented with the Middle Knowledge Thesis,²³ the Continuing Sin Defense, the Not-so-Nasty Thesis, the Extra Chance Thesis, and possibly the Fixed Character Thesis.

²¹ Seymour 1998, 76; Seymour 2000a, 83.

²² Seymour 1998, 70.

²³ Seymour 2000a, 12.

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Hell is seen here partly as a natural consequence of a person's free choice to live without God. The pains of hell are twofold: the pains of sense (*poena sensus*) and the pain of loss (*poena damni*). The pains of sense are imposed on the ungodly by God as a form of retribution. The pain of loss however is the natural consequence of a person's free rejection of God.

There are, on the one hand, punishments imposed on the damned for their sins; these have traditionally been called pains of sense. On the other hand, there is the pain of loss, which consists in the unhappiness necessarily resulting from the person's separation from God. The pain of loss is not a punishment but is rather a natural consequence of sin, whereas the pains of sense are imposed by God in response to sin.²⁴

Seymour illustrates this distinction with the example of a man who regularly takes illegal drugs. He may be fined or imprisoned for breaking the law. He may also become addicted to the drugs. A fine or prison sentence is a punishment that is meted out on the man. It corresponds to the *poena sensus*. A possible addiction is a natural consequence of repeated and prolonged use. This undesirable state corresponds to the pain of loss or *poena damni*.

In contrast to the ECT of traditionalists like Augustine, Aquinas, Anselm and Jonathan Edwards, Seymour asserts that not every sin is serious enough to warrant everlasting unhappiness in hell, but that an unending finite punishment for an unending series of sins may be warranted.²⁵ With regard to this Continuing Sin Defense, Seymour writes,

On the freedom view the pains of hell are a result of the continuing free choice of the damned. No single sin deserves eternal punishment, nor does any finite number of sins. Since our earthly existence is temporary, we can only commit a finite number of sins in this life, and none of them is infinite in seriousness. So we cannot come to deserve eternal punishment because of these sins. Therefore, the pains of sense can only be eternal if the damned continue to sin eternally; and this eternal sin can only deserve continued punishment if the sin is committed freely. ... Likewise, the pain of loss is only eternal because the damned eternally choose to reject God through their sin.²⁶

Unlike Carson, however, Seymour adds the possibility of postmortem repentance and release from hell to his freedom view of hell. "[I]f the damned

²⁴ Seymour 2000a, 161.

²⁵ Seymour 1998, 82.

²⁶ Seymour 2000a, 161.

continue to sin freely, then they are free to cease sinning as well, and vice versa.”²⁷ Seymour insists that for endless punishment to be warranted for endless sins, people must continue to possess free will even after death. The idea that one’s eternal fate is fixed upon death and that freedom is rescinded presupposes that the finite number of sins committed in a lifetime warrants eternal punishment, an argument that makes the traditionalist views of Carson and Craig susceptible to charges of injustice. If people in hell are not free to stop sinning, then it would be unjust to continue punishing them.

Although it doesn’t play as prominent a role in Seymour’s theodicy, he does use a version of the Fixed Character Thesis to explain how there could still be some sense of finality in one’s destiny given the possibility of people in hell ceasing to sin and being released from hell (or for people in heaven to begin rebelling against God and be cast into hell).

The force of habit, and the vision of God they [the godly in heaven] enjoy, powerfully combine to make sin an unappealing option ... The power of bad habits that the wicked developed on earth and continue to develop in hell could explain why some people choose to remain in hell.²⁸

Seymour gives a synopsis of his freedom view:

To summarize, the freedom view is essentially liberal. Since it claims that the damned freely continue to sin, it must also allow that some of the damned could freely cease their sinning and join the blessed. On the freedom view, the souls who remain in hell have had ample opportunity to know what hell is like. Furthermore, like other versions of hell, the freedom view need not claim that the punishments of hell are torturous. It only entails that they are strong enough to render justice for the sins committed by the damned, and (by the definition of hell) that they are strong enough to make life on the whole unhappy. It is reasonable to think that such punishments are no greater than sufferings we experience in this life.²⁹

Seymour himself recognizes the exegetical shortcomings of his freedom view. “I admit that there are scriptural passages inconvenient for my thesis; for example, the parable of the wise and foolish bridesmaids”, whereupon he quotes from Matthew 25:1-3 and comments, “Presumably the interpretation of the parable needs to be stretched a bit in order to accommodate the

²⁷ Seymour 2000a, 162.

²⁸ Seymour 1998, 82.

²⁹ Seymour 2000a, 139.

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freedom view.”³⁰ Even so, Seymour has presented a rigorous philosophical defense whereby he strengthens a retributivist version of hell with some of the same supplements used by issuantists to fortify basic issuantism as a solution to the problem of hell.

Michael J. Murray

Although Michael J. Murray is not in the strict sense an issuantist since he does not reject the Retribution Thesis, he presents a hybrid view of the nature of hell where he combines the view of hell as the natural consequence of one’s choices and actions with the Retribution Thesis.³¹

Murray believes that while traditionalists have provided satisfactory answers to the problem of proportions between the finite sins of a lifetime and the everlasting duration of punishment in hell in positing both the Continuing Sin Defense and the status principle, Murray nonetheless believes that issuantism (which he calls the natural consequence model) has greater overall explanatory power, with the exception of one main problem – the atonement.

For Murray, if hell is a natural consequence of a person’s choice to love self rather than God, then it would make sense to conclude that heaven must be a natural consequence for those who love God rather than self. The problem is that no one has the good deeds necessary to warrant salvation; that’s where the atonement comes in, which Murray defines in terms of penal substitution.

There is no reason why we could not append to the [natural consequence] model the claim that in addition to destroying our ability to become God-lovers (God’s intended purpose for us) sin also carries a penalty, a penalty which we could not pay on our own. Without the payment being made we cannot receive the grace necessary to cure the disease.³²

Murray is perhaps correct in his observation that most (if not all) issuantists reject the penal substitution theory of the atonement although it would be possible – and possibly more consistent – to say that because Jesus paid the penalty for the sins of the world on the cross, no individual would have to pay for his or her own sins in hell. Seen this way, rejection of penal substitution would not be a necessary part of issuantism. What the ungodly experience in

³⁰ Seymour 2000a, 162.

³¹ Murray 1999, 287-317.

³² Murray 1999, 304.

hell is simply the natural consequence of a person's choice to refuse fellowship with God.³³

Murray hints that a life of persistent choices for evil makes people so maximally set in their ways that they "are no longer able to break the hold of the dispositions which they have acquired."³⁴ He believes that people in hell will have an intellectual recognition of how bad things are in their separation from God, but because of their fixed character for evil, they will have no desire to do anything to change their situation.

Murray likens the choice for hell to that of an addict who may recognize that his current, undesirable situation is a result of his choices, but who has the first-order desire to continue feeding his addiction at the same time as he has a second-order desire not to have the first-order desire to feed his addictions.

Justin Barnard writes that taken by itself, Murray's hybrid approach is inconsistent and fails to solve the moral problem of hell faced by other versions of ECT.³⁵ The natural consequence model of hell is plausible only when the inhabitants of hell are there of their own free will. Yet Murray's retention of the Retribution Thesis entails that the inhabitants of hell are there unwillingly.

Barnard proposes that this impasse can be resolved by applying Frankfurt's terminology. The inhabitants of hell are not there freely since their second-order volition (caused by the suffering of not fulfilling one's final cause as a human created in God's image, and in suffering the absence of

³³ Murray's observations may actually be more problematic for traditionalists who hold to penal substitution than they are for issuantists who reject penal substitution. On the principle of *ne bis in idem*, an incident of wrongdoing should not be punished twice. If Christ bore the punishment for the world's sins on the cross, then neither the godly nor the ungodly should be punished. Some traditionalists in the reformed tradition manage to circumvent this problem with the doctrine of limited atonement, whereby Christ only paid the penalty for those who will be saved; the ungodly will be left to pay for their own sins in hell. "In a sense, hell stands for everything the contemporary culture rejects - ... that all sin will ultimately be punished either via Christ the substitute or by the sinner in hell." Morgan and Peterson 2004, 239. Louis Berkhof writes: "It should also be noted that the doctrine that Christ died for the purpose of saving all men, logically leads to absolute universalism, that is, to the doctrine that all men are actually saved. It is impossible that they for whom Christ paid the price, whose guilt he removed, should be lost on account of that guilt." Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1958), 395. Similar ideas are defended by Charles Hodge in Hodge 1873. See also Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 577-578.

³⁴ Murray 1999, 298.

³⁵ Barnard 2010, 65-75.

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all the goods to which God is author) does not align with the person's first-order desire to self-love.

Wantons are beings who "have a first-order desires but who are not persons because, whether or not they have desires of the second order, they have no second-order volitions."³⁶ A wanton is something like an animal that has first-order desires (say to eat), but who lacks second-order desires or volitions related to what desires he does or does not have regarding the first-order desires. "The essential characteristic of a wanton is that he does not care about his will. His desires move him to do certain things, without its being true of him either that he wants to be moved by those desires or that he prefers to be moved by other desires."³⁷

Barnard suggests that the people in hell are wantons. They are there because they are maximally set in their ways of self-love without second-order volitions one way or another. Thus, they are in hell neither against their wills nor are they there freely. This is similar in many ways to Lewis' concept of people in hell as ex-humans. These wantons are the remains of what once were human beings with both first-order desires and second-order volitions.

Clark H. Pinnock

Clark H. Pinnock raises a number of important questions related to the doctrine of hell, including the fate of those who have never heard of Jesus, the necessity of explicit faith in Jesus Christ, the possibility of extra chances after death and the prospect that the number of people who will be condemned is relatively small. Like William Lane Craig, Pinnock raises these questions in the context of the theology of mission. Because Pinnock's theological starting point differs from Craig's on a number of points, Pinnock comes to a different set of conclusions. Perhaps the greatest difference between the theological starting points of Pinnock and Craig is Pinnock's rejection of Craig's molinism in favor of open theism. While Craig's Continuing Sin Defense leads him to a defense of ECT supplemented with the Middle Knowledge Thesis and the Fixed Character Thesis, Pinnock lands on a defense of conditionalism with the supplements of the Extra Chance Thesis, the Openness Thesis, and the Nearly-Empty Thesis.

Pinnock insists that he bases his conditionalism primarily on exegesis of the biblical texts. He writes that "scriptural backing is what I value most."³⁸ In

³⁶ Barnard 2010, 72.

³⁷ Frankfurt 1971, 11.

³⁸ Clark H. Pinnock, "The Nature of Hell" *Ex Auditu* 20 (2004): 54.

several texts, he examines what he believes to be biblical support for both the natural mortality of the soul and the ultimate destruction of the ungodly. I have already highlighted some of the main verses Pinnock uses in defense of his conditionalism in the section “Exegetical considerations for conditionalism” in chapter two above and will thus not devote further attention to them here.

A second major consideration for Pinnock’s theology of hell is his rejection of the inherent immortality of the human soul. Pinnock admits that it is not necessary to reject the immortality of the soul in order to affirm the ultimate annihilation of the ungodly. Even if the soul were inherently immortal, God could still destroy the souls of the ungodly in hell. It is Pinnock’s conviction that belief in the immortality of the soul skews one’s interpretation of the biblical material. “I believe that the real basis of the traditional view of the nature of hell is not the Bible’s talk of the wicked perishing but an unbiblical anthropology that is read into the text.”³⁹

Furthermore, Pinnock sees a serious moral problem with ECT. “Christian theology simply cannot depict God acting like a bloodthirsty monster who maintains an everlasting Auschwitz for his enemies whom he will not even allow to die.”⁴⁰ In light of the fact that even many traditionalists regard the idea of ECT as repugnant, Pinnock asks whether a Christian would really want to emulate a god who would act in such a way.

Pinnock goes on to question the justice of ECT.

Did a sinner ever visit everlasting suffering on God so as to justify unending pain? Did anyone ever cause God or his own neighbour everlasting pain and loss? Of course not. No human being has the power to do such harm. No finite set of misdeeds that the sinner has done can justify an infinite penalty.⁴¹

Pinnock concludes that the disproportion between one’s finite sins and a putative infinite punishment in hell would ascribe to God a great injustice. It is his conviction that conditionalism preserves justice; people are punished in proportion to their wrongdoing, then pass out of existence.⁴²

³⁹ Pinnock 1992a, 147.

⁴⁰ Pinnock 2004, 55.

⁴¹ Pinnock 2004, 55.

⁴² In *Unbounded Love* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1994) Pinnock writes (with co-author Robert C. Brow): “[H]ell cannot be viewed as a vindictive, retributive punishment. Since Jesus bore the sins of the world, we know that God is not in the business of punishing people. Jesus died so that he would not have to do that. Therefore, hell has to be more a matter of self-destruction, the logical result of final rejection of God. ... Hell is not retributive

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A final part of Pinnock's critique of ECT is a metaphysical objection. It is his belief that the doctrine of ECT leads to a form of cosmological dualism where evil and rebellion continue forever in eternal opposition to the reign of God. "

Surely the biblical picture is that of Jesus completely victorious over sin and death, suffering and Satan, and all those enemies consumed in the lake of fire and second death. Only if evil, death, devils and the wicked go into oblivion does history issue in unqualified victory.⁴³

Without God's final victory over all evil "destroying every rule and every authority and power" Pinnock questions how God could then be considered "all in all" (1 Corinthians 15:24-28).

Pinnock's conditionalism by itself may still fail at providing a satisfactory answer to the problem of hell. This may be why Pinnock supplements his basic conditionalism with the Openness Thesis, the Nearly-Empty Thesis and the Extra Chance Thesis.

Regarding the Nearly-Empty Thesis, Pinnock argues for what he calls the optimism of salvation.⁴⁴ Even though Pinnock rejects universal salvation,⁴⁵ he is adamant that God's desire for universal salvation must entail universal access to salvation. God is a God of love who does not sit passively by while large numbers of people perish. Rather, God is a God who patiently and tirelessly seeks reconciliation with people. This optimism of salvation is

punishment." Pinnock and Brow 1994, 88. This rejection of the Retribution Thesis would mean that Pinnock would actually be an issuantist who supplements basic issuantism with conditional immortality and ultimate annihilation. It is surprising that this rejection of the Retribution Thesis does not even warrant mention in any of his major works on the doctrine of hell. In *Four Views on Hell* he criticizes the traditionalist teaching of hell as everlasting conscious retribution (Pinnock 1992a, 153), but only for being out of proportion to a person's wrongdoing in life, not for being retributive *per se*. A similar line of reasoning is found in "The Nature of Hell" where he writes: "A just God would not punish a sinner with a punishment beyond his deserving. And what purpose would be served by endless and totally unredemptive suffering?" (Pinnock 2004, 55). Given the absence of any rejection of the Retribution Thesis in any of Pinnock's major works on hell and the fact that *Unbounded Love* was co-authored with Robert C. Brow, one may legitimately wonder whether the rejection of the Retribution Thesis in *Unbounded Love* was written by Pinnock or Brow. Since both authors are now deceased, it would be seemingly impossible to determine exactly who was behind this rejection of the Retribution Thesis. Fully cognizant of this ambiguity, I have nonetheless chosen to classify Pinnock as a conditionalist – a perspective for which he was a well-known defender – and not as an issuantist.

⁴³ Pinnock 1992a, 154-155.

⁴⁴ Pinnock 1992c, 17-47.

⁴⁵ Pinnock 1992a, 141-142; Pinnock and Brow 1994, 87-88.

rooted in a number of global covenants God establishes with people. In each case, God calls an individual or group of people for the purpose of relaying salvation to many others. Even the calling of Israel as God's chosen people is not for the purpose of excluding all others, but so that the blessings of salvation may be conveyed to all humanity; they are called to a ministry of redemptive servanthood. Salvation does not come exclusively through a conscious confession of Jesus Christ; the important thing is faith in God that expresses itself in a proper response to whatever revelation one has accessible. Thus, a person with only knowledge of general revelation can make a positive response to God on the basis of that general revelation and be saved. The same is true for those who have access to more complete presentations of the gospel in various forms of special revelation.

Pinnock rejects the Middle Knowledge Thesis on the grounds that God saving a person on the basis of a putative middle knowledge about how people would believe in other circumstances in which they had heard the gospel would mean that some people would be saved without any faith at all.⁴⁶ This need not be a problem for Pinnock, who believes in the Extra Chance Thesis, that people will be granted a postmortem opportunity to respond to the gospel.

As to the Extra Chance Thesis, Pinnock reminds us that observation tells us that not everyone has access to the gospel in this life. Therefore Pinnock concludes that postmortem opportunities for salvation must be given to those who have lacked them in this life.⁴⁷ He is careful to point out, however, that he believes that if a person has had a clear gospel presentation in this life, a clear confession of faith is necessary and no further opportunity will be given after death. Postmortem chances for salvation will be given to those who have never made a definitive rejection of faith in Christ – regardless of how much knowledge the person has had about Christ. For Pinnock there are several important considerations here: first, everyone will encounter Christ after death. Second, there is no reason to assume that God who is loving and gracious towards all before death would cease to be so once a person is dead. Third, the postmortem encounter with God will not signal a great change of mind; it will be a confirmation of the direction a person was already headed in life.

⁴⁶ Pinnock 1992c, 160-161.

⁴⁷ Pinnock 1992c, 168-172.

Conclusion on Non-Issuantist Views of Hell with Supplementary Theses

In this chapter I have highlighted the work of three traditionalists and one conditionalist. None of these scholars rejects the Retribution Thesis, yet all seek to provide coherent solutions to the problem of hell by use of some of the same supplements also used by issuantists.

I have chosen not to give detailed critiques of these four scholars. While there may be room for legitimate critique of some of the details in each of the theories presented, it would appear that any critique strong enough to render these theories of hell incoherent would have to attack key presuppositions of the system, not so much the coherence of the various elements of the system. For instance, one may have serious objections to molinism or open theism as explanations of divine foreknowledge on grounds that are extraneous to the theories of hell presented in this chapter. On that basis, a critic may reject the theories of Craig, Seymour or Pinnock. If for the sake of argument one accepts molinism or open theism, then the theology of hell presented by these scholars may be logically consistent and may constitute a reasonable answer to the problem of hell, or at least as good as any of the supplemented issuant conceptions of hell presented by Walls, Swinburne, Kvanvig or others.

7

CONCLUSION

“To hell I thought we were returning.” – Dante Alighieri, *Inferno* 34:81.

Nobody likes the doctrine of hell. Even among traditionalists who defend ECT, there is a certain repulsion at the idea that God would condemn perhaps a large portion of the world’s population to everlasting torment in hell. Nonetheless, traditionalists, conditionalists, universalists and issuantists, although they all conceive of hell in very different terms, strive to show how belief in a loving, omnipotent God can be reconciled with the prospect of certain people ending up in hell.

This problem of hell has been expressed in terms of a set of incompatible statements:

1. An omnipotent God could create a world in which all moral agents freely choose life with God.
2. An omnibenevolent God would not create a world with the foreknowledge that some (perhaps a significant proportion) of God’s creatures would end up in hell.
3. An omniscient God would know which people will end up in hell.
4. Some people will end up forever in hell.

Scholars deal with this putative incompatibility by redefining one or more of these statements. Regarding divine omnipotence (1), some scholars have advanced what has come to be called the Free Will Defense, the idea that human freedom is such a great good that nothing – not even God – could rightfully violate it. Indeed, God’s refusal to violate human freedom is seen as an expression of divine goodness. It is, as we have seen, little consensus that our moral intuitions would value freedom higher than existence if that existence were characterized by the torments of an unending hell.

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The definition of God's goodness (2) is somewhat expanded by issuantists (*inter alia*) who maintain that even hell must be an expression of the love of God. God continues to love every person, but the experience of God's love may be painful to those who reject it.¹ Likewise, some defenders of ECT expand the definition of God's goodness by stating that damnation to hell may at first appear to be something bad, but because of its roll in God's greater victory over evil, it becomes something good.

Regarding the third proposition above, it may be argued that open theists (regardless of view on hell) redefine divine omniscience as it has traditionally been understood, such that not even an omniscient God could know who (if any) will end up forever in hell.

The claim that some people will end up forever in hell (4) has been called into question or redefined by universalists, conditionalists, annihilationists and issuantists on different grounds. Beginning with a definition of hell as eternal conscious torment, we see that hell consists of four possible theses:²

(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.

(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.

Conditionalists, annihilationists, universalists and issuantists all call into question at least one – and possibly several – of the basic tenets of ECT. Universalists reject at least H1 and possibly some combination of H2, H3 and H4 as well. Conditionalists and annihilationists challenge the temporal duration of hell as understood by H2 with a further possible rejection of H3.

The focus of this dissertation has been on issuant views of hell presented in contemporary Anglo-American philosophical theology. Issuantists charge that as long as traditionalists and conditionalists retain the Retribution

¹ In this sense there appears to be a difference between thinkers like Kreeft and Tacelli, Ware and Bulgakov, who claim that God never ceases in expressing his love even to the ungodly, and Swinburne and Lewis, who see in *poena damni* the absence of all the blessings God wishes to give to people, including the love of God.

² Kvanvig 1993, 19.

Thesis, they fail to provide a satisfactory answer to the problem of hell. Issuantists thus reject at a minimum H4 and possibly H3.³

Inspired by C.S. Lewis, the first modern thinker to my knowledge to present what we today can call an issuant view of hell, a considerable number of contemporary scholars have done much to develop issuantism into a serious interpretation of the doctrine of hell.

Distilling the essence of issuantism from the works of a wide range of issuantist scholars, I have shown in chapter four that basic issuantism by itself – with its rejection of the Retribution Thesis – does not provide an adequate answer to the problem of hell. The issuantist scholars themselves, however, recognize this weakness and add a wide range of possible supplements to their basic issuantism. Some of these supplemented versions of issuantism succeed in presenting coherent answers to the problem of hell through a redefinition of some elements of the duration, quality, purpose and finality of hell.

One of the main objections issuantists have raised against ECT and conditionalism has been the charge that conceptions of hell that presuppose a retributive purpose for hell fail at providing satisfactory answers to the problem of hell. In this dissertation I have argued that the issue of retribution is not the main issue for determining whether an answer to the problem of hell is successful or not. Indeed, I concluded there that all non-retributive explanations of the purpose of hell – with the possible exception of restoration – appear to presuppose certain notions of desert and retributive justice that are inconsistent with the issuantist rejection of the Retribution Thesis.

In chapter six I have highlighted the work of three traditionalists and one conditionalist who use some of the same supplements as issuantists to strengthen their theologies of hell in answering the problem of hell. My conclusion there was that with the addition of some of these supplements, in particular various versions of the Extra Chance Theses, Nearly-Empty Thesis, Irrationality Thesis and Fixed-Character Thesis (when combined with a compatibilist definition of human freedom), versions of ECT and conditionalism can be advanced that succeed just as well in presenting coherent answers to the problem of hell as those advanced by issuantists who make use of the same supplements. It would thus appear that it is the

³ Both Swinburne and Kvanvig also call into question H2 in allowing for the possibility that people in hell may choose cessation of existence rather than perpetual existence in hell.

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supplements and not the larger categories of ECT, conditionalism or issuantism that make or break the theory.

The main question for all scholars seeking to provide a coherent answer to the problem of hell would seem to be whether God can be justified in condemning some people (or allowing some people to exile themselves) to hell. I believe that I have shown that issuantists, traditionalists and conditionalists can all present satisfactory justifications for God's actions regardless of whether one conceives of these actions as retributive or not. Thus the issuantist critique of non-issuant views of hell is not warranted in every case, especially where ECT and conditionalism are supplemented along similar lines as supplemented issuantism.

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GLOSSARY

- ANNIHILATIONISM.** The view that the souls of the ungodly will eventually cease to exist. There may be a number of reasons for this: the natural mortality of the human soul, an act of divine judgment in which the immortal soul is destroyed, or the soul's natural inability to survive the death of the body. The term annihilationism is sometimes used interchangeably with **CONDITIONALISM**.
- ANTI-UNIVERSALISM THESIS (H1).** A key component of **ETERNAL CONSCIOUS TORMENT** (Kvanvig 1993) whereby some persons are consigned to hell.
- APOKATASTASIS (PANTŌN).** The view closely related to **UNIVERSALISM** that all of creation will eventually be restored to fellowship with God. In the Greek New Testament the term is found only in Acts 3:21. *Apokatastasis* is commonly associated with the thought of Origen (ca. 185 – ca. 251 CE) and Gregory of Nyssa (fourth century CE), among others.
- BASIC ISSUANTISM.** A category of non-universalistic views on hell characterized by three trademarks: the integration of divine motivations for heaven and hell in the love of God, **LIBERTARIAN HUMAN FREEDOM** and a rejection of the **RETRIBUTION THESIS**.
- CHOICE MODEL OF HELL.** Another name for **ISSUANTISM**. Kvanvig uses this label in *Destiny and Deliberation* (Kvanvig 2011).
- COMPATIBILISM.** The view of human freedom whereby a soft form of determinism is compatible with human freedom and moral responsibility. “[A] compatibilist contends that an agent is free (and morally responsible) just in case his actions are the result of his own desires and intentions exercised without external coercions or constraints.” (Cowan 2011: 417).
- CONDITIONALISM.** The idea that human souls are not inherently immortal. The souls of those who do not receive eternal life as a gift of God through faith will eventually cease to exist, either as a consequence of the soul's natural mortality or as an act of judgment from God. Sometimes used interchangeably with **ANNIHILATIONISM**.

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CONDITIONALIST EVENTUAL EXTINCTIONISM. The view that “both the wicked and the good are resurrected, and that the wicked suffer God’s judgment until they are finally extinguished, the punishment being proportionate to their sin.” (Harmon 1992: 197). See CONDITIONALISM.

CONDITIONALIST UNIRESURRECTIONISM. The view that “man is naturally mortal and immortality is given through the gospel only to the righteous in the next life; the wicked who do not respond to Christ are not resurrected since death is their judgment.” (Harmon 1992: 197). See ANNIHILATIONISM.

CONSEQUENCE MODEL OF HELL. See ISSUANT VIEW / ISSUANTISM.

CONTINUING SIN DEFENSE. The view sometimes held by advocates of the ETERNAL CONSCIOUS TORMENT model, that the ungodly deserve infinite punishment in hell because they continue to commit an infinite number of sins even while they are in hell. The Continuing Sin Defense was likely first developed by Thomas Aquinas.

COUNTERFACTUALS (OF CREATURELY FREEDOM). Contingent propositions about what people would freely do given a particular set of circumstances. Counterfactuals often have the form ‘If subject S were in circumstances C, S would freely do action A.’ Sometime also known as contingent conditionals.

ECT. See ETERNAL CONSCIOUS TORMENT.

ESCAPISM. A supplement sometimes added to BASIC ISSUANTISM whereby the people in hell will have possibly endless opportunities to repent of their sin and escape (or be released) from hell. Escapism as a supplement to basic issuantism should not be confused with uses of the term escapism within psychology and literary criticism.

ETERNAL CONSCIOUS TORMENT (ECT). A theory of hell with widespread acceptance in the history of Western Christian theology that the ungodly will be punished in a conscious state of mind in an everlasting hell. Sometimes called TRADITIONALISM.

ETERNAL EXISTENCE THESIS. See EXISTENCE THESIS (H2).

EXISTENCE THESIS (H2). A key component of ETERNAL CONSCIOUS TORMENT (Kvanvig 1993) whereby “hell is a place where people exist, if they are

consigned there.” In Kvanvig (1997) he calls this the ETERNAL EXISTENCE THESIS.

EXTRA CHANCE THESES. A number of supplements sometimes added to BASIC ISSUANTISM whereby people receive at least one (and possibly an infinite number) of postmortem chances to be saved. The extra chance(s) may be granted immediately after death, at the time of judgment or even in hell itself. The Extra Chance Theses are posited as answers to the problems raised by bad RELIGIOUS LUCK.

FIRST-ORDER DESIRE. As used by Harry Frankfurt (1971), a first-order desire is an immediate longing for something. For example, a person may have a first-order desire to eat a second piece of pie or a first-order desire to go shopping with friends. Compare with SECOND-ORDER DESIRE.

FIXED CHARACTER THESIS. The view that the formation of an evil character explains how people can chose to remain in hell.

FRANKFURT-STYLE COUNTEREXAMPLE. A type of hypothetical situation developed (or inspired) by Harry Frankfurt that seeks to disprove PAP by showing that a person may have freedom of the will and thus be morally responsible even though he may not have freedom of action due to possible external manipulation.

FREE WILL DEFENSE (FWD). An argument developed by Plantinga (1974, 1977) to explain a possible divine motivation for allowing evil. It is argued that free will is a great good; so great, in fact, that it justifies the existence of whatever moral evil may occur as a result of human freedom. Since God desires to bring about a world in which the greater good of human freedom obtains, God cannot create a world in which human creatures are both free and in which there is no evil.

FREEDOM VIEW OF HELL. Charles Seymour’s name for his theodicy of hell which supplements ECT with the EXTRA-CHANCE THESIS.

HEAVEN. A general term used to denote a state of bliss that the godly will enjoy after death in the presence of God. In this work I do not take a specific stance as to whether heaven is to be enjoyed in a recreated earth or in some non-physical state. Nor do I take a position on whether the godly will enjoy heaven in the intermediate state or only after the resurrection of the body.

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HELL. Unless further precision is warranted by the context, I use the term hell in a general sense to denote a negative state experienced after death by the ungodly.

INCOMPATIBILISM. The view that human freedom is incompatible with determinism. Incompatibilism takes two possible forms: LIBERTARIANISM that denies determinism and hard determinism that denies human freedom.

IRRATIONALITY THESIS. Because of LIBERTARIAN HUMAN FREEDOM, God must allow people to make irrational choices even if those irrational choices entail that they end up in hell.

ISSUANT VIEW / ISSUANTISM. A category of non-universalistic views of hell that distinguish themselves from non-issuant views of hell by the three *sine qua non* trademarks of BASIC ISSUANTISM with the possible addition of at least one of the following supplements: the NOT-SO-NASTY THESIS, the LESS-THAN-HUMAN THESIS, the NEARLY-EMPTY THESIS, the EXTRA CHANCE THESES, the FIXED CHARACTER THESIS, the IRRATIONALITY THESIS, the MIDDLE KNOWLEDGE THESIS, or the OPENNESS THESIS.

LESS-THAN-HUMAN THESIS. The view that one natural consequence of a person's rejection of God is the loss of the goods with which God endows people. The loss of these goods means the ultimate loss of humanity for the formerly human denizens of hell.

LIBERTARIAN HUMAN FREEDOM / LIBERTARIANISM. An INCOMPATIBILIST concept of human freedom where an action can only be said to be free if it was not determined by any prior causes. Definitions of libertarianism often include some concept of the PRINCIPLE OF ALTERNATIVE POSSIBILITIES (PAP).

LOSING ONE'S SOUL. A term used by Swinburne, Kvanvig and others to designate the process of developing a fixed evil character or becoming less than human.

MCTAGGART'S DILEMMA. The argument proposed by John McTaggart (1906) that there is no good reason for a person to believe in hell. The only reasonable grounds for belief are empirical evidence or credible testimony. Since there is no empirical evidence for the existence of hell, any purported knowledge of it must come from revelation. If hell is a totally horrific state for those who are in hell and if God is the one

responsible both for the creation of hell and for damning some people to hell, then God must be very vile. The testimony of a very vile being is not credible. Thus there is no good reason for belief in hell.

METAPHYSICAL LIBERTARIAN HUMAN FREEDOM. See LIBERTARIAN HUMAN FREEDOM.

MIDDLE KNOWLEDGE (*SCIENTIA MEDIA*). God's knowledge of the truth value of the COUNTERFACTUALS OF CREATURELY FREEDOM. In other words, it is God's knowledge of what anyone would freely do in any given set of circumstances in any possible world. It is called middle knowledge since it logically stands between God's natural knowledge of things that are necessarily true and God's free knowledge of contingent truths that come about as a result of God's creative choice. Middle knowledge is pre-volitional like God's natural knowledge, but knowledge of contingent truths like free knowledge.

MIDDLE KNOWLEDGE THESIS. Based on God's MIDDLE KNOWLEDGE of the COUNTERFACTUALS OF CREATURELY FREEDOM, God actualizes a world in which the optimal ratio of saved to lost is realized.

MOLINISM. The view developed by Luis de Molina (1535-1600) that seeks to harmonize divine providence with LIBERTARIAN HUMAN FREEDOM by positing that God has MIDDLE KNOWLEDGE.

NATURAL CONSEQUENCE MODEL OF HELL. See ISSUANT VIEW / ISSUANTISM. This term is used *inter alia* by Barnard 2010 and Murray 1998.

NEARLY-EMPTY THESIS. Hell will be populated by only a small number of irredeemably evil beings. The dividing line between the Nearly-Empty Thesis and UNIVERSALISM is not always clearly defined. Many hopeful universalists would nonetheless ascribe to the possibility that if the ANTI-UNIVERSALISM THESIS (H1) ends up being true, that only a small number of people will be there.

NO ESCAPE THESIS (H3). A key component of ETERNAL CONSCIOUS TORMENT (Kvanvig 1993) whereby "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."

NON-ISSUANT VIEWS OF HELL. Whereas ISSUANT VIEWS of hell are characterized by three necessary trademarks, the rejection of any one of these characteristics is sufficient to label a view as non-issuant.

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UNIVERSALISM is also considered a non-issuant view of hell even when the universalist affirms the three trademarks of issuantism.

NOT-SO-NASTY THESIS. The view that people end up in hell because of their free choices. The people in hell are content with their situation since they have received what they genuinely want.

OPEN THEISM. An arminian view of divine foreknowledge whereby God can be said to be omniscient in that God knows everything that is logically possible for God to know. God does not know, however, what people will freely do in the future; that is COUNTERFACTUALS OF CREATURELY FREEDOM have no truth value.

OPENNESS THESIS. The idea based on OPEN THEISM that God's character and actions in creating the world are vindicated by the fact that God did not know prior to the creative act which if any free moral agents would end up in hell.

OPTIMAL GRACE. A term used by Walls to designate the optimal amount of influence toward good that God can exercise on a person's will without destroying the person's freedom. If optimal grace is not given during this lifetime, it will be provided after death.

PAP. See PRINCIPLE OF ALTERNATIVE POSSIBILITIES.

PARTICULARISM. A view within the theology of religions that salvation only comes through faith in Jesus Christ. This view is based on the exclusive claims of Christ in John 14:6 and on the claims by the apostles on behalf of Jesus in Acts 4:12. In some authors particularism is called Christian exclusivism.

POENA DAMNI. The pain of loss. This is the existential suffering a person experiences in hell due to separation from God and the loss of the image of God.

POENA SENSUS. The pain of the senses. This is the physical suffering a person experiences in hell that is related to the resurrection of the body.

PRINCIPLE OF ALTERNATIVE POSSIBILITIES (PAP). Part of a standard definition of libertarian free will. An agent is free if, *ceteris paribus*, one at the time of action has the possibility of doing otherwise in a particular situation.

PROBLEM OF HELL. A soteriological variation of the problem of evil whereby there is a perceived inconsistency between the following premises:

An omnipotent God could create a world in which all moral agents freely choose life with God.

An omnibenevolent God would not create a world with the foreknowledge that some (perhaps a significant proportion) of God's creatures would end up in hell.

An omniscient God would know which people will end up in hell.

Some people will end up forever in hell.

A satisfactory answer to the problem of hell must seek to harmonize these premises. The problem of hell is perhaps more problematic for Christian theology than the related problem of evil, since according to the problem of evil, suffering in this life can be justified by belief in a final justice after death.

PROGRESSIVE VIEW OF HELL. A term used by Eric Reitan (2003) to designate the ISSUANT VIEW / ISSUANTISM.

PUNISHMENT THESIS. See RETRIBUTION THESIS.

PURGATORY. In some classical formulations, purgatory was seen as the postmortem state in which people who die in a state of grace are punished for unshriven sins and where one atones for the temporal effects of forgiven sins. Among some issuantists, however, purgatory becomes a step in the process of sanctification whereby a person develops the godly character requisite to enjoy eternal life in the presence of God.

RELIGIOUS LUCK. The view that a person's degree of responsibility for her religious faith or lack thereof goes beyond the degree to which she controls it. These circumstances make it easier or harder for a person to believe in God and develop a life of virtue. Religious luck is influenced by factors such as genetics, nurture and culture. Religious luck is closely related to the concept of moral luck, whereby the degree of a person's moral responsibility is dependent upon factors over which a person has no control.

RETRIBUTION THESIS (H4). A key component of the ETERNAL CONSCIOUS TORMENT (Kvanvig 1993) whereby the "justification for and purpose of

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hell is retributive in nature, hell being constituted so as to mete out punishment to those whose earthly lives and behavior warrant it.” In Kvanvig (1997) he calls this the PUNISHMENT THESIS.

SECOND-ORDER DESIRE. As used by Harry Frankfurt (1971), a second-order desire is a desire about a desire. Second-order desires are the results of reflections about FIRST-ORDER DESIRES. For example, a person may have conflicting first-order desires to eat a second piece of pie and to lose weight. A second-order desire would be a desire that one didn't have the first-order desire to eat a second piece of pie.

SECOND-ORDER VOLITION. As used by Harry Frankfurt, a second-order volition is the wish that a certain FIRST-ORDER DESIRE would be one's will. For instance, the will that the desire to lose weight would be stronger than the desire for a second piece of pie.

SELF-DETERMINATION THESIS. The view that a person ends up in hell as a result of a freely-chosen course of action, not because of external causes such as divine wrath or punishment. The Self-Determination Thesis is one alternative to the RETRIBUTION THESIS.

SEPARATIONIST VIEW OF HELL. A term used by Charles Seymour (1998, 2000) to designate ISSUANTISM.

SIMPLE FOREKNOWLEDGE. The idea that God knows everything that will happen in the future, regardless of whether God causes or foreordains such events.

SOTERIOLOGICAL PROBLEM OF EVIL. Another name for the PROBLEM OF HELL (Basinger 1992; Craig 1989).

STATUS PRINCIPLE. The view that the grounds for judging one's punishment in hell is not the severity of the sin itself, but the status of God, the one who is offended by all sin. Since God is an infinite being, all sins against the infinite being warrant an infinite punishment.

STRONG VIEW OF HELL. A term used by Kvanvig (1993) for the ETERNAL CONSCIOUS TORMENT view of hell. The strong view of hell is characterized by a combination of the ANTI-UNIVERSALISM THESIS (H1), the ETERNAL EXISTENCE THESIS (H2), the NO ESCAPE THESIS (H3), and the RETRIBUTION THESIS (H4).

TRADITIONALISM. A view of hell where the ungodly will suffer endless punishment in a conscious state of mind in hell. The term

traditionalism is often used by both defenders and critics of the view. See also ETERNAL CONSCIOUS TORMENT.

TRANSITIVITY OF MORAL RESPONSIBILITY. The idea that people are morally responsible for their actions even in the absence of LIBERTARIAN FREEDOM if their lack of freedom is caused by free choices for which they are morally responsible. For instance, a father is morally culpable for not keeping a promise to attend his daughter's birthday party if the father is in jail for robbing a convenience store to get money to buy a birthday present for his daughter. The father is not free to attend the birthday party, but it is the father's fault that he is not free.

TRANSWORLD DAMNATION. A term introduced by William Lane Craig (1989) to designate the idea that the people who end up in hell would not be saved in any possible world in which they exist. Inspired by Alvin Plantinga's theory of transworld depravity (Plantinga 1974, 1977).

UNIVERSALISM. The view that all of creation will eventually enjoy the blessings of salvation and eternal fellowship with God.

WANTON. A term introduced by Harry Frankfurt (1971) for a person who has no SECOND-ORDER VOLITIONS. Even though wantons may have rational faculties of a high order, but aren't concerned with the desirability of their desires, or with what their wills ought to be. Wantons are consequently not persons. All animals, very young children and some adults are wantons.

WEAK VIEW OF HELL. A term used by Lindsey Hall (2003) to designate ISSUANTISM.

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Ramon W. Baker

Issuant Views of Hell in Contemporary Anglo-American Theology

In Christian theology, the doctrine of hell as eternal punishment presents a real problem: How can one reconcile belief in an omnipotent, omnibenevolent and omniscient God with the belief that some (perhaps a significant portion) of God's creatures will end up in an eternal hell?

Since the late twentieth century, a number of British and North American philosophical theologians, inspired by C.S. Lewis, have developed a new approach to answering the problem of hell. This present work seeks to systematize these "issuant" views of hell by distilling the essence of issuantist perspectives on hell: the insistence that both heaven and hell must issue from the love of God, an affirmation of libertarian human freedom and a rejection of retributive interpretations of hell. An evaluation of the success of these issuant views of hell in providing satisfactory answers to the problem of hell is also presented.

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