

АНОТАЦІЯ

(до магістерської роботи)

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A Systematic Theological Analysis of the Problem of Hell as a Mystery of Faith in Christian

The problem of Hell, consists of reconciling God's benevolence, justice and providence with the concept of Hell. The juxtaposition of God's mercy with that of an eternal punishment poses a difficulty for believers while also serving as a powerful argument against Christianity.

In response to the problem of Hell, apologists have taken different approaches to the doctrine, including undermining the doctrine with universalism, or defending it from the perspective of justice and free will. This thesis attempts to illustrate how none of the supposed resolutions or explanations are sufficient in explaining the doctrine in a way that resolves the matter, and therefore concludes that Hell should be considered a mystery.

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List of Symbols and Abbreviations

CCC: Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1992

CUCC: Catechism of the Ukrainian Catholic Church: Christ- Our Pascha, 2016

Introduction

The problem of evil presents a dilemma for theologians and believers. The question of how God could allow evil and suffering to thrive is a question that has led many to doubt or even deny God's existence. Apologists, such as C.S. Lewis, Alvin Platinga, and Peter Kreeft, often suggest that the reason God allows suffering to occur is that He is able to bring about a greater good from such suffering (e.g. suffering may exist as a penance or a learning experience, be that for humanity or an individual). In the case of Hell, however, this issue takes on a new dilemma, because while theologians may speculate plausible answers as to why temporal sufferings may bring about a greater good, such typical explanations are not relevant in an eternal setting. For this reason, while Hell is relevant in the much wider question of the problem of evil, it serves as its own separate issue, known as the problem of Hell. Although apologists explain Hell as a testament of free will or God's justice in the form of punishment, such explanations present difficulties when considering God's benevolence and omniscience. The purpose of this thesis is to observe and analyze these explanations, and then explain how the problem of Hell may be understood as a mystery of the Christian faith.

When concerning the Problem of Hell, perhaps the most important clarification is what is meant by Hell. The teaching most commonly assumed regarding Hell is what is called infernalism, the belief in a permanent everlasting punishment. For some theologians and Christians, however, Hell is seen as a temporary state of existence, where the soul enters either before reaching apokatastasis (universal reconciliation) or annihilation.¹ In the case of apokatastasis, the argument most often presented is that God's benevolence overpowers evil and the human will cannot refuse such good, thus rendering salvation inevitable and free will arguably insignificant. In this scenario, Hell is

¹Brad Jersak, "Presumption and Possibilities: Renovating Hell; Theological Options for Divine Judgment," in *Her Gates Will Never Be Shut: Hope, Hell, and the New Jerusalem*, (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2009).

equivalent to Purgatory, since it punishes souls for their sins, but prepares them for everlasting life. In the case of annihilationism, or sometimes alternatively called conditional immortality,² the destruction of the soul occurs after the soul has been properly punished in Hell. The soul is not conditioned for salvation, and thus is disposed of, but is preserved from the everlasting pains of Hell. Finally, there is also a fourth model of Hell, in which one is able to leave Hell once placed there. This is known as second chance theory.³ While (as Jeffrey Trumbower notes) there has been some scholarly work done that indicates that belief in annihilationism and apokatastasis were more common in the early Church, neither belief prevailed and neither is considered orthodox Catholic teaching.⁴ Among the four versions listed, only one version is palatable, and that is infernalism. In the case of annihilationism, apokatastasis, and second chance theory, the teachings are at odds with Catholic doctrine, as “the [Catholic] Church affirms the existence of Hell and its eternity,”⁵ and clarifies that the punishment of Hell is “eternal fire” and “eternal separation from God.”⁶ The word “eternal” is important in regards to punishment as it discredits annihilationism and puts to rest theories about second chances.

The second important question in answering the problem of Hell as a mystery, is defining what is meant by a mystery. The word mystery comes from the Greek word, *mysterion*,⁷ which can be translated to mean things “closed” or “secret.” While a certain element of God’s providence is always a mystery, in the

²George W. Sarris, “Chapter 2: What Are We Talking About Anyway?” in *Heaven's Doors: Wider Than You Ever Believed* (Trumbull, CT: GWS Publishing, 2017).

³Valery Kuzev, “The Problem of Hell and the Second Chance Theory,” (The Publishing house "Internauka", 2017), 1-14, https://www.academia.edu/10377324/THE_PROBLEM_OF_HELL_AND_THE_SECOND_CHANCE_THEORY.

⁴Jonathan Wright, “Hell and Its Afterlife: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives. Edited by IsabelMoreira and MargaretToscano. Pp. Xvi, 266, Farnham, Ashgate, 2010, The Problem of Hell: A Philosophical Anthology. Edited by Joel Buenting. Pp. Ix, 236, Farnham, Ashga,” *The Heythrop Journal* 56, no. 1 (May 2014), 159-160, <https://doi.org/10.1111/heyj.12192>.

⁵While unlikely, there may perhaps be some esoteric explanation of semantic or theological oversight of that would allow for annihilationism or apokatastasis to be true, be it in the authority of the texts quoted, or the language used, but regardless of such an explanation, this thesis argues from within a Catholic infernalist perspective, as that is at least the most dogmatically supportable position.

⁶*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd ed. (Vatican City: Vatican Press, 1997), 1035, <http://www.scborromeo.org/ccc.htm>.

⁷“Mystērion - Strong's Greek Lexicon (KJV),” Blue Letter Bible, accessed December 7, 2020, <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?t=kjv>.

sense that it is a secret or unknown, what is usually meant by a theological mystery, entails not just knowledge that the faithful do not know, but a concept that goes beyond human rationale and cannot be understood. *The Catholic Dictionary*⁸ defines it as such:

A divinely revealed truth whose very possibility cannot be rationally conceived before it is revealed and, after revelation, whose inner essence cannot be fully understood by the finite mind. The incomprehensibility of revealed mysteries derives from the fact that they are manifestations of God, who is infinite and therefore beyond the complete grasp of a created intellect.

What is important to note about this definition, is that mystery is defined as something that depends on revelation, whose inner essence cannot be understood, is incomprehensible, but still intelligible.⁹ This thesis argues that Hell, despite many apologetic efforts to rationalize Hell, is a mystery. That is as a theological concept, it is something whose inner essence cannot be understood or rationalized based on human reasoning alone.

The sources used in this thesis are eclectic and view the problem of Hell from a variety of different perspectives, including universalists, and secular critics of the doctrine. The approach given is an analysis of predominantly modern thinkers (Christian and non-Christian) done in order to make sense of the doctrine of Hell. Scripture and Church Fathers are referenced, but in a relatively minor manner, as this thesis is not primarily concerned with Biblical or Patristic exegesis. Catholic doctrines, rather, are assumed to be definitive interpretations, because the question posed is whether Hell, as a Catholic doctrine, is an element of Christian faith that can be rationalized on basis of humanity's freedom, God's providence, or justice. While this thesis is primarily interested in theology, it also includes sociology, psychology, and especially religious philosophy. While contrary stances and heretical positions are referenced and observed, the purpose is not to present a new doctrine concerning Hell or to challenge the existing doctrine. Rather, the

⁸*Catholic Dictionary*: "Mystery," Catholic Culture (Trinity Communications, 2020), <https://www.catholicculture.org/culture/library/dictionary/index.cfm?id=35021>.

⁹*Catholic Dictionary*: "Mystery."

purpose is to demonstrate how Hell poses a problem for a variety of different Christian creeds, and how this problem is recognized even amongst those who are critics of Christianity. This study attempts to observe the problem of Hell from a variety of different Christian traditions, while advocating for a position that is in-line with Catholic teaching. While Section 4 deals extensively with arguments put forward by universalists and hopeful universalists, this is done in order to demonstrate how it does not resolve the problem of Hell. The other sections address justice in regards to Hell, the ability to choose Hell, and God's providence in relation to Hell, in that order. The purpose is also not to answer the practical components to the question of who goes to Hell or what is necessary to go to Hell, though it does attempt to explain difficulties of justice in light of said questions. This thesis, overall, attempts to explain why the most difficult elements of the problem of Hell can only be explained as a mystery regardless of what creed one accepts.

According to philosopher Jonathan L. Kvanvig, the author of the book *The Problem of Hell*,¹⁰ the difficulty is present in two different variants, logical and epistemic.¹¹ In using either approach, skeptics may often ask why God allows for souls to go to Hell for all eternity, or how such a punishment could be just. The difference between the epistemic approach and the logical stance, is that the epistemic argument assumes that the doctrine on Hell is too difficult to be believed, or that it serves as a considerable counterpoint to the validity of Christianity or God's goodness. The logical stance, is stronger in that it holds that the existence of Hell does not merely undermine other elements of Christianity, or that it subjectively makes it difficult to believe, but that it is ultimately a contradiction that is incompatible with the claim that God is both omnibenevolent and omnipotent. The difference between the two positions is the nature of the claims surrounding the problem. Either the doctrine of Hell is seen as a subjective obstacle to faith, or it is seen as a teaching that is inherently flawed. In either

¹⁰Jonathan L. Kvanvig, *Problem of Hell* (New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

¹¹ Kvanvig, 4.

argument, the problem can be summarized as Hell is too cruel to be real.

In response, the two main defenses used by apologists for the rationality of Hell are freedom and justice. The argument on behalf of freedom is usually presented as though Hell is the proper theological consequence of free will. To put it simply, if God forced every soul to be with Him in Heaven, then they would not truly be free. Therefore, Hell exists as the choice and logical consequence for those who freely reject God. The second argument is that God cannot be just if he allows evil to go unpunished. While God is all-merciful, He is also all-just, so Hell as a punishment for sin is fitting. There is no action on humanity's part that merits salvation, so any rejection of God's grace can be seen as an action that results in damnation. Both of these arguments (and other explanations) are inadequate in thoroughly explaining eternal damnation, and the purpose of this thesis is to demonstrate such. The following section observes the latter argument concerning the perspective of justice.

Section 1:

Merit Eternal Damnation

1.1. Understanding Justice

If one argues that Hell is just, then one must understand what is meant by justice. In his writings, Plato discusses at length what justice is, in which he concludes that justice is when everyone tends to their own business and no one has what belongs to others or is deprived of what is their own.¹² Cicero more succinctly words the same idea that justice is “the virtue which assigns to each his due (*iustitia suum cuique distribuit*).”¹³ In reminiscence of both these definitions The Catholic Catechism defines justice as “the moral virtue that consists in the constant and firm will to give... [one’s] due to God and neighbor.”¹⁴ If any of these definitions are used, then this would mean that Hell, as a just punishment, is something that is due to the damned. Therefore, the damned have earned their fate. While the Bible is clear that God’s actions are just (Psalm 89:14), there are reasons to suppose that Hell differs from anything Plato ever defined as just, as what is earned in Hell, does not follow a normal human or societal understanding of justice.

1.1.1. Hell as unjust and cruel

The first difficulty with understanding justice in relation to Hell is that it is in no way apparent, from a finite perspective, how Hell is just. Cruelty is usually defined as a form of injustice, and yet the assertion that “Hell is cruel” is not a particularly novel assertion. By extension nor is the assertion that “God is cruel” novel among those who are critics of Christianity. When referring to Old Testament verses, 18th century deist thinker, Thomas Paine, refers to God as such,

¹²Plato, *Republic*: Book 4 trans. Paul Shorey, (Cambridge, MA Harvard University Press, 1969) Section 433a, 433e.

¹³Marcus Tullius Cicero, “On the Nature of the Gods - Book 3,” trans. Francis Brooks, Online Library of Liberty (Liberty Fund, Inc., 2004), <https://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/cicero-on-the-nature-of-the-gods>.

¹⁴CCC, 1807

Whenever we read the obscene stories, the voluptuous debaucheries, the cruel and torturous executions, the unrelenting vindictiveness, with which more than half the Bible is filled, it would be more consistent that we called it the word of a demon, than the word of God... I sincerely detest it, as I detest everything that is cruel.¹⁵

While Thomas Paine's words are written particularly with Old Testament passages in mind, they could easily be applied to an argument against the doctrine of Hell, as both sorts of arguments raise the objection that such a matter is an act of cruelty, not justice, on God's behalf. 20th century agnostic, analytical philosopher Bertrand Russel, expresses a similar feeling as that of Thomas Paine. In his own words, He states that "Hell-fire...[as a] punishment for sin, is a doctrine of cruelty. It is a doctrine that put cruelty into the world and gave the world generations of cruel torture."¹⁶ If cruelty is seen as a form of injustice, and Hell is cruel, then logically, it would follow that Hell is unjust. This specific criticism, that Hell is cruel, therefore unjust is not limited to opponents of Christianity. Catholic Philosopher, Alfred Freddoso, for instance, wrote that it was not obvious, "How... the existence of a benevolent and almighty God [is] to be reconciled with even the possibility of someone going to Hell..."¹⁷

1.1.2. Hell as just and necessary

In contrast with those who reject Hell for being too cruel of a doctrine, there are those who suggest that there could not possibly be justice without a Hell. Catholic, English philosopher, Peter Geach, in part for the same reason, considered the doctrine essential for anyone who acknowledges themselves as a Christian.¹⁸ This is most obvious in that it serves as a deterrent for bad behavior. If there is no Hell, then there is no incentive for good behavior. Historian, Martin E. Marty, recognized that this specifically the case for students in American public

¹⁵Thomas Paine, *The Age of Reason: Being an Investigation of True and of Fabulous Theology* (New York City, New York: D. M. Bennett: Liberal and Scientific Publishing House, 1877). 15.

¹⁶Bertrand Russell, "Why I Am Not a Christian," (The Bertrand Russell Society, 1927).
<https://users.drew.edu/~jlenz/whynot.html>.

¹⁷Jerry L. Walls, *Hell: The Logic of Damnation* (Notre Dame, In: University of Notre Dame Press, 1993), 4.

¹⁸Walls, 9.

schools.¹⁹ Even without this perspective, theologians still argue that Hell is justified for reasons other than deterrence. Theological lecturer, Peter Admirand, for instance, rejects universal salvation on the basis that victims are entitled to see justice done to those who harm them. While Admirand accepts the free will argument, He also insists that theodicy is achieved not by Christ's redeeming work, but by the existence of Hell. Hell, rather than creating a problem concerning cruelty, resolves an issue of how the deceased will receive justice.²⁰ Rather than being outraged by the punishment of eternal damnation, Peter Admirand is perplexed by those who think it is possible to forgive unrepentant sinners. Australian, Jesuit Philosopher, John Cowburn S.J., similarly argues that God does not take responsibility for man's action, but does have a responsibility to apply justice.²¹ In both John Cowburn and Peter Admirand's viewpoint, God cannot forgive someone who is unrepentant. One need not endorse Bertrand Russell's anti-theistic stance to recognize that the assertions held by Peter Admirand, John Cowburn, and countless other Christian thinkers, do not adequately answer Bertrand Russell's objection in regards to the problem of Hell. In fact, both Peter Admirand and John Cowburn's position could be seen in contrast with Christ on the cross who forgave unrepentant sinners when He said "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34, Douay Rheims).

1.2. Questioning what makes something just

Whether one accepts the premise that Hell is unjust because it is cruel, or just because it punishes sin, one of the primary issues with identifying what is just in regards to Hell, is understanding what metric is used in determining what is just. If someone suggests that God's word alone is enough to evaluate the matter, then there emerges what is called the "Euthyphro dilemma." This was initially observed by Plato in his Dialogues, but was later put forward in a monotheistic

¹⁹Walls, 7-8.

²⁰Sean A. Otto, "Review Essay: Theism, Evil, and the Search for Answers: Some Recent Scholarship on Theodicy and the Problem of Evil," *The Heythrop Journal* 56, no. 1 (November 2014), 137, <https://doi.org/10.1111/heyj.12171>.

²¹Otto, "Review Essay: Theism, Evil, and the Search for Answers."

context by the 17th/18th century, German, natural philosopher, Gottfried Wilhelm von Leibniz. The dilemma goes as follows: if something is good and just, "is [it] good and just because God wills it or [does] God will it because it is good and just?"²² In the case of the problem of Hell, the same dilemma can be rephrased as such: is Hell just because God permits it, or does God permit Hell because it is just? Here, the only prerequisite for something to be considered just is for God to assert it as such.

1.2.1. Establishing a standard for justice

The normal response to such an argument is that there is more to the justice of Hell than just an assertion of such. Sin is evil and therefore merits a punishment. Even Episcopalian universalist, MaryInyn McCord Adams²³ specifically states that certain actions are so horrendous they require post mortem satisfaction and that it would be irresponsible for God not to punish them.²⁴ Historian Alan Bernstein reflects on this same notion when he mentions that Hell emerged as a punishment for those who faced no consequence in this life.²⁵ What is true for both McCord Adams and Bernstein is that evil necessarily merits punishment, and the idea emerges due to the lack of punishment in this life. However, if this assertion is true, then this decidedly means that God's word alone does not render it just or unjust, but rather the justice in regards to Hell is based on the premise that sinful actions are evil, and therefore deserving of punishment. While God's word alone may be enough to know something is moral, there does seem to be a standard of morality that is understood as separate from God. While this standard of morality may come from God, it is distinct from God, Himself. If this were not the case, then the statement "God is good" would be rendered unintelligible or redundant, and would be tantamount to merely asserting that "God is God."

²²Leibniz, Gottfried Wilhelm. "Reflections on the Common Concept of Justice." SpringerLink. Springer, Dordrecht, January 1, 1989. https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-94-010-1426-7_60.

²³MaryInyn McCord Adams reveals herself to be a universalist in *Christ and Horrors*, 229-230.

²⁴Stephen Grover, "Religion and Morality," *Philosophical Investigations* 21 (1996), 181.

²⁵James T. Palmer, "Book Reviews: Hell and Its Rivals: Death and Retribution among Christians, Jews, and Muslims in the Early Middle Ages," *Early Medieval Europe* 27, no. 4 (2019), 591-593, <https://doi.org/10.1111/emed.12368>.

When evaluating the justice of Hell, there is also what is known as the is/ought fallacy. The is/ought fallacy is a fallacy originally asserted by 17th century, agnostic philosopher, David Hume that states that simply because something is a certain way, is no indication that it should or ought to be that way. Often the response to those who criticize the doctrine of Hell is to merely assert that is clearly a reality based on Scripture and Tradition. This is, as will later be discussed, demonstrably true. Hell is real and an essential part of Christian doctrine. However, if the faithful hold that the damned deserve Hell, because it is a just punishment for their sins, and then explain that it is a just punishment for their sins because they deserve Hell, then there is a form of tautology. Considering that God is all just, the faithful must presume that whatever the consequence for a sin is, it ought to be such. While there is no confusion or scandal to this statement, the statement alone does not answer the question of how Hell is just. To answer this semantical dilemma of what is and what ought to be is not the main purpose of this thesis, but it does demonstrate that there is a need to identify what is considered just in regards to eternal damnation, and that the assertion that Hell is just is true, but is not self-explanatory.

1.3. Questioning whether a standard of justice can apply to God

At the heart of the problem of Hell, is the problem of evil in attribution to God. Despite the Euthyphro Dilemma and the is/ought fallacy in application to Hell, there is a tendency for many philosophers and theologians to remove God from moral assessments. Dominican Philosopher, Brian Davies in his book, *The Reality of God and the Problem of Evil*,²⁶ discusses the issue of subjecting God to our moral assessments. The reason for this is God is not a “moral agent.” Former Anglican Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, makes this same assessment.²⁷ According to both theologians, Williams and Davies, God, as the author of all that exists, and the underlying transcendental being, is not subject to

²⁶Brian Davies, *The Reality of God and the Problem of Evil* (London: Continuum, 2015).

²⁷Stephen Grover, “Religion and Morality,” *Philosophical Investigations* 21 (1996), 181.

morality, as if He were a finite being with a choice. While Scripture describes God in anthropomorphic terms, that is in manner like that of a finite moral agent, He is only to be understood that way by analogy and not to be understood that way in metaphysical terms.²⁸ Rather, in His fullness of being, His existence and will is already perfect and perfectly oriented. While God's will is most certainly a free will, God's will is not a conflicted will. Similarly, God is not good and true, because He chooses to be, but rather He is goodness and truth, in being Himself. For this reason, Williams' argument states that there is no need for a theodicy at all.²⁹ Theodicy forces us to fit God within some moral framework, but as Kierkegaard's similarly affirms, God is someone who makes demands outside of human morality.³⁰ This is the fundamental problem, because for God to be outside of morality, is for God to not be all good and Holy as those are moral terms. If God is all good, and also outside of morality, this would be for Him to be something that contradicts the definition of His own being. Such a claim is blasphemous, as it permits for God to not only be "bad" in addition to good, but renders what constitutes as good in relation to God as arbitrary. Philosopher Gregory R. Peterson, in an essay summarizing theological approaches to determinism in science, echoes this same sentiment when he mentions in passing that, "a God who created a natural order only to violate it was repugnant to many Enlightenment thinkers."³¹ Similarly, if God creates a moral order only to violate it, then His acts would also be repugnant by the same standard.³² If anything said of God is said to be good merely by assertion, with no appeal to revelation or moral law, then it cannot be said to be incommensurably good, but is rather amoral or without morality. Thus it is not actually of God. The classic question presented to atheists concerning morality is then turned on its head. Rather than

²⁸David Bentley Hart, "The Moral Meaning of Creating Ex Nihilo," in *That All Shall Be Saved: Heaven, Hell, and Universal Salvation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019).

²⁹Stephen Grover, "Religion and Morality," *Philosophical Investigations* 21 (1996), 181.

³⁰Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, trans. Glenway Wescott (New York, NY: Harper & Brothers, 1932).

³¹Gregory R. Peterson, "God, Determinism, and Action: Perspectives from Physics," *Zygon* 35, no. 4 (2000), 883, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9744.00318>.

³²Gregory R. Peterson, "God, Determinism, and Action," 881-890.

how can atheists have morality without God, the question becomes how can morality exist alongside an a-moral view of God within religion?³³

1.3.1. God as consistent justice

If one argues in response, not that God is outside of good and evil, but that God's goodness is entirely incommensurable, and therefore entirely unknowable, then there is a question of how one can understand God as good, and how his decrees concerning Hell could be understood as good. Whether His goodness fits within human standards, should not be the concern, as humanity is not consistent or infallible on this judgment. Rather, to say God is infinitely good means He must surpass human goodness in His perfection. While Christ did assume an imperfect human nature in *kenosis* (Phil 2, 6-7), in regards to his morality, He is still all good in a moral sense. This is what is meant in the Roman Catholic, fourth Eucharistic Prayer that says Christ shared in human nature "in all things but sin."³⁴ To say God is incommensurably good in order to resolve the problem of Hell, however, is more of a denial of the problem than a resolution. While this assertion is most assuredly true, that God is incommensurably good, the follow up discussion is problematic, since everything is rendered unintelligible. When accusations of evil are applied to God, the response is merely that He is so good that one cannot recognize that He is good, even if His acts concerning Hell appear horrendously evil. Rather than resolving the problem of Hell, it denies the existence of the problem, which is disingenuous. The problem is by nature something concerning human reasoning, since humans are the ones speculating the issue. The issue is not concerning God's nature in Himself. Axiomatically, any Christian can and should rightfully assume God is good and just, but if something, such as Hell appears in contrast with this assertion, it is incumbent on the apologist to reconcile the issue, not dismiss it.³⁵ The Second Vatican Council Dogmatic

³³Stephen Grover, "Religion and Morality," *Philosophical Investigations* 21 (1996), 181.

³⁴"IV Eucharistic Prayer," in *Missal*. iBreviary, [Visita News.va](http://www.ibreviary.com/m/messale.php?s=liturgia_eucaristica) accessed December 12, 2020, http://www.ibreviary.com/m/messale.php?s=liturgia_eucaristica.

³⁵*Catholic Dictionary*: "Mystery."

Constitution *Dei Verbum* clarifies this obligation in regards to exegetes when it says its their task “to work according to these rules toward a better understanding and explanation of the meaning of Sacred Scripture,” since Scripture helps to “clarify the mystery contained in [deeds wrought by God].”³⁶ While appeals to super rational reasoning are sometimes appropriate, they can also serve as fatalistic arguments, hence why there is a need dwell further.

Rather than supposing God may contradict morality in regards to Hell, the expectation for the supreme perfect being is that He perfectly fulfills morality. This does not mean He is limited to human understandings of morality, rather it means he cannot contradict essential moral principles, and be considered good. The criticism is not to suggest that humanity will always recognize God’s goodness, but to assert that claims about God's goodness should be in line with the good and the beautiful of His own moral teachings.³⁷ While God does not need to meet humanity’s expectation for what is moral or good, He does need to meet His own standards in order for His nature and being to be consistent, which is necessary for any moral claim concerning God and Hell to have any sense at all. While such a claim may seem to define God as a finite agent, or subject to human scrutiny, morality, is in definition, more than a finite reality. Rather morality, is defined as the principles concerning the distinctions in right and wrong behavior. This would mean that God’s “behavior” or more accurately, actions are always in accordance with what is good. For God to be against His own moral decrees would appear for Him to be against His own goodness, which is absurd. In regards to God’s pedagogy, there are instances in scripture where God’s precepts may seem contrary to His good nature [for instance, His command to stone rebellious teenagers (Deuteronomy 21:18-21)], these precepts are relative to particular situations, and the exceptions or changes to rules are part of a consistent moral

³⁶ Vatican II Council. "Dogmatic constitution on divine revelation: Dei verbum." Solemnly promulgated by His Holiness Pope Paul VI on November 18, 1965. Accessed September 5, 2018. http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651118_dei-verbum_en.html

³⁷The reason for this claim is that Divine Impassibility suggests God can’t change. The argument I am making is that God’s goodness must be consistent.

goodness, when considered in light of God's goodness and providence. There, however, is no contradiction in morality.

1.3.2. Hell as part of God's consistent or intrinsic justice

If one assumes Hell is a matter of consistent justice the simplest response to the problem of Hell would be that Hell is intrinsic to God's morality. In Dante's story of the *Inferno*,³⁸ a sign on the gate outside of Hell states: "No things were before me not eternal; eternal I remain... I too was created by eternal love."³⁹ The implication of this statement is the grim view that Hell is inherently just.⁴⁰ In James Wetzel's interpretation of this passage, Hell is not even a result of the fall, but part of God's original design.⁴¹ In Friedrich Nietzsche's criticism of this passage, however, he states that love is antithetical to Hell, and that Dante would have been more just had he stated that Heaven "was created by eternal *hate*."⁴² In his atheistic view, Hell is more the result of resentful moralism, and has more to do with human emotions, fear, anger, hatred, and deceit, and less to do with Divine will or true morality. Needless to say, such an approach is not embraced by Catholic teaching, though it does pose a common objection to Hell. How can an idea so seemingly hateful fit in with the Christian notion of God's love?

This objection to Hell, that it places a dampening on God's goodness is quite obviously shared by Bertrand Russell. Russell argues that the doctrine of Hell not only discredits Christianity, but the character of Christ Himself, as he considers it a "serious defection" in Christ's teaching. In Russell's own words, he could not believe that anyone who is "profoundly humane... [could] believe in everlasting punishment."⁴³ What is unique about Bertrand Russell's criticism is not simply that Hell is too cruel for God to allow it to exist, but that the mere belief in

³⁸Dante Alighieri et al., *Divine Comedy: Inferno* (Firenze: Piatti, 1841).

³⁹Wetzel, "A Meditation on Hell: Lessons from Dante."

⁴⁰Another interpretation of Dante would suggest that God created Hell with foresight of sin, but this is not entirely consistent.

⁴¹Wetzel, "A Meditation on Hell: Lessons from Dante."

⁴²Wetzel, "A Meditation on Hell: Lessons from Dante."

⁴³Russell, "Why I Am Not a Christian."

Hell is immoral, because that belief alone is enough to cause a disproportionate amount of grief and suffering. The warnings and thoughts of Hell are usually considered justified based on the fear being used as a deterrence, but here the fear seems to Bertrand Russell to be so catastrophic, that it is not justifiable. John Stuart Mill, in reflecting on his father's words, recognized that his father had a similar conclusion, that Hell was the result of the "most perfect conception of wickedness."⁴⁴ While neither Bertrand Russell or John Stuart Mill makes the particular argument, one could conclude from their text that the problem with Hell is not merely that it is unpleasant, but that even believing in the possibility presupposes a callous and cruel assessment of another person's character, be that as an individual or a generalization. The distinction is likely irrelevant since a generalization is a collection of individuals, be they particular or not. While Russell mentions that he finds the context in which Jesus allegedly threatens Hell fire (Mathew 23:33) unjust (that is in regards to those who reject his teaching), even if Christ is not seen as a divine figure or the arbitrator of Salvation, the issue remains because the doctrine is woven in Christ's teachings.

1.4. Human notions of justice applied to God and Hell

Not surprisingly, opponents of the doctrine of Hell often present the doctrine as though it were obviously a human creation. Philosopher J. E. Barnhart for instance, argues that it is a mythologized projection of the worst side of human vindictiveness.⁴⁵ His theory is that the idea emerged because it was appealing for the Israelites, an enslaved people, since they bore no way to distribute justice on their captors. In Barnhart's opinion, the belief remains as a way for Christians to veil their frustrations with their failures in missionary endeavors.⁴⁶ While such an idea may sound particular to nontheists, even Christians, such as Ukrainian born, Russian speaking, Nicolas Berdyaev, have come to such conclusions. Berdyaev

⁴⁴Walls, 5.

⁴⁵Walls, 25.

⁴⁶Walls, 25.

argues that Hell is the invention of those who consider themselves in the place of God. “God will judge the world,” says Berdyaev, “but [H]e will judge the idea of Hell as well.”⁴⁷ While some Christians, such as professor and ethicists Richard Miller, reject Barnhart’s naturalistic explanation, on account of it challenging the metaphysical nature of such doctrine,⁴⁸ others embrace it. Sociologist Peter Berger, for instance, argues that there is an acceptable way to move from naturalistic explanations to theological ones.⁴⁹ If the natural world is seen as part of God’s creation, then it serves as a strong foundation of knowledge of God’s will.

1.4.1. Transactional and retributive justice applied to God and Hell

Whether Richard Miller or Peter Berger is correct, the main issue for those who take seriously the doctrine of Hell, is understanding what metric is used in determining what is just in regards to Hell. Justice of such a kind, is generally understood in terms of merit. This can be seen in the many ponderings of philosophers. One particular example is Aristotle, who said that what is “just in distribution must be [just] according to merit in some sense.”⁵⁰ An example of what Aristotle means by this, is if a person works for a particular period of time, or does a certain level of work they are entitled to a certain amount of pay. If they are not paid for their work then something is owed to them. What exactly is it about said work that grants them a right to pay is not defined, but it is usually based on a predetermined agreement, where people freely agree to exchange goods for services. In the case of a social, noneconomic transaction, there are still notions of justice based on agreements. For example, an adulterous husband is said to be unjust because he deprives his wife of the dignity and respect that she deserves. The agreement this violates is their marital agreement. In like manner if

⁴⁷Walls, 26.

⁴⁸Walls, 27.

⁴⁹Walls, 30.

⁵⁰Aristotle. *Nicomachean Ethics*: Book V. Moral Virtue: Chapter 3. Distributive Justice, in Accordance with Geometrical Proportion.” Translated by William David Ross. www.sacred-texts.com, 1908. <https://www.sacred-texts.com/cla/ari/nico/nico046.htm>.

the law determines that a person is guilty of a crime, say theft, this is also based on a social contract where certain actions are deserving of such outcome based on how offensive they are perceived to be. The law and culture have already predetermined what kind of punishment is fitting for a specific crime. For example, murder usually merits a longer sentence than theft, and theft merits a greater penalty than jaywalking. While different cultures may arrange their justice systems differently, the notion of justice is always present, because it requires an injustice (or a perceived injustice) for there to be a punishment of such a sort. The common element of justice in these examples given, be they wages, amputations, or marriage fidelity, is that something is owed or given based on a particular behavior. Punishments that are given with this understanding of merit, can be understood as retributive as opposed to remedial since they are not based on the reform of the individual, but on creating punishments of an equal nature.

1.4.2. Predetermined agreement in regards to Hell

There is a difficulty applying this model of retributive justice to Hell. In the opinion of religious philosopher, James Wetzel, there is a truth in Nietzsche's criticism since a retributive Hell would be a disaster.⁵¹ The idea of a retributive Hell implies that Hell has a proportionate pain for a pain caused. The implication is those hurt by sinful actions, are hurt infinitely so. A retributive conception of Hell would therefore imply a Heaven full of victims, since there would have to be some object of harm in regards to sin.⁵² This object would then have to suffer eternally, for an eternal punishment to be retributively justified.⁵³ Wetzel recounts that such a retribution in light of offenses against God does not make sense, since God, according to the doctrine of Divine Impassibility, is not able to be affected by humanity's actions, and is not subject to "vulnerability" or "eternal harm." Furthermore, many philosophers would argue that punishment should be

⁵¹Wetzel, "A Meditation on Hell: Lessons from Dante."

⁵²Wetzel, "A Meditation on Hell: Lessons from Dante."

⁵³Wetzel, "A Meditation on Hell: Lessons from Dante."

corrective not punitive in purpose. Plato, for instance, in his Dialogues insisted that punishment must be purposeful in a reformatory sense.⁵⁴ To punish out of retribution and not remediation, Plato argues is beastly.⁵⁵ Rather what is virtuous in Plato's mind is punishing for the sake of prevention in order that virtue may be taught.⁵⁶ In Plato's view, punishment serves only a purpose if it can prevent future misdoings as past misdoings cannot be undone. For Biblical scholars, this corrective approach is the same approach God uses towards punishment in the Old Testament, where the Israelites grows according to God's pedagogy as God gradually reveals Himself.⁵⁷ This same kind of evolutionary approach is embraced in Stephen Geller's book *Sacred Enigmas*, where he argues the Hebrew people in the Scriptures undergo a cultural development, in which God's punishments play a transitory role. God could have punished the Israelites retributively, He instead helped them to grow in virtue as a people. The suspicion one may have, contrary to a retributive Hell, is that any punishment in the afterlife would be of a similar corrective and purifying nature. Yet, if a purifying punishment fails to actually purify a soul, then there is a question of why is it necessary or just if it is ultimately useless.

In the case of Hell, the agreement or contract made between God and man is not a consensual agreement, so thus not part of some human social contract. Humanity exists, and can either choose Heaven based on a relationship with God, which entails a certain kind of behavior, or humanity can reject God and merit Hell, everlasting torment. This is the predetermined arrangement that exists prior to any particular human's existence, in which there is no negotiation on the part of man. Christians may think of the various covenants made with God, periodically referenced in Scripture, but there were no negotiations as there are between legislators and voters or between workers and employers that caused this

⁵⁴Plato, "Protagoras," trans. Benjamin Jowett, Classical Wisdom Weekly, accessed October 26, 2020, https://classicalwisdom.com/greek_books/protagoras/3/.

⁵⁵Plato, "Protagoras."

⁵⁶Plato, "Protagoras."

⁵⁷ CCC, 53

to be the case. God merely created man and certain behaviors are seen as meriting certain responses from God. Humanity does not choose to exist, and for certain individuals, such as Judas, it is often understood that it is preferable for them not to exist than to be faced with the potential of Hell. “It were better for him if that man had not been born” (Matthew 26: 24). Philosopher and theologian Stephan Webb is correct to note that political justice as it is exercised in courts, is not tantamount to God’s justice and judgment.⁵⁸ On one hand such a statement is obvious in the sense that no government or legal system could perfectly reflect God’s will. On the other hand, this shows what is usually considered to be just in one instance, may not be recognized in another. This is surprising, since while justice is inconsistently practiced, it is, to various degrees, universally recognized. If existence itself is not chosen and there is no prior agreement, there does seem to be some element to the problem of Hell that is unjust by societal standards since there is no part of the recipient on accepting the terms. Such an interpretation is dependent on Hell being a reinforcement or consequence of the law (Section 2 addresses Hell as an intrinsic reality based on freedom). In the controversial theologian David Bentley Hart’s opinion, for instance, no account of the divine intention to create out of nothing could merit an eternal punishment.⁵⁹ Hart, in response to Aquinas’s metaphysics, argues that such a proposition equating being with goodness is “ridiculous.” If the gift of being, is “a gift that is at once wholly irresistible and the source of unrelieved suffering on the part of its recipient, [it would then] not [be] a gift at all.”⁶⁰ The fact that there are those who choose to commit suicide as an alternative to life (which many atheists consider to be the only form of existence) serves as evidence or proof that certain forms of existence are undesirable, and nonexistence can be perceived as preferable to certain arrangements. Needless to say, Hell would be included among such arrangements.

⁵⁸Stephen H. Webb, “Save It for God: Confession and the Irrelevance of the Judicial System with Special Attention to Dostoevsky’s *The Brothers Karamazov*.” (Wiley Online Library. John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, June 3, 2013). <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/dial.12028>.

⁵⁹Hart, “The Moral Meaning of Creating Ex Nihilo.”

⁶⁰Hart, “Framing the Question.”

This is not to say that nonexistence is, in general, preferable to existence, only that existing forms of evils can render such existence overall undesirable.

1.4.3. Human understanding of proportionality in regards to Hell

Without any prior agreement, perhaps the single most difficult component to the problem of Hell, is understanding how an infinite punishment could ever be justified on any sort of metric at all. This issue is known as the proportionality objection.⁶¹ Because justice is usually understood on a spectrum, with certain crimes being deserving of worse penalties, the expectation is that Hell would also follow a proportionate principle. Hell, destroys this notion of spectral justice, as it is considered to be the worst possible outcome. If every mortal sin is deserving of an infinite punishment, then the various levels of Hell would all share the same infinite quality. The fact that this infinite quality is done both temporally and according to intensity, does little to alter the matter. For instance, a minor punishment, extended for all eternity, can be considered infinite, and an extreme punishment rendered for all eternity, is also infinite. In both instances, there is no precise understanding of where an infinite punishment could be placed on a spectrum, as in either situation, the spectrum would have to be infinite in order to encompass it. Both the idea of an infinite, temporal punishment or an infinite punishment of intensity would entail an infinite punishment for a finite action. This is the objection.

1.5. Hell as definitive doctrine

This proportionality objection is not limited to contemporary criticism, but is rather a recurring thought in history. In the 15th century, a philosopher named Giovanni Pico della Mirandola reflected the same sentiment when he said, "a mortal sin of finite duration is not deserving of eternal, but only of temporal punishment." As a result he was pronounced heretical by Pope Innocent VIII in

⁶¹Joel Buenting, "Introduction," in *The Problem of Hell: A Philosophical Anthology* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2016).

his bull on August 4th, 1484.⁶² Orthodox Bishop Kallistos Ware also mentions in a letter that St. Isaac the Syrian noted this objection as well,⁶³ though Isaac the Syrian was most likely unfamiliar with the condemnation of Origen's universalism at the 5th Eccumenical Council. In response to the various promotions of the proportionality objection, contemporary Cardinal Avery Dulles in his letter on universalism, illustrates how the Church's response was restated at various moments throughout history. Dulles recounts three specific Church councils (Lyons I, 1245; Lyons II, 1274; and Florence, 1439), Pope Benedict XII's bull *Benedictus Deus* (1336) and passages from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*⁶⁴ that everyone who dies in a state of mortal sin goes to suffer eternal punishment in Hell.⁶⁵ Here a transition is made between arguing from a perspective of philosophy, regarding what is justice, to how Hell is to be understood as just based on statements from Scripture, Tradition, or more particular authoritative church statements. The arguments tend to overlap as how one understands justice impacts their understanding of theology. A theological argument, however, is helpful in demonstrating that Hell is definitively part of Catholic Tradition. Avery Dulles' remark decently displays how the eternity of Hell for mortal sins, despite the proportionality objection, is demonstrably part of Catholic doctrine.

1.5.1. Mortal sins

While the Church has confirmed its stance on mortal sin and Hell, resolving the theological issue, this does not resolve the philosophical concerns with the proportionality objection, as the question can easily be rephrased so as to ask why certain actions, or any actions, are worthy of being considered mortal sins in the

⁶²Sarris, "Chapter 6."

⁶³Kallistos Ware, "Dare We Hope for the Salvation of All? Origen, St Gregory of Nyssa and St Isaac the Syrian," *The Collected Works Volume I The Inner Kingdom*, (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir Press, 2001), <https://www.clarion-journal.com/files/dare-we-hope-for-the-salvation-of-all-1.pdf>.

⁶⁴CCC, 1022, 1035.

⁶⁵Avery Dulles, "The Population of Hell," in *First Things*, May 1, 2003, <https://www.firstthings.com/article/2003/05/the-population-of-hell>.

first place. Mortal sins have eternal consequences, but they do not seem to have any eternal implications (outside of those given in revelation). One argument positioned, is that once a person commits a sin, it has eternally been committed, since it cannot be undone, thus it is of eternal consequence and deserving of eternal punishment. This argument, while persuasive, does not distinguish between mortal and venial sins, so by the same reasoning, all sins would be mortal, or at least, it would not follow that venial sins are purged in Purgatory. Both venial sins and mortal sins are deserving of eternal penalty, therefore, quantifying how one could be worse than the other is futile. While in the book of Revelations the just are arranged equally, the clarification for why a venial sin would not omit someone is what's in question. The issue in distributing an infinite punishment for a finite action, in contrast, is replaced, with the question of why God would differentiate between sins, if they all have an infinite consequence. Both positions present a difficulty in proportionality.

As the Church teaches, in order for something to be considered a mortal sin, it must not only be grave matter, but must be committed with full knowledge and full intention. While most individuals can generally assess their state of mind, when this criterion is met is actually something only God can have certainty of. For instance, a person may either have a habit, they are fighting against, or someone may have emotional issues that prevent them from acting in a clear level headed manner. There are numerous ways a person's judgment could be impaired, one need not suffer from specific disability. The difficulty to this is there is no indication as to what amount of knowledge is sufficient for avoiding Hell or what amount ignorance constitutes ignorance of a mortal sin. While a person may be aware that they have committed a mortal sin, there is no certainty that they grasped the full harm of their actions. Given that no one can fully understand Hell (as it is an infinite outcome), or any eternal measure, it seems hard to imagine how anyone could fully merit it. No form of earthly justice could answer this question, as it does not exist within any sort of remedial system of justice or on a spectrum of retributive justice. While a mortal sin may require knowledge of the act being

committed, there is only the possibility of partial knowledge of the outcome (Hell), which therefore must be sufficient grounds for one to go to Hell, and thus ignorance cannot always be used as an excuse. Whatever excuses someone may suggest, there is the expectation that people are responsible for what they are able to do and what they can do in accordance with their conscience. Certainly God, the infinitely good cause of all being, is deserving of mankind's best efforts and loyalty, so it cannot be said, with any adequacy, that any sin is committed innocently. Yet, if the idea of sin is based on knowledge, then a sin committed without any form of knowledge, is not a sin. This is the doctrine of invincible ignorance. Pius IX notes this when he states, "because God knows, searches and clearly understands the minds, hearts, thoughts, and nature of all, his supreme kindness and clemency do not permit anyone at all who is not guilty of deliberate sin to suffer eternal punishments."⁶⁶ Rather souls are guilty of the faults they intend and are complicit in forming.

In addition to those who lack knowledge of their sins, in some manner, there is also the difficulty of assessing the guilt of those who are innocent or guilty of mortal sins by virtue of conditions they don't control. While God only judges based on the decisions humans are able to control, there are certain actions that are controlled but are the result of uncontrolled circumstances. This is what contemporary philosophers refer to as "moral luck,"⁶⁷ and it refers to individuals who find themselves sinning in one instance, when had they been in another situation, they would have likely not have sinned at all. This principle, while it may sound specific, is applicable to all individuals. Given the limit of human nature. Every sinful decision made, is in some way qualified so that either the person is congenitally or circumstantially wicked.⁶⁸ The difficulty with this is that if action is seen as circumstantial, and that mankind does not determine his

⁶⁶Pope BI. Pius IX, "Quanto Conficiamur Moerore," Papal Encyclicals, April 25, 2017, <https://www.papalencyclicals.net/pius09/p9quanto.htm>.

⁶⁷Daniel Statman, "The Time to Punish and the Problem of Moral Luck," *Journal of Applied Philosophy* 14, no. 2 (1997), 129-136, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-5930.00049>.

⁶⁸Hart, "Doubting the Answers."

circumstances, then mankind's actions do not appear to be entirely his own fault. Here, while someone may be thought to be deserving of Hell on account of their actions, yet no action is committed in a vacuum without circumstances in some way altering the culpability.

1.5.2. Clement and remedial punishment

One theory promoted by St. Clement of Alexandria, contrary to the notion of retributive justice, and similar to that of pre-punishment, is that Hell could be imagined as remedial.⁶⁹ That is to say perhaps the flames of Hell are meant to correct sinful mannerisms.⁷⁰ Rather than being an exchange of punishment for injustice, it is a remedial attempt on God's part to convert the hearts of wicked men. Universalists, such as Gregory of Nyssa, Origen of Alexandria, George Sarris, Rob Bell, David Bentley Hart and Thomas Talbott, interpret Hell as a kind of temporary Purgatory for this reason. While the Church assures the faithful that the punishment of Hell is eternal, perhaps the universalists are correct in asserting that the intention is to correct the sinful, while the distinction is that the sinful remain stubborn or uncompromising in their wickedness. In C. S. Lewis' *The Great Divorce*,⁷¹ for instance, the damned are kept from Heaven by their own choice while God sends them angels to encourage them or purify them in order that they may enter Heaven. The difficulty with this belief is understanding how a punishment could correct a sin for all eternity. St. Clement, himself, believed in a second chance theory, in which there would be a choice for the souls in Hell to enter into Heaven even after being in Hell. For him, such an idea would be consistent, but the second chance theory, as already mentioned in the introduction, is contrary to the Catholic teaching on Hell as an "eternal" punishment.⁷² His reasoning for supposing a remedial punishment is problematic since there

⁶⁹ Ilaria Ramelli, *The Christian Doctrine of Apokatastasis: A Critical Assessment from the New Testament to Eriugena* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 124–7.

⁷⁰Ramelli, 125-126.

⁷¹C. S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce* (London, UK: Collins, 2012).

⁷²CCC, 1035.

apparently seems to be no reason to suppose a correction that does not correct. Remediation, generally assumes that some corrective purpose is achievable or within reach, yet this is not the case as an eternal punishment is never ends. Therefore, the problem with suggesting that Hell serves as a corrective or remedial purpose, is that it is, in at least one sense, ineffective.

1.5.3. Status Principle

Despite the difficulty of applying a retributive or remedial purpose to Hell, Hell is traditionally considered to be a just punishment as the result of a just judgment.. The traditional Roman Catholic version of the prayer, the “Act of Contrition,” confirms this same theological understanding, “I detest all my sins because of thy just punishments,”⁷³ and St. Maximus the Confessor refers to the fires of Hell as the “fire of judgment.”⁷⁴ This observation should be of no controversy, since no Christian is of liberty to suggest that God is unjust. God is infinitely good, so an offense against Him is deserving of an infinite punishment. The assertion that the more good the victim is, the greater the punishment should be, is known as the status principle.⁷⁵ Perhaps the best example of this principle comes from St. Anselm who compellingly argued that all of creation owes God its whole existence, so any sin against God places one in an infinite debt.⁷⁶ In his own words Anselm states “Sin is nothing other than not to give God what is owed him... Therefore, everyone who sins is under obligation to repay to God the honor which he has violently taken from Him, and this is the satisfaction which every sinner is obliged to give to God.”⁷⁷ This status principle is not limited to St. Anselm as it can easily be applied to most notions of original sin, since most

⁷³“Act of Contrition,” Prayers - Vatican News, accessed June 18, 2020, <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/prayers/act-of-contrition.html>.

⁷⁴*Christ, Our Pascha: Catechism of the Ukrainian Catholic Church*, (Kyiv: Synod of the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church, 2016).

⁷⁵S. Mark Hamilton, “Jonathan Edwards, Anselmic Satisfaction and God's Moral Government,” *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 17, no. 1 (2014), 38, <https://doi.org/10.1111/ijst.12081>.

⁷⁶Chad V. Meister, Paul Copan, and Jerry L. Walls, “Hell: Traditional and Contemporary Views,” in *The Routledge Companion to Philosophy of Religion* (New York City, NY: Routledge, 2013), 586.

⁷⁷Chad V. Meister, Paul Copan, and Jerry L. Walls, “Hell: Traditional and Contemporary Views,” in *The Routledge Companion to Philosophy of Religion* (New York City, NY: Routledge, 2013), 586.

notions insist that original sin was inherited precisely because of the status of the offender (God). Many Church fathers, such as Tertullian, St. Cyprian, St. Ambrose, argued that future generations not only inherited the concupiscence of original sin, but participated in the very act of original sin.⁷⁸ This theory would later be contradicted by the Council of Trent,⁷⁹ but for St. Augustine, as expressed in his *Quaestiones Ad Simplicianum*, original sin meant that mankind had as a default *massa damnata*(mass damnation) status.⁸⁰ All of these theologians seem to confirm the same notion that Hell is a just punishment from the Lord given to those who have original sin. David Bentley Hart, on the contrary, argues that an inherited guilt is a contradiction in terms, as one cannot be guilty of an action they did not commit.⁸¹ Guilt is something applied to a person who has committed a wrongful action and from this, Hart concludes that humanity is incapable of meriting unlimited and unqualified guilt.⁸²

1.5.4. Original sin and Hell

Regardless of whether David Bentley Hart or the specific list of Church fathers are right, the teaching of original sin is critical to the problem of Hell, because the guilt someone inherits is what prevents them from reaching salvation. While this does not necessarily mean damnation is the result, it is, at least, potentially the result. In Calvinist theology, for instance, the understanding of the human person is that mankind is totally deprived, and merits damnation as a default because of original sin. The problem is presented in a way where God has no obligation towards man, and man has no justification outside of what God gives him. God withholds grace, and insists on a limited atonement, meaning He intends for souls to go to Hell by design. In Catholicism, atonement is not limited,⁸³ and

⁷⁸F.L Cross and E.A Livingstone, "Original Sin," in *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 994. <https://archive.org/details/oxforddictionary00cros/page/994/mode/2up>

⁷⁹CCC, 405.

⁸⁰F.L Cross and E.A Livingstone, "Original Sin."

⁸¹Hart, "The Moral Meaning of Creating Ex Nihilo."

⁸²Hart, "Doubting the Answers."

⁸³*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd ed. (Vatican City: Vatican Press, 1997), 402-409, <http://www.scborromeo.org/ccc.htm>.

for unbaptized babies, and others who do not receive sanctifying grace at their baptism, Limbo is seen as a tenable alternative. There are also Catholic theologians that suggest that unbaptized babies have the ability to be saved through other means, namely through baptism of desire like the repentant thief on the cross (Luke 24:43). Contrary to the position of Calvinism, though, Catholicism teaches that no one bears the guilt of Adam's original sin, since it does not have the "character of a personal fault."⁸⁴ While there is the loss of original holiness and justice, which creates the sinful nature or "concupiscence" within man,⁸⁵ human nature, as the Catechism states, is not totally corrupt. Rather it is wounded. This is important as in both Calvinism and Catholicism, original sin creates the conditions for Hell. While Baptism washes away original sin, with the effects remaining, the fact that it was inherited in the first place is problematic when considering how justice is distributed normally. What is important to recognize is regardless of whether Hell or Limbo is the result, original sin prevents people from receiving salvation, and there is no action on the part of any particular person that places them in this state. The Catechism directly states, "The transmission of original sin is a mystery that we cannot fully understand."⁸⁶ This mystery deals directly with the distribution of justice, so the nature of justice in regards to original sin is a mystery.

1.6. Hell in light of infinite goodness

Contrarily, such an understanding of a just punishment is not quite as epistemically troubling in light of the possibility of eternal salvation. If Christians are uncertain of why someone earns damnation, then it is reasonable to also ask what is done in order to deserve salvation. The answer is nothing. Contrary to many mischaracterizations of the Catholic view of good works, the Council of

⁸⁴CCC, 405

⁸⁵CCC, 405.

⁸⁶CCC, 405.

Trent clearly states that there are no actions, in which one is justified in their salvation.

[T]he beginning of the said Justification is to be derived from the prevenient grace of God, through Jesus Christ, that is to say, from His vocation, whereby, without any merits existing on their parts, they are called; that so they, who by sins were alienated from God, may be disposed through His quickening and assisting grace, to convert themselves to their own justification, by freely assenting to and co-operating with that said grace...⁸⁷

The 1992 Catholic Catechism also clearly states,

With regard to God, there is no strict right to any merit on the part of man... Man's merit, moreover, itself is due to God, for his good actions proceed in Christ... no one can merit the initial grace of forgiveness and justification, at the beginning of conversion..⁸⁸

From the quotes given, there is nothing done in order to merit salvation. Salvation is the result of Christ's sacrifice on the cross and it is a freely given gift, given on behalf of love.

1.6.1. Infinite duality to God's justice and mercy

With this emphasis on God being the one who justifies and merits our salvation, there exists a duality in God's justice. On one hand God is all merciful, in so far as He will forgive any sin presented before Him. There are no limits to His mercy. On the other hand, God tolerates no evil as He is all just. For this reason, no sin is permitted in his midst. While neither of these two principles are tenable from a finite perspective of justice, they do illustrate an incomprehensible awe to God's perfection, an infinite resolution, ultimately resolving mankind's every desire for both justice and mercy. Nowhere is this more clearly and definitively expressed, than in the Letter to Romans, where Pauls mentions that it is by the disobedience of one man, that all of mankind were condemned as sinners,

⁸⁷The Council of Trent, Session 6, Chapter 5," ~The Council of Trent - Session 6~ (StGemma.com Web Productions Inc. , 2011), <http://www.thecounciloftrent.com/ch6.htm>.

⁸⁸"Merit," in *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2019), (CCC 2006-2008, 2010).

and by that same man death and sin entered into the world(Rom 5:12, 18-19). In contrast it was also by the obedience of one man, Christ, that many were made just in life(Rom 5:12, 18-19). While the question of How Hell is just is not resolved, Christ is able to counterbalance the effect in a way that only the Divine Pascha could do. Augustine poses it as such," for Christ in the very same passage included both punishment and life in the same sentence. If both are eternal it follows necessarily that both are to be taken as long lasting but finite or both as endless and perpetual."⁸⁹ Jesuit philosopher Fr. Martin Henry S.J in an article on Hell, "Does Hell Still Have a Future"⁹⁰ reflects on this truth and quotes Bernard Williams who states that, "The doctrine of grace... mean[s] that there ...[i]s no calculable road from moral effort to salvation;"⁹¹. From this he concludes that the ultimate judgment of what is good and evil belongs specifically to God, and God alone. Meanwhile humanity's knowledge of this entails only glimpses of Heaven and Hell, and to believe in either one consists in accepting a mystery beyond comprehension. Where there is sin, so follow the pains and sufferings of Hell, but "Where there's life, there's hope."⁹² In Henry's words, "we shouldn't expect to see either realized totally and finally here on earth, but only 'elsewhere'."⁹³

For those concerned with the problem of Hell, this may pose as a remedy. If there is nothing that mankind does that merits Heaven, then some may suppose perhaps the question of what merits Hell is irrelevant. The reason why a person would question whether Hell is justified, is based on a societal or finite notion of justice, yet this societal notion of justice is not capable of granting someone a place worthy of eternity. Whether Stephen Webb is correct in asserting that nothing can justify Hell in a court of law, the other assertion, that no one in a court of law could ever be deemed deserving of eternal salvation, is also correct for the

⁸⁹Paul O'Callaghan, *Christ Our Hope: An Introduction to Eschatology*, (Catholic University of America Press, 2012).

⁹⁰Martin Henry, "Does Hell Still Have a Future?" *The Heythrop Journal* 56, no. 1 (September 2014), 120-135, <https://doi.org/10.1111/heyj.12123>.

⁹¹Bernard Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 2014), 210.

⁹²Martin Henry, "Does Hell Still Have a Future?" 133.

⁹³Martin Henry, "Does Hell Still Have a Future?" 133.

same reason. It goes beyond humanity's notion of justice. Merit, is therefore, beyond man's ability. With Heaven being so incommensurably good, one may suppose that Hell is irrelevant. Fr. Martin Henry S.J. makes this same point when he says that both salvation and damnation have more to do with God overcoming evil, than with man deserving either one. Salvation ultimately belongs to God and not anything man does.

Although the benevolence of God is a comforting thought, the mere absence of the worthiness of Heaven, does not, on its own accord, mean that humanity merits Hell. If Christians suggest that there is nothing deserving of eternal reward, then suggesting that one can deserve eternal punishment appears to be a contradiction as it also an eternal outcome. According to Fr Martin Henry, S.J., if mankind deserves Hell, then there is an asymmetry in God's justice that would render God "perverse."⁹⁴ Hell, and evil, for that matter, cannot be made up for with Heaven. In the words of philosopher Andrew Pavelich, evil is not an economic transaction that can be justified with some kind of reward.⁹⁵ Rather as a privation, it lacks economic transferability. If one wished to reward someone who has undergone terrible evil, the evil would not be justified in light of the reward. While humanity is imperfect and inherits original sin, this is a separate claim from saying mankind deserves Hell as a default, even if one were to suppose that Tertullian, St. Cyprian, St. Ambrose and St. Augustine were correct in asserting that all of mankind participated in the first sin.

1.6.2. Impossible to conjecture definitively what Hell looks like

When considering the afterlife, there is a certain impossibility with trying to conjecture as to what would be a just punishment. In other words, God could have created another type of afterlife, in which there was no need for man to suffer endlessly. Once one considers the infinite amount of possibilities God could

⁹⁴Martin Henry, "Does Hell Still Have a Future?"

⁹⁵Andrew Pavelich, "The Moral Problem with the Free Will Defense Against the Problem of Evil," *The Heythrop Journal* 60, no. 5 (August 2017), 678-688, <https://doi.org/10.1111/heyj.12654>.

propose, there is an added difficulty suggesting why God would choose a particular version of the afterlife over another. Kvanvig refers to this as the arbitrariness problem,⁹⁶ since different resolutions, don't necessarily appear more logical than one another. Rather the framework is dependent on the premises an individual accepts. For Christians that believe in unlimited atonement and don't believe in double predestination, Catholics in particular, the teaching is that souls are designed for Heaven and if they reject such, they place themselves in Hell, but this does not mean, as the existence of Limbo and Purgatory suggests, that Hell is the only alternative to Heaven. If Hell were to be understood as the mere absence of Heaven, then every living being that is alive could be considered to be in Hell by virtue of not currently being in Heaven. Some form of suffering is necessary for it to be defined as such, yet there is no clear reasoning as to what kind of suffering would be suitable.

The idea of equating the absence of Heaven with Hell emerges from a traditional metaphysical explanation for the problem of evil, where evil is defined as a privation of good. The argument has been embraced or acknowledged by a number of theologians, St Athanasius, St. Clement, St. Gregory of Nyssa, St. Augustine, and St. Thomas Aquinas, to name a few.^{97,98} St. Athanasius embraces this view in his section on creation in *The Incarnate Word of God*.⁹⁹ Aquinas argues that since existence is the primary good, nonexistence would be a greater evil for the souls in Hell than perpetual agony.¹⁰⁰ St. Gregory of Nyssa argues that for a soul to be entirely evil would be for it to not exist,¹⁰¹ and St. Augustine, argues the same point, but from the opposite perspective of Gregory, when he says

⁹⁶Kvanvig, 56.

⁹⁷Joseph F. Kelly, "Out of Africa," in *The Problem of Evil in the Western Tradition: from the Book of Job to Modern Genetics*, (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2002), 42.

⁹⁸"Problem of Evil (2 of 4) The Augustinian Theodicy," (MrMcMillanREvis, April 15, 2014), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E1ysPBjXXk4>.

⁹⁹Athanasius, "On the Incarnation: De Incarnatione Verbi Dei," trans. Penelope Lawson, On the Incarnation, accessed October 27, 2020, <http://www.romans45.org/history/ath-inc.htm>, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ymDMiLuDG-sch1>

¹⁰⁰Hart, "Framing the Question."

¹⁰¹In *Inscriptiones Psalmodum*. trans., Ronald. E. Heine, 117(1.8.106), GNO iii/2. 62-3in Morwenna Ludlow, *Universal Salvation: Eschatology in the Thought of Gregory of Nyssa and Karl Rahner* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 87.

that since evil is defined as a privation or an imperfection; and mankind lacks perfection, if God wanted to get rid of all the sin and evil in the world, He would have to get rid of humanity. Undoubtedly, evil lacking an existence as a mere privation is a Christian teaching, but the origin of this teaching can be found, even prior to Christianity. Plotinus, Clement, Origen and Augustine incorporated this idea from Neo-Platonism. However, it can also be found in the writings of Aristotle.¹⁰² Defining evil as the absence of good is relevant to Hell, as it means the evilness of Hell must be understood in relation to goodness of Heaven, since that is what it is a privation of. While the souls in Hell may be deprived of the goodness of Heaven, they are not deprived entirely of good as Hell still has to be good on some level for it to exist. St. Thomas Aquinas and contemporary Thomist philosopher Eleanor Stump both argue that Hell is good based on the preservation of existence of the souls in Hell.¹⁰³ Kvanvig responds to this suggestion that it is not enough for God to preserve them in existence, but He must preserve them to the best of their potential if this privation is the result of choice.¹⁰⁴

1.7. Section 1 summary

In this section, the notion of justice in regards to Hell is explored. There are two major types of justice, remedial and punitive. In both instances, justice is not readily applicable to Hell. In regards to retributive punishment, there is no just equation to determine what is the proper punishment, but the infinite nature of Hell appears to violate the proportionality principle. The status principle in relation to original sin, seems to confirm the legitimacy of the retributive punishment, but there are difficulties as ignorance of the infinitude of God, does in a minor way mitigate the culpability of those sinning. In regards to the infinite, there also seems to be no way to distinguish a mortal or venial sin, if both are said to be infinitely unremovable, then it is not clear why one merits eternal

¹⁰²Pavlos Kontos, "Evil in Aristotle // Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews // University of Notre Dame," Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews, December 4, 2018, <https://ndpr.nd.edu/news/evil-in-aristotle/>.

¹⁰³Kvanvig, 124-125.

¹⁰⁴Kvanvig, 126.

punishment and the other does not. Heaven offered as an alternative does shed some light on Hell, as its incommensurable goodness, and it does mitigate Hell's incommensurable suffering, but this does not fully rationalize the need or necessity for Hell. Hell can still be said to be good, since it exists, but this poses a problem for those who would argue that nonexistence is preferable to Hell. While revelation and doctrine confirm the justice of Hell, there is no way by which man could understand the justice involved in an eternal punishment. The very concept of infinity goes beyond the finite rationale. For this reason the justification for Hell is beyond man's understanding and is therefore considered a mystery.

Section 2:

Freely Choosing Hell

2.1. How to understand Freedom

In addition to Hell being depicted as a just punishment, Hell is often presented as the result or consequence of free will. That is to say, Hell is a freely chosen outcome, and while God desires no one to be there (1 Tim. 2:4), souls are still able to place themselves in Hell, because God's passive will, as opposed to his active will, permits it.¹⁰⁵ The main distinction between this presentation of Hell and that of a just punishment, is that rather than subscribing some measure of justice on God's behalf to eternal punishment, what is put into question is the ability to choose. Here God does not actively impose a punishment, rather he merely does not prevent his subjects from choosing such. From one perspective, it seems as though God could not possibly have an alternative choice but to allow those who desire Hell to go there. Only God alone is self-sufficient, so the question remains what is God to do with the evil of humanity.¹⁰⁶ Permitting the sinful into Heaven, while they freely choose to sin, would be incompatible with Heaven, so Hell remains a freely chosen alternative.

2.1.1. Choosing Hell as a punishment

With this choice between Heaven and Hell, there are two ways one can theorize that souls freely choose Hell. The first way to understand those who freely choose to sin, is to understand them as desiring sin over God, and therefore place themselves in Hell as a result. In this particular version of freely choosing Hell, there is no direct causal relation between one's actions and being in Hell, rather it is an indirect result. A comparison can be made between earthly crime and punishment. If a person chooses to rob a store, gets caught, they have, in a

¹⁰⁵John Piper, *Does God Desire All to Be Saved?* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013).

¹⁰⁶William F. Lawhead, "Part Two: The Middle Ages; The Problem of Evil," in *Cengage Advantage Series: Voyage of Discovery: A Historical Introduction to Philosophy (Revised)* (Stamford, CT: Wadsworth Publishing, 2014), 140.

way, chosen to go to prison, even though they did not intend to get caught. Thomas A. Nelson, (the founder of the Catholic printing company, Tan Books) recounts in his essay, *How to Avoid Hell*, the reason why the choice to go to Heaven is more than just an assertion of faith is because, as one of his students says, that would be, “too easy.”¹⁰⁷ Hell too must be actively avoided. If Christians understand that Hell is freely chosen, in that Hell is chosen because a person chooses to sin while alive, then this understanding of freedom is not relevant when discussing the question of how a soul can freely choose Hell for all eternity, because they didn’t directly choose Hell. Rather they made sinful decisions that resulted in them being placed in Hell. As the child in Thomas Nelson’s example would say, they’re in Hell, not because they really wanted to go to Hell, but because it was easy. This version of Hell as a choice is not incompatible with viewing Hell as a just punishment, as just punishments do not come prior to a person’s offense. However, as Philosopher Kieth Parsons mentions in a debate with William Lane Craig, “this is the same sort of freedom given to you by the mugger in the alley who says give me your money or I’ll blow your brains out.”¹⁰⁸ While such a response is of course antagonistic, and does little to reflect God’s true omnibenevolence, it does demonstrate how freedom to embrace Hell, in this framework, is really only the result of failing to respond positively to a mandate from God.

2.1.2. Choosing Hell Intrinsically

The second kind of freedom, in regards to Hell, is a type of freedom where one may consider Hell to be a continuously chosen outcome. In contrast to merely choosing to sin, the souls in Hell are not there because of anything they have specifically done to merit it, rather, they are there as a result of them freely and eternally rejecting God’s love. If God’s love is the source of all happiness and joy,

¹⁰⁷Schouppe, F. X., and Thomas A. Nelson. *Hell/ How to Avoid Hell*. (Rockford, IL: Tan Books and Publishers, 1989).

¹⁰⁸William Lane Craig and Kieth Parsons, “Why I Am/Am Not a Christian” (debate, Prestonwood Baptist Church, April 3, 1998), 1:00:19, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8MKH_j44DaQ.

then by rejecting God's love and happiness, they place themselves in Hell. Here Hell is actively desired and the result is a natural punishment as opposed to an imposed one. This eschatological position is referred to as the "Natural Consequence" model of damnation by Michael Murray.¹⁰⁹ Usually the position is presented in a way where mankind is perfectly free, in a libertarian sense, to reject God, while men and women bring about their own suffering by doing such.¹¹⁰ The dichotomy presented is that if souls were not free to reject God, then they would be forced to accept Him, which would cause God to be a tyrant. In this libertarian view, the damned have the final say in their outcome.¹¹¹ This implies that "a coerced redemption is of even less value than a freely chosen damnation."¹¹² This relatively modern answer to the problem of Hell was largely popularized by the likes of C.S. Lewis. Lewis writes that he "willingly believe[s] that the damned are, in one sense, successful, rebels to the end; [and] that the doors of Hell are locked on the *inside*,"¹¹³ and "every shutting up of ... creature[s] within the dungeon of...[their] own mind—is, in the end, Hell."¹¹⁴ Cardinal Ratzinger echoes this same sentiment when he insists that "Christ is sheer salvation" and "inflicts pure perdition on no one."¹¹⁵ It is when someone is enclosed in on themselves with their own desires and needs that they distance themselves from Christ. Here, it is the sinner, who has "drawn the dividing line and separated himself from salvation."¹¹⁶ Hans Urs von Balthasar in his work, *Dare We Hope All Men Be Saved*¹¹⁷ mentions numerous examples of Hell being a place where love does not exist. Balthasar recounts words taken from Georges Bernanos'

¹⁰⁹Joel Buenting, "The Problem of Hell: A Philosophical Anthology," in *The Problem of Hell: A Philosophical Anthology* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2016).

¹¹⁰James Wetzel, "A Meditation on Hell: Lessons from Dante." *Modern Theology* 18, no. 3 (2002), 375–94. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-0025.00194>.

¹¹¹Wetzel, "A Meditation on Hell."

¹¹²Wetzel, "A Meditation on Hell."

¹¹³C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (London, UK: Collins, 2012).

¹¹⁴Balthazar, 34.

¹¹⁵Balthazar, 34.

¹¹⁶Balthazar, 34.

¹¹⁷Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Dare We Hope: That All Men Be Saved? With a Short Discourse on Hell*, (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 2014).

novel, *Diary of a Country Priest*,¹¹⁸ where the a young priest says, “Hell is not to love any more, Madame.”¹¹⁹ In addition to this, Balthasar also recounts the words of Luise Rinser who says in her novel: “I have a distinct mental image of Hell. One sits there, quite forsaken by God, and feels that one is no longer able to love, never again, and that one will never again meet with a human being, never in all eternity.”¹²⁰ Such descriptions place not only the choice of Hell on the damned, but also explain the pains of Hell as a result of one’s own misdoing. Natural punishment of this type of punishment is self-inflicted as opposed to being externally inflicted by an outward agent,¹²¹ since such outcomes follow specific behaviors with no intervention on God’s part. For example, if a person chooses to be mean and cruel, and as a result is bitter, there is no imposing agent, as a person is directly causing the outcome. This definition is perhaps the clearest representation of what can be meant by freely choosing Hell, and is what is generally meant by “freely choosing” Hell in this thesis.

2.2. God’s justice and mercy are compatible as the burden is placed on man

Part of the appeal of this libertarian argument for Hell is that it allows for both the “gratuitous mercy” and “strict justice” of God. If God allows for humanity to be evil, it is only out of love and respect for humanity’s self-determination. Self-determination, in itself, is good, but when it is used outside of God’s will it is what places a person in Hell.¹²² However there are two conceivable problems with this self-determination. The first is that it could make one’s will out to be greater than God’s since they are able to defy God’s will in rejecting his mercy. While there are many things that are not controlled by humanity, it is peculiar that the worst possible outcome is left up to the decision of man. The second is that there is no apparent reason for why specific evil desires exist. While

¹¹⁸Georges Bernanos, *Diary of a Country Priest*, trans. Pamela Morris (Classica Libris, Paris, France. 1936).

¹¹⁹Balthasar, 34.

¹²⁰Luise Rinser, *Nina.: Mitte Des Lebens*, trans. Richard and Clara Winston (Frankfurt, Germany: S. Fischer, 1961). in Balthasar, 34.

¹²¹James Cain, “On the Problem of Hell.” *Religious Studies*, no. 38 (2002), 355–62.

¹²²Wetzel, “A Meditation on Hell: Lessons from Dante.”

freedom may be essential, the drives that influence one's freedom appear to be based on desires that humanity did not choose to have. If there is a common trend it appears as though most desires are the result of the disorders for good desires, but even in this it is not apparent why there needs to be disorders of good desires.

While freedom is the basis for this model of Hell, most philosophers and theologians argue that there is some level of conditioning that occurs prior to Hell.¹²³ Robert Kane, for instance, argues that one's own actions form a person before eternal life,¹²⁴ and Richard Swinburne holds that when one conditions their soul for Hell for all eternity, they are unable to choose or be motivated to choose more virtuous options. The condition of Hell is one of perpetually choosing the more harmful outcome for all eternity where the soul has made enough sinful decisions that it has irreversibly chosen sin over good. While there is always a choice, it is possible, according to Swinburne to reach a point of irreversible conditioning. There is no longer a freedom, rather there is a slavery to sin in which the stronger desire always overcomes the alternative desire. Either the soul dies to God or the soul dies to the temptations of the world, but there are no individual instances left to make any decisions.¹²⁵ This process is generally considered to be the result of freedom, even though it is a slavery to one's own passions. Here the issue is that there is no indication as to why this state would necessarily be the prevailing state. If one adheres to radical libertine freedom, then such a state would not be possible as someone can always choose otherwise. David Bentley Hart acknowledges that there is truth in Swinburne's philosophy, but says that it could only be true to a certain extent. If every action is aimed towards a good (even lesser goods over greater ones), then such a state of choosing one's fate, would not allow for the soul to choose its ultimate destruction.

¹²³Kvanvig, 99.

¹²⁴Joel Buenting, "Introduction," in *The Problem of Hell: A Philosophical Anthology*, (Farnham: Ashgate, 2016).

¹²⁵Kvanvig, 121.

2.3. Deliberate conditioning for immortality.

In contrast to David Bentley Hart, Karl Rahner accepts freedom as the primary factor in salvation, but reduces free will to be something specifically finite. Rahner argues that the soul prepares itself for death, and that's the state it remains for all eternity. Though Rahner is a contingent or hopeful universalist, it is correct in Rahner's eschatology to say a soul chooses Hell for all eternity, by becoming the kind of soul that conditions itself for Hell. What he denies is that it is a continuous choice. The form of eternity he proposes is distinct from other eschatological approaches, since it does not include the same type of action, and interprets eternity to be synonymous with being outside of time. In Rahner's view, freedom is irrelevant to those in Heaven or Hell since there is no way to change outside of time, since this would involve action, which takes place exclusively in time.¹²⁶ Rahner is not dismissive of the idea of Hell being an imposed punishment or a natural punishment or potentially both since God can bestow a natural cause as a punishment. Rather he sees both these things as freely chosen, but occurring in another reality where there is no ability to change, because it contradicts the state of the soul. A criticism of Rahner's stance could be that it falls prey to the arbitrariness problem, since there is no obvious reason why this would be the case, though, it does resolve the issue of how a soul could choose to go to Hell for all eternity, by placing the decision entirely in the present. In the present, there is always some lack of insight into the eternal, so as mentioned before, if the decision is made entirely in the present, then it is made with some form of ignorance. The difficulty remains the same that there is no explanation for how one's choices could merit eternal punishment outside of time or how one's choices could result in eternal perdition.

¹²⁶ Ludlow, *Universal Salvation*, 257.

2.4. Limitations of free will

One problem with understanding Hell as a result of free will, is the definition used for free will, since mankind is not free in the absolute sense of the word. While to deny that mankind has free will is heresy, there is a distinction between unlimited free will and just simply free will. Philosopher Alfred Mele, noted that most critics who deny free will in favor of what they call determinism, do so because their expectations or standards for free will are too high.¹²⁷ For example, while most people possess the ability to make conscious choices, those who criticize free will (i.e. Montague, Cashmore, Gazzaniga) insist that free will must entail having the ability to make conscious choices that are entirely independent of brain activity and absolutely unconstrained by genetics and environment. This kind of unlimited freedom does not exist in this life. David Bently Hart, echoes this same sentiment, but in regards to soteriology, when he mentions that he finds it impossible to understand how one can freely and fully reject God's love. He does not doubt that people make voluntary estrangements from the good of God in this life. He even quotes Moses Maimonides when he states that we are what we make ourselves.¹²⁸ However, Hart only acknowledges this self-determination as true to a certain point. All of our decisions are made with a finite consciousness, and there is no reason to suggest that we possess limitless or unqualified liberty.¹²⁹ In the case of a known evil man, one may guess that he is either evil in part circumstantially, or congenitally, since both circumstances and genes play a role in a person's wicked behavior.¹³⁰

One difficulty Hart mentions with understanding freedom in the face of Hell, is that the soul is always oriented towards a good. St. Augustine and St. Aquinas, both argued something similar, but again the idea was prevalent even

¹²⁷Alfred R. Mele, "Free Will and Evidence," in *Free: Why Science Hasn't Disproved Free Will* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2015).

¹²⁸Hart, "Doubting the Answers."

¹²⁹Hart, "Doubting the Answers."

¹³⁰Hart, "Doubting the Answers."

prior in Aristotle's thought who says every act aims at a good.¹³¹ St. Augustine and St. Aquinas both say that the will is naturally directed towards the good, and so the nature of sin is to choose a lesser good over a higher good.¹³² While certain actions are manifestly evil, they are still done for some good purpose. Even though this purpose may not be justified, it does entail an end that is seen as good for the individual in some manner. For example, a robber killing a store clerk, is an action that can be perceived by the robber as good for serving his particular ends. While the robber may realize that the murder and theft are evil, he still seeks some perceived good. Here the action is said to be evil based not on the good it aspires towards, but the goodness it lacks. If there was no good desired, however, there would be no reason or ability for him to do such, since no one can will nothingness. Usually in the case of sin, one first acknowledges some positive end. While this idea is in line with Catholic teaching, it faces a difficulty explaining the decision to choose Hell, since by definition, Hell is the worst possible outcome and a complete separation from the source of good. To deliberately and continuously choose such a fate, is not an action directed towards any perceived good. A will that chooses Hell, however, would not just be catastrophic, but a choice made without any rational basis, which is a contradiction in terms.¹³³ Hart theorizes that if one were to be so radically libertine that they deliberately chose Hell, then this would mean that they were prohibited in terms of their sanity, since it is not rational to choose such a fate. In other words, they are not truly free, but insane. Here insanity is understood to be a type of ignorance, which prevents individuals from acting in deliberation, which is, as mentioned before a criterion for a mortal sin. Meanwhile Hart, like Plato, in a deterministic fashion, believes that the more full of knowledge an individual is, then the more that individual will

¹³¹Augustine, "Book I, Section 1," in *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. W. D. Ross, 2009, <http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/nicomachaen.1.i.html>.

¹³²Augustine and Thomas Williams, "Book II," in *On Free Choice of the Will*. (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Pub. Co., 1993), 68.

¹³³Hart, "The Moral Meaning of Creating Ex Nihilo." and "Doubting the Answers."

seek the good.¹³⁴ One can stray from the good only insofar as they are ignorant of the will's true end. This idea is somewhat supportable in patristics, since according to Maximus the Confessor the natural will must tend towards God for its true end, as God is goodness.¹³⁵ Aquinas likewise identifies rational activity with moral activity.¹³⁶ Hart differentiates himself from Maximus and Aquinas, however, when he states that there is no primordial incident where a person deliberately rejects God with a completely rational sound mind. Eternal culpability lies beyond any deliberation. The universalist philosopher, Thomas Talbott, makes the same argument. If God is seen as the source of all good, the choice to break from God would be unaccounted for.¹³⁷ While Hart and Talbott's perspective is at odds with Catholic teaching, it does present a relevant argument against the free will defense of Hell. A radical departure from God, would be to deny the deepest longings of the soul, in exchange for what would appear to be a pointless outcome. Not only is such an act foolish, it is detrimental. If one takes a more cardinal look at the problem this issue is even more apparent, since the choice to undergo pain is considered to be impossible in great quantities. In contemporary war tactics, for instance, torture, such as waterboarding, is sometimes used as a method to extract information. What is generally shown is that people in these situations will confess to having done crimes they didn't do or they'll say just about anything to prevent more torture. This is because the pain is unbearable. Given that individuals are unable to withstand such torture that's imposed on them, it is even more difficult to imagine how they could withstand torture by their own initiative. This is not considered to be freedom, because free will is compromised in this situation, yet, God is capable of removing such impediments to man's freedom.¹³⁸

¹³⁴Harry J. Gensler and Earl W. Spurgin, "Introduction," in *The A to Z of Ethics*. (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2010), 49.

¹³⁵Hart, "Doubting the Answers."

¹³⁶Kvanvig, 123.

¹³⁷Wetzel, "A Meditation on Hell: Lessons from Dante."

¹³⁸Jonathan L. Kvanvig, *Problem of Hell*, (New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 78-83.

Thomas Tallbott ultimately places himself against the “Natural Consequence” model of damnation. In particular, he responds to Robert Kane’s version of the argument, where Robert Kane argues for the “Natural Consequence” model on account of, “self-forming actions.” The argument pushed forward by Kane is that certain actions form a person, thus ultimately lead to the type of person they’ll be when they reject God and accept eternal damnation. Talbott does not dismiss the idea of free will. He accepts that there may be free choices or “undetermined actions.” His argument, however, is that many actions are the result of previous actions that could not have possibly been made with foresight of their moral ramifications. Talbott uses the example of a person learning to swim at a young age, being the inspiration for why they save a person later in life.¹³⁹ Choosing to swim was an a-moral choice that led to what is considered a virtuous action. While certain actions may condition a person to sin, many actions, including sinful actions, may actually condition someone to avoid sin in the future. For instance a husband who decides to have an affair, may only reinvigorate his faithfulness to his spouse in response to his past neglect.¹⁴⁰ They could not have foreseen the impact of their choices, but the impact was there all the same. In short, Talbott appeals to the concept of “moral luck” as a reason for why individuals don’t shape who they are, and suggests that they can not ultimately place themselves in Hell in the manner that Robert Kane advocates.

2.4.1. Argument contrasting desire with freedom

One issue with Thomas Talbott’s philosophy is that he presumes desire interferes with freedom.¹⁴¹ While God is capable of removing impediments to man’s freedom,¹⁴² the truth is most actions are determined by some desire or another, and these are generally desires one does not choose. While one could potentially imagine a situation where God eliminates a desire, this is actually an

¹³⁹Joel Buenting and Thomas Talbott, “Grace Character Formation, and Predestination unto Glory,” in *The Problem of Hell: a Philosophical Anthology* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2016).

¹⁴⁰Buenting and Talbott, “Grace Character Formation, and Predestination unto Glory.”

¹⁴¹Kvanvig, 81.

¹⁴²Kvanvig, 78-83.

abridgement to freedom, if the person did not actually wish to have said desire removed. The only way freedom can be preserved while desire is removed is if someone deliberately chose to have that desire removed.¹⁴³ This however could never entail removing all desires since even the desire to remove desires is a desire. Similarly, without desire, one would not be free or able to desire to be with God in Heaven for all eternity.

2.4.2. Free will in patristic theology

St. Gregory of Nyssa has a similar approach to Thomas Talbott, but more readily distinguishes between desire and impulses in his work on death. St Gregory states:

[Our desire]denuded and purified from all these [materialistic impulses]... will turn its energy towards the only object of will.. and love. It will not entirely distinguish our naturally occurring impulses towards such things, but will refashion them towards the immaterial participation in good things. For there shall lie the unceasing love of true beauty, there the praiseworthy greed for the treasures of wisdom, and the beauty and good love of glory which is achieved in the communion of the kingdom of God, and the fine passion of insatiable appetite which will never be cut short in its good desire by a satiety of these things.¹⁴⁴

In Gregory's *Contra Eunomonium* and *De anima et resurrection*, his eschatology, inspired by Plotinus and NeoPlatonism,¹⁴⁵ Hell is temporary, and not so much punitive as medicinal. In this description Hell has a cathartic nature to it (or catharsis) that allows for a cleansing and purification, which redirects the souls passions towards God. Rather than some souls choosing Heaven or Hell, all souls progress towards God infinitely. This idea can also be found in St. Gregory Nazansius, St. Clement Of Alexandria,¹⁴⁶ St. Macrina who all embraced the same idea of medicinal punishment from God in the afterlife, but only sometimes with a universalist undertone. Some criticize the lack of freedom in an eschatological

¹⁴³Kvanvig, 81.

¹⁴⁴Gregory of Nyssa, *De Mortuus*, Lozza, 17, 68. 23-70. In Ludlow, *Universal Salvation*, 57.

¹⁴⁵Harold Chernis, "The Platonism of Gregory of Nyssa," 6. in Ludlow, *Universal Salvation*, 23-30.

¹⁴⁶John R Saches, "Apocatastasis in Patristics in Theology" *Theological studies* 54(1993), 618-9. in Ludlow, *Universal Salvation*, 32.;and Brian Daley, *The Hope*, 47. in Ludlow, *Universal Salvation*, 32.

view where souls are forced towards God, but St. Gregory's reasoning is such that a soul could not truly be free unless it was moving towards God, since no desire to choose evil could last forever.¹⁴⁷ A problem for Gregory of Nyssa is that he assumes the soul has a natural and proper desire for God, and suggests that man in his natural state will automatically be attracted to God, but all the while mentions that man has passions that are contrary to God's will.¹⁴⁸ His explanation leaves little room for a libertarian sense of freedom, and places the faults of man in a position where God has control. If it is in God's power to correct the human soul, then it would also seem plausible to suggest that God would have no reason to not cleanse everyone's soul from the moment of inception. However, for others, the idea of Hell being a medicinal punishment from God is not at odds with teaching that Hell is eternal. While Gregory of Nazansius and St. Irenaeus, agrees with St. Gregory of Nyssa that God punishes in order to purify, they do not come to the same conclusion that all souls will be saved. While Gregory Nazansius mentions that God punishes medicinally, he also speaks of an unending fire.¹⁴⁹ St. Irenaeus similarly speaks of the flames of Hell being able to cleanse some sinners, but not all.¹⁵⁰ Here again, though, is the issue of whether a medicinal punishment may last for eternity.

2.4.3. Arguments regarding the free will defense

Raymond J. VanArragon in response Thomas Talbott finds two assumptions in Tallbott's argument that also apply to St. Gregory of Nyssa.¹⁵¹ The first is that evil is always destructive towards the sinner and the 2nd is that sinners will naturally come to recognize that evil is destructive to themselves. While Talbott is correct that some choices are the result of undetermined circumstances,

¹⁴⁷De hom. Opif. 21. 2: PG 44, 201c.in Ludlow, *Universal Salvation*, 88.

¹⁴⁸Gregory of Nyssa *De Mortuis* in Ludlow, *Universal Salvation*, 56-58.

¹⁴⁹Gregory of Nazianzus, *Theological Oration* 4(= Or. 300)s.6 in Ludlow, *Universal Salvation*, 36.

¹⁵⁰Irenaeus "Judgement: fate of the just" adu baer 5. 27. 2,5. 28. 3.in Ludlow, *Universal Salvation*, 31.

¹⁵¹Raymon J. VanArragon, "Is it Possible to Freely Reject God Forever?" in *The Problem of Hell: a Philosophical Anthology* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2016).

such as the swimmer example, certainly some actions, in contrast, are the result of deliberate, morally consequent choices. In this life sin may be destructive, but it is not always destructive to the person committing the sin, at least not in a way that is manifestly obvious. The example VanArragon uses is an individual who knows that drinking and driving is harmful, but yet still choose to do such anyway. Such an individual may even have firsthand experience of how drinking and driving can be harmful, choose to avoid it for a time being, but still decide to drink and drive later anyway. In other words, it is quite feasible that they know some action is wrong, yet choose to ignore it or forget their conscience. VanArrogon extends this same concept to the afterlife and states that sinners in Hell may be perpetually choosing to remain ignorant or indifferent, just as they do in the present life. Opponents of VanArrogon's freedom may suggest that it is wrong for God to allow them to stay ignorant, if this means they're eternally damned, but this argument places no burden on the individual. In response to Gregory's idea of Heaven and God being irresistible, VanArrogon states that it is in no way apparent what kind of information could convert a recalcitrant sinner, and if it were certain that it would, then freedom itself would not be apparent.

Perhaps the greatest and most troubling response to the free will defense of Hell comes from Andrew Pavelich who recognizes that the problem places free will in a position that it is generally not considered deserving.¹⁵² While free will is valued by man, there are numerous instances where it is not valued above some other good. For instance, parents taking care of children do not always allow their children to act freely, particularly if they know it would endanger the children.¹⁵³ If a child is likely to endanger another child, a good parent is also not one that would likely standby. Intervention is the norm, not the exception in such instances. While a child is perhaps not the best example, since they lack full cognitive abilities, the same can be applied for adults. Take for instance a police officer who

¹⁵²Andrew Pavelich, "The Moral Problem with the Free Will Defense Against the Problem of Evil," *The Heythrop Journal* 60, no. 5 (August 2017), 678-688, <https://doi.org/10.1111/heyj.12654>.

¹⁵³Pavelich, "The Moral Problem with the Free Will Defense Against the Problem of Evil."

has to prevent a crime.¹⁵⁴ The free will and intention of the culprit is irrelevant, as the officer's job is to prevent an evil action. Throughout history and Biblical revelation, people have believed in God's ability to intervene in human affairs.¹⁵⁵ There seems to be little reason to suppose God couldn't do so in regards to those destined to suffer an eternal fate, just as a police officer or parent would do. He could annihilate all evil doers or change their desires, and the circumstances which allow for them to act on their will, which according to Pavelich is not at odds with free will. Even if Pavelich accepted that this were a violation of free will, he also argues that the free will of individuals to choose evil is not only irrelevant for eternal consequence. It is also unnecessary from an earthly perspective, since there are no necessary decisions that also entail the ability to choose all manners of evil.¹⁵⁶ While perhaps the ability to choose some evil is necessary, the ability to know love and serve God, for instance, is not intertwined with man's ability to commit acts of terrorism. Just as God restrained Pharaoh in the book of Exodus, God has the ability to physically restrain such actions on the part of his children in hopes that they may better reach salvation. In summary, Pavelich sees the evil resulting from freely chosen actions as a burden on God's existence, and he does not see free will as belonging to man or serving as a sufficient reason for evil. If one accepts the premise that freedom is the primary value of soteriology, then preserving individuals in Hell, as Kvanvig notes, without their consent when they wish to perish is a violation of their freedom.¹⁵⁷ If freedom is given as an acceptable response to universalism, that is a reason so important for why certain souls are not allowed to enter into Heaven, then the question remains why is it not granted to those who wish for annihilation. If Eleanor Stump is correct, in asserting that existence is preferable to nonexistence, then the most feasible interpretation of Matthew 26:24 would appear to be rendered false, as it would

¹⁵⁴Pavelich, "The Moral Problem with the Free Will Defense Against the Problem of Evil."

¹⁵⁵Pavelich, "The Moral Problem with the Free Will Defense Against the Problem of Evil."

¹⁵⁶Pavelich, "The Moral Problem with the Free Will Defense Against the Problem of Evil."

¹⁵⁷Kvanvig, 127.

still have been better for Judas to have been born if his existence in Hell is preferable to not existing.

2.5. Section 2 summary

Karl Rahner, VanArragon, Robert Kane, Richard Swinburne, James Wetzel, C. S. Lewis, and countless others all accept some variant of the free will defense. While there are numerous issues the free will defense resolves, such as how God could punish a soul eternally, there are also many issues it does not resolve including some it creates. Other theories avoid such difficulties. If the decision is presented as a continuously chosen decision, however, then there's the question of how a soul could choose something so detrimental, when there are limits to the human will in the present life. As it is, the human will exists in a finite reality. The question for how it could act within an infinite reality is a question that cannot be resolved with any conclusive evidence. This is especially true if the choice of nonexistence is preferable to existing in such a state. On the contrary, though, if the decision to choose Hell is based entirely in the present, then it is not clear why it must necessarily have such a detrimental result. However much conditioning there may be for Hell in the present life, there seems to be no obvious answer as to how conditioning, of any sort, could result in eternal damnation.

Section 3:

God's Providence in Relation to Hell

3.1. God allows Hell

Even if one accepts the proposition that souls freely choose Hell or that Hell is a just punishment, the question of how God's will allows for souls to go to Hell in light of his providence also remains a mystery. While in a previous section, the justice of punishment was discussed, here what is of concern is the very intention of God. If God creates the entire universe in accordance with his design, and with full knowledge, then there is the expectation that the universe will follow his order. If a soul chooses to go to Hell, either indirectly or directly, this then is a difficulty because this means God wills the existence of souls who choose Hell. If Christ desires all men to be saved as is stated in 1 Timothy 2:4, then there appears to be no reason why God would create men he knows will choose Hell, especially since such a fate is apparently worse than nonexistence. As was discussed in the parent analogy, given by Pavelich, God's will is of relevance when considering what He allows to occur. Swiss Theologian, Hans Urs van Balthasar words it as such, "The question is whether God, with respect to his plan of salvation, ultimately depends, and wants to depend, upon man's choice; or whether his freedom, which wills only salvation and is absolute, might not remain above things human, created and, therefore, relative."¹⁵⁸

3.1.1. Difficulties with theorizing that Christ does not desire all men to be saved

While 1 Timothy 2:4 is rather clear, some theologians do disagree with the claim that Christ desires all men to be saved. Calvinists, for instance, simply interpret "all" as something other than every created being,¹⁵⁹ but this interpretative issue is not unique to Calvinists. St. Thomas Aquinas himself states, "God... does not will every good for everyone, and is said to hate some in so far

¹⁵⁸Balthasar, 14-15.

¹⁵⁹Hart, *That All Shall be Saved*.

as he does not will for them the good of eternal life.”¹⁶⁰ The opinion that God does not love everyone, Thomas Talbott refers to as hard hearted theism.¹⁶¹ Proponents of this theory may also likely embrace the idea that God is above all morality, therefore not subject to the same moral norms as humanity. For instance, 17th/18th century French Protestant, Pierre Jurieu holds this position.¹⁶² While this position consistently explains why Epicurus' dilemma would not apply to God, it does nothing to further any worthy image of the Lord.

3.1.2. Modern academics using Epicurean arguments

While suggesting that God intends or desires Hell does resolve the problem of Hell, insofar as it explains the existence and need for Hell, it fails to be a tenable solution as it further exacerbates the problem of evil. Observing this, in a manner similar to Epicurus and Hume, philosopher Michael Tooley phrased the question as such, “If evil exists and God exists, then either God does not have the power to eliminate all evil, or does not know when evil exists.”¹⁶³ Many other philosophers have commented on this very issue as well. J. L. Mackie says that the existence of an all powerful, all good God is incompatible with the existence of evil, as an all good God would eliminate such evil.¹⁶⁴ St. Clement, in observing the same dilemma, concludes that evil exists as a result of free will, that is the good that God created,¹⁶⁵ but John Hick argues that the doctrine of Hell implies that God does not want to save all humanity, so there's a limit to His goodness by the same measure.¹⁶⁶ While the statements and positions vary, the dilemma is the same since the difficulty is reconciling the justice of God with what is perceivably an unjust outcome. In observing this issue, David Bentley Hart argues that there are

¹⁶⁰Kvanvig, 108.

¹⁶¹Kvanvig, 109.

¹⁶²Kvanvig, 112-113.

¹⁶³Michael Tooley, “The Problem of Evil,” Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Stanford University, March 3, 2015), <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/evil/>.

¹⁶⁴Walls, 70-71.

¹⁶⁵Sarris, “Chapter 4: What Did the Early Church Teach?”

¹⁶⁶Walls, 70-71.

three claims, in which two may be true, but never all three;¹⁶⁷ that God freely created all things out of nothingness, that God is the good itself, and it is possible that some rational creature will endure the loss of God. According to Hart, If God is the good creator of all, He must be the savior of all that flushes forth from Him. While the question dealt with in the previous section of how souls choose or desire to go to Hell, is an important unanswered question, it is still a different question from why God would create a soul knowing full well that they will choose to go to Hell on their own accord. The fact that God created people knowing that some people would fall, or at very least understanding the risk of Hell, is morally problematic from the same perspective.¹⁶⁸

3.1.3. God moves all

To elaborate further, one should look at the issue in light of the greater issue of the problem of evil. God created the world *ex nihilo*. He is the final cause for all being and the reason for why creation exists.¹⁶⁹ It is not simply alone sufficient to suggest that God creates, as there is a purpose for His creation, and for this reason all creation is aimed towards God. Catholic philosopher and theologian Joseph Bracken S.J., using process theology, suggests that God moves all things towards Himself.¹⁷⁰ Evil is permitted in a holistic way, where God is able to ultimately transform it, though, in this situation, it is not clear how God could create freely in a way that would move against Himself. Christianity teaches, and practical experience shows that it is possible to reject the goodness of God even while knowing Him to be good. How or why this occurs is not readily apparent, because all causes are reducible to their first cause, which is also the final cause (God). The final cause entails the whole moral truth of existence, why there is something and not nothing. God could not create something evil, without evil

¹⁶⁷Hart, "The Moral Meaning of Creating Ex Nihilo."

¹⁶⁸Hart, "The Moral Meaning of Creating Ex Nihilo."

¹⁶⁹Hart, "The Moral Meaning of Creating Ex Nihilo."

¹⁷⁰Otto, "Review Essay: Theism, Evil, and the Search for Answers."

being a part of himself, which it is not.¹⁷¹ Therefore God's creation is good and God is present in all creation, as a manifest power. He has no need for the world, but because of its dependency on Him, it is a fitting example of His goodness.¹⁷² If the Baltimore Catechism is true when it asserts that we are created to know, love, and serve God in this life and be happy with him in the next, humanity could not exist as objects of God's anger¹⁷³ since this would be contrary to His purpose for creation. Yet this is exactly what those who state that God actively desires Hell for the wicked suggest.

3.2.1. Hell as a difficulty for those in Heaven

A second concern is that if God wills for us to be in Heaven and Heaven is understood to be a fulfilling of our desires, then there is a difficulty resolving how individuals in Heaven can rejoice knowing that there are individuals suffering so intensely in Hell. Liberal, German Protestant, Friedrich Schleiermacher states "that that if eternal damnation exists, eternal blessedness cannot continue to exist."¹⁷⁴ If all are called to love each other, and love entails desiring the good of the other, then one would suspect that it would be impossible to rejoice knowing others are in Hell. Bishop Robert Barron in the introduction to Balthasar's *Dare We Hope All Men Be Saved?* makes note that St. Catherine of Siena among other female mystics(Mechtilde of Hackeborn, Angela Foligno, Thérèse of Lisieux) felt impacted by this same dilemma.¹⁷⁵ Barron mentions a discussion that St. Catherine had with Christ where she asked him,

How could I ever reconcile myself, Lord, to the prospect that a single one of those whom you have created in your image and likeness should become lost and slip from your hands." The Lord responded to her with her spiritual director Raymond

¹⁷¹"Part 1: Question 6; Why Did God Make You?," in *The Baltimore Catechism* (Baltimore, MD, 1891), <https://www.sacred-texts.com/chr/balt/balt00.htm>.

¹⁷²Hart, "The Moral Meaning of Creating Ex Nihilo."

¹⁷³Hart, "The Moral Meaning of Creating Ex Nihilo."

¹⁷⁴ Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Christian Faith: A New Translation and Critical Edition*, trans. T. N. Tice, C. L. Kelsey, E. Lawler. ed. C. L. Kelsey, T. N. Tice, (Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville: 2016). Section 163. pp. 997-998. [P.S. 1] Addendum [to the Fourth Point of Doctrine]: Regarding Eternal Damnation"

¹⁷⁵Barron, "Foreword," in Balthasar, *Dare We Hope: That All Men Be Saved?*

of Capua who said to her: "Love cannot be contained in [H]ell; it would totally annihilate [H]ell."¹⁷⁶

Her response was to suggest that if she could remain united with Christ in love while blocking the entrance to Hell, that would be her greatest pleasure. What this exchange between Catherine Siena, Raymond of Capua, and Christ asserts is that it is impossible to love the souls in Hell, while also existing in Hell. What the exchange shows, however, is that a true saint would be willing to go to Hell rather than allow another soul to go to Hell. If the idea of others suffering in Hell is so painful for a saint, the question then remains, how is it possible for all the saints in Heaven to exist peacefully within the same reality. If this sentiment is integral to human morality, one must question whether divine love could be satisfied with such an outcome as well.

3.2.2. Hell as a benefit for those in Heaven

On the contrary, there is the argument that a limited amount of saved individuals contributes to the goodness in Heaven, specifically, that the exclusive nature of Heaven is what grants it merit.¹⁷⁷ Because mankind recognizes goodness in comparison to that which is bad, the existence and knowledge of Hell allows souls to recognize and rejoice better in the goodness of God. While certainly shocking, there's a sense of gratitude in this. St. Thomas Aquinas argues that this knowledge of the damned will increase pleasure.¹⁷⁸ This pleasure consists not in delighting in other people's pain, but in a gratitude that they are preserved from such a fate. Here Heaven is an exceptional outcome that highlights God's goodness. While Aquinas specifies that it is not the torment of the souls in Hell that should cause rejoicing, but the preservation from such a punishment, he still saw such an outcome as good, which would mean Heaven is rejoicing despite the eternal damnation of others. Church teacher Tertullian, on the other hand, rejoiced in the torment of his enemies in Hell, when he said it would "excite his admiration,

¹⁷⁶Barron, "Foreword," in Balthasar, *Dare We Hope: That All Men Be Saved?*

¹⁷⁷Hart, "The Moral Meaning of Creating Ex Nihilo."

¹⁷⁸Hart, "Third Meditation: What is a Person? Reflection on the Divine Image."

and rouse him to exultation, to witness those who persecuted the Christian name in the lowest darkness with Jove.”¹⁷⁹ He goes so far as to say he “will laugh” while looking down from Heaven at all the authorities who persecute Christians are “roasted.”¹⁸⁰ Hans Urs von Balthasar in his book, *Dare We Hope* recounts Tertullian’s comment and refers to them as sadistic, when he states that sadism was not imitated by Tertullian’s student, Cyprian.¹⁸¹ The problem with Tertullian perspective is it encourages a lack of love in our neighbor, and selective pity as a Christians. If it is a sin to wish the damnation of one's neighbor, certainly it would seem sinful to rejoice in Heaven at the expense of those not saved, yet Heaven is a place where sin cannot exist.

3.3. Possible worlds

The difficulty in posing the question of what God would not do versus what He could not do is a challenging distinction in the Hell equation. Late 20th Christian philosopher Alvin Plantinga speaks of this distinction, when he mentions that it is not possible that a person who accepts a bribe would do otherwise in any other scenario. Here Plantinga differentiates himself from Gottfried Wilhelm von Leibniz in saying there are possible worlds that God could not actualize.¹⁸² The statement would seem to go against the claim that God is omnipotent, meaning God could create any world He wanted. God however, does not contradict His own nature, but there is a limit to how much mankind can understand about His divine nature. How God reconciles human freedom with His own providence is the question that determines God’s approach to Hell. Intrinsic to human nature, is the capacity for sin, which is contrary to God’s will. The solution Alvin Plantinga puts forward, is essentially the same as Luis de Molina’s

¹⁷⁹Tertullian, “Chapter 30: Of Spectacles,” trans. S Thelwall, (Darren L. Slider, 2008), <http://www.logoslibrary.org/tertullian/spectacles/30.html>.

¹⁸⁰Karl-Wilhelm Webber, ed., “Tertulliani De Spectaculis,” Tertullian, 1988, sec. 30. http://www.tertullian.org/latin/de_spectaculis.htm. in Balthazar, 32.

¹⁸¹Balthazar, 32.

¹⁸²Jonathan L. Kvanvig, *Problem of Hell* (New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 89-90.

teaching on middle knowledge, known as Molinism.¹⁸³ What this proposes, contrary to divine openness or simple foreknowledge, is that God has knowledge of counterfactuals. If God knows middle knowledge then it means he chooses to create one reality, knowing full well what the alternatives are, and what the possibilities are within that reality. Alvin Plantinga makes two statements, the first is that there could logically exist a world where free creatures always choose what is right, but that it is not in God's power to create any possible world he pleases.¹⁸⁴ While He may want all to be saved, there are components of His nature, that He is limited by. The Catechism seems to confirm this same form of Molinism when it states that God knows the future and yet "predetermines no one to Hell,"¹⁸⁵ and when it states "to God, all moments of time are present in their immediacy... [and] [H]e establishes [H]is eternal plan of 'predestination', [in which] he includes in it each person's free response to [H]is grace."¹⁸⁶ Jonathan L. Kvanvig concludes from Plantinga's limitation that it is possible to theorize that God could create a world where people do not freely choose Hell, and also make this world dependent on the decision of man, but this is only theoretical. This would be a universalism where man freely chooses their fate, but specifically because God places them in a position where He knows they will avoid Hell. Theologian and Philosopher William Lane Craig was asked in a discussion forum for a talk he gave on Molism, whether God uses this middle knowledge in order to accomplish the maximum amount saved in a utilitarian manner or out favoritism to specific individuals.¹⁸⁷ Craig responded that it was a point Christians could disagree with each other over, but that the theory Molina puts forward, unlike Kvanvig, suggests only that the world God chooses is the model that is most virtuous, not necessarily the one in which most are saved. What this would mean is that God is not exclusively

¹⁸³William Lane Craig, "On Behalf of a Molinist Perspective" (speech, San Francisco, CA, Gracepoint Church, April 3, 1998), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VWly0PlaTMI>.

¹⁸⁴Walls, 72-73.

¹⁸⁵CCC, 1037.

¹⁸⁶CCC, 600.

¹⁸⁷Craig, *On Behalf of a Molinist Perspective*.

interested in humanity's salvation. Therefore, some other factor must determine why Hell is necessary.

3.3.1. Molinism and soteriology

The problem with Craig's(or Molina's) resolution is that Hell is not a negligible factor. While Molinism may have the correct interpretation of providence, it does not resolve the issue of theodicy. The accusation facing Hell is precisely that it does not appear to be all just and all merciful. However, considering the significance of the fear of Hell, perhaps some souls must go to Hell in order that other souls do not. If there are no souls in Hell, then striving for salvation makes less sense. This striving is essential and if the souls in Hell allow for others to enter Heaven, perhaps then, it makes sense why God would feel it necessary to create such souls. The problem of Hell is precisely that it seems undesirable and that it would be chosen among other feasible options. There is essentially no way Hell could not be a relevant factor for God when deciding which feasible reality to pick, since it is an undesirable outcome even for Himself (1 Tim 2:4).

If it is presumed that God has the ability to arrange the universe in a such a way that certain souls go to Heaven, then it would seem that God has the unique ability to make whoever he chooses a saint and whoever he chooses a sinner. For instance, the justification often made for harsh punishments in Scripture, is that they're acts of pre-punishment, thus preventing greater evils. Jewish Philosopher Daniel Statman in his article *The Time to Punish and the Problem of Moral Luck* cites the Sanhedrin Rabbis who punish a rebellious teenager not because his offenses were great, but because they foresaw that he would become evil.¹⁸⁸ The implication of this statement is that by God arranging the world and decrees in a certain manner, He is actively trying to prevent evil. If God can punish in order to prevent evil, then one would likely presume that God would want to do so for all

¹⁸⁸Statman, "The Time to Punish and the Problem of Moral Luck."

individuals, in order to save all individuals, not just some. Likewise, one may also suspect that God could annihilate innocent individuals in order to prevent them from committing evil deeds in the future, thus rendering the punishment of Hell presumably unnecessary.

One suggestion, mentioned in a lecture on Leibniz, is metaphysical efficiency which is the principle that God values all the factors that have been considered so far, but Hell is the result of Him balancing these factors in a way that is optimal for each consideration.¹⁸⁹ That is to say, God values mankind's freedom, He values the wellbeing of mankind, and He also values justice, but because these three things can be placed in juxtaposition with one another, it is incumbent on God to create a world that balances these instead of placing the emphasis on any particular factor. If God were to create the world strictly with freedom in mind, optimal freedom would allow for souls to move interchangeably between Heaven and Hell and annihilationism. What is missing from this scenario is God's remedial love and justice, so it would not be a perfect situation. If instead of freedom, justice were the only consideration for His creation, then God would not be able to allow for anyone to enter into Heaven. This also would not be ideal for love and freedom. Finally, if the emphasis were placed on God's love, then freedom and justice would both be neglected. While there may be some other factors to consider, these three are sufficient to demonstrate that He is unable to grant anyone of them absolutely without negating the other so the end result is a kind of balance. Marilyn McCord Adams recognizes this same issue when she states that there is a difficulty between reconciling God's will, providence, and impassibility, with that of human actions.¹⁹⁰ The will of God's creation(mankind) seems to be the undeterminable factor, not God. If one accepts the concept of pre-punishment, perhaps all the evil in the world is already the result of God optimizing the universe for the most amount of people to be saved. While it may

¹⁸⁹Matthew McCormick, "Leibniz: This Is the Best of All Possible Worlds, Despite the Appearance of Pointless Suffering" (lecture, Sacramento, CA, California State University, December 5, 2013), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=amcnW7Dkc-0>.

¹⁹⁰Stephen Grover, "Religion and Morality," *Philosophical Investigations* 21 (1996), 181.

seem unfair that certain individuals have it more difficult than others, perhaps this was arranged precisely for their own benefit, with others in mind as well. While this explanation does describe a compelling reason for why the world rarely seems optimal for any particular objective, it fails to resolve the mystery of the problem of Hell, as it is not clear why these factors must be placed in conflict with each other. Nor is this the only possibility, as Plantinga puts forward an counter position, known as transworld damnation, meaning if an individual is damned in one conceivable reality, then he would also be such in any other, as damnation is the result not of circumstances, but an internal position. Here the soul's consistency is undetermined by the surrounding circumstances. This viewpoint is also particular to a Molinist perspective.

3.3.2. Other theories besides Molinism

While Molinism is a normal view for many Christians, it should be noted that not all Christians accept Molinism. For English, Orthodox, Christian philosopher, Richard Swinburne and Peter Geach, God does not have definite knowledge of future events. The argument presented is that it is a logical impossibility for God to know what will happen before it happens precisely because it hasn't happened yet.¹⁹¹ If humanity's freedom is undetermined, then this is a necessity. In Swinburne and Geach's mind, it is a contradiction to know a freely made choice in advance, without detracting from that freedom. In this same theological framework, Richard Creel states God knows exactly how He will respond prior to it unravelling.¹⁹² He is aware of every potential act or possibility before it occurs, so nothing surprises Him, which allows Him to be able to predict things with great exactitude, but by giving humanity freedom, He allows for Himself not to be aware of events prior to their occurring. According to Geach, the reason God knows the future is by making it happen. Within this framework, there is a possibility for all to be saved, in an undetermined sense, but no guarantee of such

¹⁹¹Walls, 47.

¹⁹²Walls, 48.

since it has not unfolded. By omitting God's involvement in the future, this solution resolves one component of the problem of Hell.

A natural criticism of Geach and Swinburne's theory is that it either places God in time, thus limiting Him to a finite reality, or it places time as an infinite reality outside of God's prediction and control. Contemporary philosopher Anthony Kenny referred to this as the most extreme form of indeterminism.¹⁹³ One could still argue that God created time, but in virtue of giving humanity freedom, He does not know the exact outcome of creation. Potentially, if one were to use an illustration, it would seem that God can watch time unfold from outside it occurring, but how it unfolds, by virtue of it having not happened yet is unknowable. Naturally, if God is omnipotent, the presumption would be that He could know all things, so this position limits God's ability to intervene.

3.4. Section 3 summary

The issue of providence is unresolved as would be expected. There is no definite answer as to whether God is content with souls in Hell or is eternally displeased. Divine Impassibility would suggest that He is unmoved by such a state of affairs, however, His unceasing love for creation suggests otherwise. While His will is only known through revelation and humanity's knowledge of creation, philosophers disagree as to whether He has knowledge of future events, and whether His will(including passive) is ultimately achieved. As the words from the Our Father would suggest, "Thy will be done," one can presume our Lord has the last word, but how eternal punishment fits within this will is a mystery.

¹⁹³Walls, 45.

Section 4:

Failed Resolutions

4.1. Universalism

While Hell poses a problem to most Christian believers, many have resorted to heresy or radical attempts to remedy the doctrine with their perception of God. The most obvious example of this is universalism. As mentioned before, this solution does not work within a Catholic framework since universalism is a condemned belief. Universalism or apokatastasis, is generally considered to have been first condemned at the 5th Ecumenical Council which states: “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 (*apokatastasis*) will take place of demons and of impious men, let him be anathema.”¹⁹⁴ There is some controversy surrounding the nature and legitimacy of the specific anathemas, since they may have actually been from a lesser local council shortly before.¹⁹⁵ The argument that many universalists put forward is that Emperor Justinian issued two series of judgments. The first was 9 articles in a letter to Patriarch Menas in 544, that were promulgated at a local council in Constantinople, and the second was a series of 15 articles that would be promulgated at the 5th ecumenical council.¹⁹⁶ What is proposed is that the lesser council condemned universalism, but not the ecumenical one. Another theory, also put forward by universalists that conflicts with the two councils theory, is that the same bishops present at the 5th Ecumenical condemned universalism shortly before, but not during the 5th Ecumenical Council, simply to avoid a conflict with emperor Justinian.¹⁹⁷ That is, while they did condemn it, it wasn’t part of the authoritative council. This would

¹⁹⁴Henry Percival, tran., “Second Council of Constantinople; The Anathemas of the Emperor Justinian Against Origen,” *New Advent* (Kevin Knight, 1900), <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/3812.htm>.

¹⁹⁵Kallistos Ware, “Dare We Hope for the Salvation of All? Origen, St Gregory of Nyssa and St Isaac the Syrian,” *The Collected Works Volume I The Inner Kingdom*, (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir Press, 2001), 4. <https://www.clarion-journal.com/files/dare-we-hope-for-the-salvation-of-all-1.pdf>.

¹⁹⁶Sarris, “Chapter 4: What Did the Early Church Teach?”

¹⁹⁷Sarris, “Chapter 4: What Did the Early Church Teach?”

mean, as George Sarris notes, that Pope Vigilius was not present at this council, so the version he approved would not have included the anathemas.¹⁹⁸ Though the language in the anathema quoted above seems applicable to contemporary universalism, some also suggest that the council's anathemas are not relevant to contemporary universalism, because they were only meant to address the radical interpretations of Origen's teachings in the 6th century. Morwenna Ludlow, for instance, suggests in her footnotes to her book, *Universal Salvation*,¹⁹⁹ that the 5th Ecumenical Council would not be applicable to Gregory of Nyssa, but more specifically Stephen Bar Sudhaile.²⁰⁰ Alternatively, George Sarris suggests that the idea of infinite punishment being a core doctrine of faith first emerged with what was known as the Athanasian creed. Sarris notes that the apostle's creed mentions judgment, resurrection of the body, life everlasting, and Christ going into Hades, and that the Nicene Creed mentions He will judge the living and dead, but neither creed mentions eternal punishment.²⁰¹ Part of this controversy can be seen in the early church with the interpretation of Greek word *aion* as a never ending a finite age. Two notable examples include Augustine who interpreted it as endless and believed all deserved endless punishment, while St. Clement saw it as finite.

4.1.1. Catechism opposes universalism

Regardless of whatever historical stance one takes on the matter, the condemnation is reasserted authoritatively as Church teaching in the contemporary *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and elsewhere. In regards to angels, the Catechism states that, "it is the irrevocable character of their choice, and not a defect in the infinite divine mercy, that makes the angels' sin unforgivable."²⁰² This same paragraph goes on to state that "there is no repentance

¹⁹⁸Sarris, "Chapter 4: What Did the Early Church Teach?"

¹⁹⁹Morwenna Ludlow, *Universal Salvation: Eschatology in the Thought of Gregory of Nyssa and Karl Rahner* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

²⁰⁰Ludlow, 38.

²⁰¹Sarris, "Chapter 5."

²⁰²CCC, 393.

for the angels after their fall, just as there is no repentance for men after death”²⁰³. From this quote it can reasonably be deduced that Hell is at least filled with the demons, and once a human soul is in Hell, it is there eternally.²⁰⁴ This statement negates Diodorus of Tarsus and Gregory of Nyssa’s theory of a temporary Hell, and theory concerning the conversion of the devil, thus rendering universal salvation impossible for all spiritual beings.

4.2. Hopeful universalism

One theory suggested by the 20th century theologian, Hans Urs von Balthasar, however, can be seen as an attempt to reconcile the problem of Hell and universalism, by suggesting that there is a chance or reasonable hope that all men(not spiritual beings) might be saved, but this salvation is the consequence of souls freely overcoming a real danger. Hell, in Hans Urs von Balthasar’s theory remains possible, but as Cardinal Avery Dulles in his article on the subject said, “the fact that something is highly improbable need not prevent us from hoping and praying it will happen.”²⁰⁵ By analogy, if there was a massive hole in the middle of a road, it would present a real danger. The potential danger is present, but no one has to actually fall into the hole for it to still pose a real danger. Hans Urs von Balthasar’s approach to salvation is similar to this analogy, in that Hell poses a real and grave danger, but such an outcome is not presumed to have happened to anyone. In his work he cites the philosopher Josef Pieper who was aware of two types of hopelessness: despair and *praesumptio* (presumption).²⁰⁶ Both of these, are contrary to the hope he is advocating for.

4.2.1. Hopeful differs from universalism

The position presented by Balthasar differs from the various universalist positions, such as that of Diodorus of Tarsus, Gregory of Nyssa, Origen of

²⁰³St. John Damascene, *De Fide orth.* 2,4: PG 94, 877. in CCC, 393.

²⁰⁴CCC, 1035.

²⁰⁵Sarris, Chapter 7.

²⁰⁶Balthasar, 21.

Alexandria, David Bentley Hart, Rob Bell, George Sarris, Ilari Ramelli or George Macdonald since they do not believe Hell poses a real risk of permanent separation from God. A universalist argument, contrary to what Balthasar states, would not concede of such a possibility. The introduction to Balthasar's book says that "whatever else Hans Urs von Balthasar says in ...[his] book, the one thing he is quite clearly not saying is that we have certain knowledge that all people will be saved."²⁰⁷ This claim of Balthasar is, at very least, not entirely at odds with traditional Catholic thought. The German Bishops in their catechism for adults, support this claim, when they state neither Tradition or Scripture "asserts with certainty"²⁰⁸ that any man is actually in Hell. Hell rather, remains a possibility, constantly before one's eyes, as a call to conversion.²⁰⁹

4.2.2. Hopeful universalism confused for universalism

Even though the position of Balthasar is distinct from the apokatastasis or the universalism heresy condemned by the Catholic church, Balthasar's position has been referred to as hopeful universalism, since it still hopes for such an outcome. While perhaps it is not universalism, since it is not a default position, it is universalism insofar as it proposes that the salvation of all souls is a possible hope. Since a hope could be classified as a belief, there is a confusion, but one holds the position of universal salvation as a definite teaching, while the other is only contingently committed to such an outcome. If a soul goes to Hell, Balthasar's statement would not be rendered incorrect as he merely asserted that he had the right to hope, not presume that the soul would do otherwise.

A helpful distinction that may be made is between that contingent universalism and necessary universalism. In the case of necessary universalism, universalism is believed to be true out of necessity, since the premise is Hell is not possible. Contingent universalism, however, proposes that salvation is

²⁰⁷Barron and Balthasar, 8.

²⁰⁸Balthasar, 13.

²⁰⁹Balthasar, 13.

contingent on some matter, presumably the free will of man. While Balthasar's hopeful universalism could be considered a type of contingent universalism, not all types of contingent universalism could be considered hopeful universalism. Since hopeful universalism is a belief that universal salvation is a mere possibility, it is not equivalent to believing universalism will occur, even if that salvation is dependent on a contingent factor. Take for instance choice. The premise is accepted that Hell is a choice, a contingent universalist could potentially presume to have knowledge or faith that all of mankind will choose to be saved, and claim to have definite knowledge of such. while Balthasar adamantly denies that such knowledge is possible.

4.3. Balthasar as consistent with Catholic teaching

While Hans Urs von Balthasar's position is not endorsed by the Church, or formally rejected, there are two premises of his argument that are consistent with Church teaching. First, is that it is acceptable to have hope in a general sense. If Hell is embraced as a real possibility, then it is good to pray for all souls. Benedict 16th in *Spe Salvi*²¹⁰ focuses on this hope for the unknown, where he asserts that "In hope the church prays for all men to be saved... and that no one will be lost."²¹¹ It is important to note that Benedict the 16th, unlike Balthasar, is not referring specifically to the possibility of all men being saved, but to the fact that we should not limit our hope in regards to any particular person. The second element is that Salvation is not a given in Christian teaching. Benedict 16th recognizes that the Christian message is not just informative but performative as well. He mentions that Aquinas' thought of faith has a habit or *habitus* that leads reason to consent to what it cannot see.²¹² Salvation is not a given in Christian teaching.

²¹⁰Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi*. (November 30, 2007)." http://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20071130_spe-salvi.html. and CCC, 1058.

²¹¹Sarris, Chapter 7.

²¹²Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi*.

4.3.1 Balthasar's hope

In regards to the first premise of hope, there is a controversy over whether it should be sought individualistically or as part of a collective whole. While charity would seem to suggest that hoping for the salvation of all men is more inline with loving one's neighbor, this approach lends itself more readily to universalism. For this reason, Henri de Lubac argued that our joy in Christ can only be taken as an individualistic joy.²¹³ While one may desire others to be saved, one's knowledge and trust in Christ is an individualistic choice. There's no conflict or need for him to share this joy with others, when they will need to experience it on their own as well. DeLubac quotes Jean Giono in saying, "The joy of Jesus can be personal. It can belong to a single man and he is saved...The isolation of this joy does not trouble [H]im. On the contrary: [H]e is the chosen one! In [H]is blessedness [H]e passes through the battlefields with a rose in his hand."²¹⁴ The main issue for DeLubac is that one cannot find hope in a general sense, as joy does not exist in abstract but only in particular instances where one experiences it. Pope Benedict notes that this attitude is heavily criticized among other theologians. He mentions that it can be seen as abandoning the world in order to seek a private salvation.²¹⁵ This private form of salvation is at odds with the body of Christ, where all members perform a crucial function in salvation. In contrast, Jean Cardinal Danielou, S.J. argues that hope bears all of creation, where all of humanity is intertwined in purpose or salvation.²¹⁶ To live for Christ means to be drawn towards his being for the sake of others.²¹⁷

²¹³Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi*.

²¹⁴ And Jean Giono, *Les vraies richesses*, Paris 1936, Preface, quoted in Henri de Lubac, *Catholicisme. Aspects sociaux du dogme*, Paris 1983, p. VII. quoted in Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi*.

²¹⁵Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi*, Sec. 13.

²¹⁶Daniélou Jean, *Essai sur le mystère de l'histoire*, (San Sebastián: Ediciones Dinor, 1953), 340. quoted in Balthasar, *Dare We Hope All Men Be Saved?and*

²¹⁷Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi*, Sec. 13. and Avery Dulles, "The Population of Hell: Avery Cardinal Dulles," First Things, May 1, 2003, <https://www.firstthings.com/article/2003/05/the-population-of-hell>.

4.4. Universalist criticism of Balthasar

While the positive attributes of Balthasar's position are embraced by the Catholic hierarchy, there are criticisms from necessary universalists that are applicable to contingent universalism. David Bentley Hart, for instance, argues against Hans Urs von Balthasar's position, since it concedes the possibility of a better outcome, yet denies that this outcome is necessarily so.²¹⁸ Gottfried Wilhelm von Leibniz made the claim that since the world comes from God, it must therefore be the greatest of all possible worlds. If this claim is taken seriously, then it would suggest that if a greater outcome were possible, then that greater outcome must necessarily be so. When Hume read Jonathan Edwards' endorsement of Leibniz's position, his response was "what the devil does the fellow make of Hell and damnation?"²¹⁹ Necessary universalists, like David Bentley Hart, would seem to agree with Hume on this point, which is why they do away with the doctrine of Hell. A hopeful universalist, like Balthasar, however, accepts that universal salvation is the greatest of outcomes, but refuses to accept that it is a problem if God is not able to grant such. From the perspective of such an outcome being possible, the question for why it would not be so is even more burdensome. To be able to improve upon God's creation, suggests that God created something imperfect. Creation could not be called fully good if there is some imperfection.²²⁰ Even if one were to grant Balthasar's premises that Hell can be avoided by all, this says nothing to redeem God's goodness, which is often expressed as the essential concern of those who embrace universalism. If one holds to reason that hopeful universalism is true, because God would otherwise allow evil, then their argument is that God is only contingently good based on the actions of humanity.²²¹

²¹⁸Hart, "The Moral Meaning of Creating Ex Nihilo."

²¹⁹Walls, 3-4.

²²⁰Hart, "The Moral Meaning of Creating Ex Nihilo."

²²¹Kvanvig, 76.

4.4.1. Infernalist criticisms of Balthasar

In addition to the criticism from universalists, are still two main problems with Hans Urs von Balthasar's position. The first is even though it is technically distinct from apokatastasis, the distinction is one that lends itself to an approach that for all intents and purposes might as well be universalism. In the analogy given earlier in this section, of a hole that no one ever falls into, the hole can not easily be perceived as a real problem if everyone avoids it. For example, the Grand Canyon poses a real danger, but it is not exactly what one would call a problem. During an interview with philosophy professor Dr. Michael Pakaluk, concerning a possible correlation between a lack of justice in the priest scandal and that of Balthasar's theory, the Catholic apologist Patrick Coffin said Balthasar's position "[flies] in the face of our Lord's words and frequent warnings about Hell." He reiterated this by stating that "the teaching of the church that Hell is real, that it's not a wordplay, [and] it's not just a verbal threat."²²² Dr. Pakaluk, responding to Patrick Coffin, stated that Balthasar's theory does not "resolute with a serious person's reflection concerning their own live possibility of suffering eternal damnation. If the danger of Hell is true for one person, then it is true for all people." While this refutation is incomplete in that it does not recognize the real risk of Hell that Balthasar believes in, it does demonstrate how difficult it is to suggest the possibility of universal salvation, without it being misconstrued to mean universal salvation as a default result. This same criticism was noted in the introduction to Balthasar's book where Bishop Barron notes that particular theologians argue that Balthasar is responsible for the decline in Christian missionary work, and that his desire to hope runs contrary to the teaching of Christ and the actions of many missionaries.²²³ Certainly Christ does not speak of this possibility when considering the final judgment. The difficulty with assuming one is free to hope in God's mercy is that if it is phrased in such a way,

²²²"91: The Death Penalty and the Sex Abuse Scandal—Dr. Michael Pakaluk," Youtube (PatrickCoffin.media, 2018) 37:47, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5G63OFdbvSo>.

²²³Barron and Balthasar, "Introduction" in *Dare We Hope*.

one may conclude that since God's mercy is greater than our sins, we must be automatically saved.²²⁴ If hoping for the salvation of all souls is acceptable because God is all good, then the problem is that the burden is being placed on God, not on humanity. To state that this is an acceptable basis for hoping for the salvation of all souls, suggests that God is responsible for our fate. If all that is required to hope for the salvation of all, is that God be all good, then there is no reason not to suppose that the heresy of apocatastasis is true. This here is what critics would refer to as a perversion of hope.

4.5. Reimagining eternal Hell

Perhaps the main difficulty facing the problem of Hell is the epistemic issue since many Christians have not fully come to terms with what the doctrine means for eschatology, God, themselves and for others. While it is no surprise that there are an increasing number of Christians who deny the doctrine, what is also common is a sort of cognitive dissonance which assumes either the doctrine does not apply to oneself, or is not a problem for others. Dutch Theologian Hedrikus Berkhof notes that a person would normally warn against a threat that they took seriously.²²⁵ If for instance there was a fire about to burn down a person's house, a concerned neighbor would warn the neighbor that their house was about to burn. However, in regards to eternal damnation, which is presumably a real and present danger, everyone is silent. While the attitude of those who hold signs or shout to the public to repent is often mocked as being radical, the reality is the position is entirely in line with Christian teaching. However, resolving the problem of Hell is not possible if the teaching is not embraced.

A common response to the problem of Hell and the cognitive dissonance described, is to either retort that one's subjective complacency does not speak for the validity of the doctrine or to perhaps argue that Hell is in some ways different than imagined. One example is F. W. Farrar, a 19th century Anglican who outlined 4 accretions to the traditional doctrine of Hell that he disagreed with. He denied

²²⁴Sarris, "Chapter 4: What Did the Early Church Teach?"

²²⁵Walls, 22.

that Hell consisted of physical torment, a punishment that was necessarily eternal, a punishment that applies to the majority of humanity, and that people would be judged irrevocably on death.²²⁶ In a famous 19th century debate, E. B. Pusey accepted the 1st and 3rd accretions of Farrar, for they could both agree that Hell need not be physical torment or apply to all living souls, but they disagreed on the matter of whether Hell was eternal and irrevocable. In regards to the nature of the punishment, Pusey, inline with Catholic teaching on this matter, said that Scripture warns us “of their intensity,” but “does not define their quality.”²²⁷ This same outlook has caused others to reimagine the punishments of Hell in a way that is more to their liking.

4.5.1. Hell as not painful

James Cain in an article entitled “On the Problem of Hell” noted an observation that is often missing in the discussion of Hell.²²⁸ While there is a debate over whether the punishment of Hell is self-inflicted or imposed, what is often not considered is that it is possible to suffer by virtue of deprivation, not necessarily self-inflicted or imposed. Rather if Heaven is infinite, than anything outside of Heaven is an infinite loss. While Cain admits that he believes punishment, as a matter of doctrine is positive, that is imposed by God, what he unknowingly shows is that as a deprivation, the souls in Hell may actually be as happy as they possibly can be. Here he admits the necessity for a natural punishment or positive punishment, but theoretically Hell could be imagined as a place not of suffering, but of infinite loss of potential. While most assuredly sadder than those in Heaven, the souls may or may not recognize their lack of fulfilled potential, but once the realization is made, that everything less than infinite goodness is an infinite loss, the perspective is a bit different. James Wetzel states that “the metaphysical truth that sin is no good, a ticket to non-being, is usually

²²⁶Walls, 10.

²²⁷Walls, 11.

²²⁸Cain, “On the Problem of Hell.”

hard to credit in the face of some particular sin.”²²⁹ This is perhaps not a good reason to believe Hell is not a miserable place of suffering, but Jerry Walls in his book *the Logic of Damnation*,²³⁰ admits a similar confession that maybe the distorted pleasures of Hell are enough to prevent the souls in Hell from committing suicide.²³¹ The fact that the soul is designed for something superior is alone sufficient to be considered the worst possible punishment. It is the worst possible punishment not by virtue of what it is, but by virtue of what it potentially could have been. If there is the possibility for something infinitely great then missing such greatness would be an Infinite loss. One potentially redeeming aspect is that the souls in Hell may in fact rejoice in the notion of their punishment but in God’s justice, since at the name of Jesus, every knee shall bow and confess Him (Phil. 1:10). Soren Kierkegaard stated that “if, after the Final Judgment, there remains only one sinner in Hell and I happen to be that sinner, I will celebrate from the abyss the justice of God.”²³² While its not apparent how a soft variant of Hell is to be mended with the language of Scripture that speaks of eternal flames, or eternal torment and suffering, Jacques Maritain provided a synthesis of the two ideas where there is fire and suffering, but that at one point this torment will end, and then result in Hell transforming into the equivalent of a permanent Limbo.²³³ Maritain recognizes that such an idea is unconventional but still sees it as a conceivable idea.

The idea that Hell can still be considered the worst possible punishment but only because it is not Heaven and never ending is, at first glance, conceivable in Christian Tradition. Thomas Aquinas, for instance, recognizes that since evil is a privation or a separate existence, then there must be some good in order for the

²²⁹Wetzel, James. “A Meditation on Hell: Lessons from Dante.” *Modern Theology* 18, no. 3 (2002): 375–94. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-0025.00194>.

²³⁰Jerry L. Walls, *Hell: The Logic of Damnation*, (Notre Dame, In: University of Notre Dame Press, 1993).

²³¹Walls, 137.

²³²Martin Henry, “Does Hell Still Have a Future?,” *The Heythrop Journal* 56, no. 1 (September 2014): pp. 129, <https://doi.org/10.1111/heyj.12123>.

²³³Avery Dulles, “The Population of Hell: Avery Cardinal Dulles,” *First Things*, May 1, 2003, <https://www.firstthings.com/article/2003/05/the-population-of-hell>.

souls in Hell to exist.²³⁴ Meanwhile Gregory the Great's prayer for Trajan, while not hopeful in light of the prospect of infinite punishment, does suggest that punishment in Hell is not necessarily unceasing since there are some, albeit minor, measures that can mitigate the pains of Hell.²³⁵ An old Irish legend that says Judas is given a day off from his torments in Hell,²³⁶ also supports this idea, but while the idea of a less painful Hell is appealing and possibly conceivably in line with Christian Tradition, the reality is such a suggestion is controversial for a good reason. The long-standing tradition of Hell being a place of torment is ingrained into the tradition of the Church in such a way that most religious imagery would not support Maritain's theory, as eternal torment is the status quo.

4.5.2. Heaven and Hell as the same place

A third supposed remedy to the problem of Hell, different from reinterpreting the punishments of Hell and universalism, is to suggest that while Heaven and Hell are seen as opposites in many respects, there is the possibility that the two are actually one in the same thing. Philosopher Peter Kreeft, much like St. Ephrem the Syrian, in a book on apologetics makes this claim in regards to the fires of Hell, that is perhaps the fires of Hell are the same as the glory and love of Heaven only it is being experienced in rejection.²³⁷ This would mean that the souls in Heaven and Hell in the same place only the experience is different based on how they choose to respond to God's love and based on how well formulated their souls are. While this may sound like a more merciful approach to Hell, a closer look shows that it does nothing to resolve the issue. If love is antithetical to the good will or being a person then it is not love. The actual physical location of Heaven has never been the concern, rather the issue deals

²³⁴Msgr. Charles Pope, "Why Damnation Is Eternal and Other Teachings on Hell," *Community in Mission* (blog, November 21, 2017), <http://blog.adw.org/2017/11/damnation-eternal-teachings-hell/>.

²³⁵James T. Palmer, "Book Reviews: Hell and Its Rivals: Death and Retribution among Christians, Jews, and Muslims in the Early Middle Ages," *Early Medieval Europe* 27, no. 4 (2019), 591-593, <https://doi.org/10.1111/emed.12368>.

²³⁶Martin Henry, "Does Hell Still Have a Future?" 124.

²³⁷Peter J. Kreeft and Ronald Keith Tacelli, "God and Glory: Hell," in *Handbook of Christian Apologetics: Hundreds of Answers to Crucial Questions* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 280-313.

specifically with how individuals experience the afterlife. If Heaven is a miserable fate for some individuals, then the questions or difficulties are the same as if they were placed in Hell.

4.6. Heretical viewpoints that do not resolve the issue

Even if one does away with the standard views of Hell, heretical viewpoints do not necessarily resolve the issues facing Hell. For instance, there are two viewpoints: annihilationism and second chance theory, that both repeat the same concerns surrounding Hell. In the case of annihilationism, it does nothing to resolve the arbitrary problem, as it does not entail a specific criterion for eternal life. Whether one frames the question as God intervening to destroy life, or prevent it from dying is irrelevant for an omnipotent being in light of the doctrine of divine conservation, because in either situation, God permits destruction.²³⁸ The second alternative heretical viewpoint, that people can choose to leave Hell, still overlooks the assessment of Hell as an unjust punishment. Simply because there is an easy alternative, does not render the punishment just. For instance, if someone were to insist that cutting off another person's hand is an unjust punishment, the punishment does not become just if the only requirement to avoid such is if someone apologizes. The punishment is apparently unjust either way.

4.3. Section 4 summary

In this section, various alternatives to the infernalist model of Hell are explored and dismissed that are either heretical or do not actually resolve the problem. For hopeful universalists, who try to maintain mankind's freedom with universal salvation, they are still burdened with the consideration of the Devil, and the justice involved with the possibility of Hell. If one attempts to revise the teaching so as to suggest annihilationism, or the theory that Hell is not eternal, there is the same issue facing the justice of the matter, since one cannot know,

²³⁸Kvanvig, 70.

definitively, what metric would be just. Here, nothing is actually resolved except a sympathetic sentiment for the damned. For those who try to reimagine the doctrine in less painful manner, they overlook Hell's most defining characteristics.

Conclusion: Conflicting Opinions on Hell

Amongst the various models of Hell presented, there is one consistency, and that is whatever proposal is presented, criticism surely follows. While this is not surprising since Hell is perhaps the most controversial dogma in Christianity, it does demonstrate that the controversy of how Hell exists is not definitively resolved. As shown, numerous theologians disagree over the matter, and create various models attempting to illustrate the infinity of Hell. When presented in contrast with one another, the premises are often in conflict with one another, with none giving thorough insight as to how the mysterious components of Hell could be rationalized.

Any criticism presented towards the doctrine of Hell can be answered, but not without altering some presuppositions. For instance, if one suggests that Hell is a just punishment, this answers the question of why people go to Hell and what purpose it serves, but if one then denies or questions the legitimacy of an infinite punishment for finite action, there is, with the exception of perhaps the status principle, no satisfactory answer. If one is discontent or conflicted with the idea of Hell being considered a just punishment bestowed on them by a loving God, then they can suggest that it is a freely chosen outcome. However, if Hell is presented as the result of a freely chosen outcome, then it is not apparent how one could choose Hell for all eternity. Meanwhile, if Hell is presented as a choice, then this is a separate claim than that it is just punishment. None of this is to suggest that Hell is not real or that it is unjust, rather only to illustrate that the proposed solutions are often short sighted.

To suggest that Hell is a just punishment, however, is not a claim that can be proved or disproved. While infinite punishment will seem proportionally unbalanced, there is no immediate knowledge of the entirety of what is lost when one sins. Sin brought evil into the world, both during the fall of man and prior with the fall of demons, but this does not explain why justice is not proportionally

distributed in any noticeable measurable way. Judaism and Christianity, very openly, however, do not claim to be able to explain this. On the contrary, this mystery is the main theme to the book of Job. When Job, a man who was considered to be just, complained about his suffering, God's answer was to tell Job that he didn't know what he was talking about. "I will question you, and you shall inform Me, Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? Tell Me, if you have understanding" (Job 38). Whatever correlation there is between suffering and humanity's faults, it is in some manner beyond comprehension. This includes suffering in Hell.

While the suggestions that Hell is a choice and the suggestion that Hell is a punishment are not positions that are incompatible with each other, most models or illustrations present these concepts in ways that are at odds with one another. For instance, if one suggests that Hell is entirely the doing of the individual, such as in C. S. Lewis' *The Great Divorce*, this then is in conflict with the illustration given of Hell in Dante's *Inferno*. While neither presentation is heretical or definitive, they both hold opposing positions on fundamental elements of Hell. For instance, Hell in Dante's description, the damned are placed in particular circles distributed according to their sins on earth. None of the souls desire to be there, or directly choose to be there. In Lewis' *Great Divorce*, however, Hell is entirely of their own making since they reject efforts on God's part. It is exclusively the result of their desire. When a believer is confronted with these two versions, and the various descriptions in Scripture, they are not only in a position where they are uncertain over which description is more accurate, but over whether Hell can properly be considered to be a choice of one's own making.

As discussed in section 3, human choice and justice are not the only issues facing Hell. God's desire in the equation is also one of human uncertainty. While 1 Timothy 2:4 is clear regarding God's desire for all to be saved, the passage does not mention whether God's will is conditional or if it is limited by humanity's own will. Either the will of humanity limits God, or God's desire for salvation is conditional. When taken in light of divine providence, both statements would

suggest that salvation is of limited value to God (either because of free will or justice), while the consequences are eternal for His subjects.

While some suppose that universalism, hopeful universalism, or the prospects of a less painful Hell would resolve the issue of Hell, there are good reasons to suppose that they do not. In the case of universalism, the teaching is definitively heretical, while the case for a less burdensome Hell or hopeful universalism, are contrary to Tradition and the language of Scripture. In the event that universalism, or another heretical opinion were true, these events would also not resolve the issue of justice as there would still be a great difficulty in understanding any sort of penalty, be that temporal or infinite in the next life. Just as there are complaints of Hell being too stringent, there naturally would follow complaints that universalism, annihilationism or second chance theory are also unfair.

As mentioned in the introduction, the term mystery means something beyond human comprehension. It is not simply something that is unknown. In regards to the doctrine of Hell, however, there are numerous issues that are beyond human comprehension; the nature of justice, the nature of evil, the necessity of eternal punishment, the significance or value of free will, relation between finite actions and an infinite reality, and the purpose for why certain desires are driven towards detrimental ends. These questions may be answered individually, but when answered collectively the premises either conflict or contradict some other concern. While some concerns may be illegitimate, no criteria has been presented for precisely what is in God's power in regards to eternal life. This question involves reconciling His omnibenevolence, revelation, and humanity's free will, yet, there appears to be no way to reconcile each of these different components, as the question of infinitude damnation is as much out of our grasp as the question of creating out of nothing.²³⁹ 19th century, German Protestant Theologian, Franz Overbeck worded it as such, "the idea of the eternity of the torments of Hell is

²³⁹Martin Henry, "Does Hell Still Have a Future?" 131-132.

quite beyond anything our minds and hearts can comprehend.”²⁴⁰ Similarly, just as Hell is beyond our comprehension, so is the question of salvation also out of our reach.²⁴¹ While, as mentioned before, this does not resolve the issue, it does illustrate how God’s illuminous ways are beyond our fathomability.²⁴² Part of the explanation for how Hell may exist as a mystery is twofold. If justice is giving to someone what they deserve and mercy is sparing somebody of a punishment they deserve, then justice and mercy would be opposed to each other.²⁴³ An action cannot be both merciful and just simultaneously, but this perplexing paradox is part of God’s mystery.

The final statement of this thesis is that Hell is inextricably tied to Christianity, but cannot be explained through rational measures, and is therefore a mystery. Many considerations have been put forward in this thesis, regarding free will, justice, God’s providence, and unconventional resolutions regarding Hell. None have presented an argument that can be seen as definitive or without criticism. While truth is often criticized, the legitimacy of the criticisms presented in this thesis stem from factors that are mysterious in nature. Justice, eternity, providence, and even human volition all possess qualities that are beyond humanity’s comprehension. The question for why God allows for souls to go to Hell remains unresolved.

²⁴⁰Martin Henry, “Does Hell Still Have a Future?” 128.

²⁴¹Martin Henry, “Does Hell Still Have a Future?” 131-132.

²⁴²Martin Henry, “Does Hell Still Have a Future?” 131-132.

²⁴³Benjamin Brown, “Raymund Schwager on the Dramatic Justice and Mercy of God,” *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 17, no. 2 (2015), 212-228, <https://doi.org/10.1111/ijst.12098>.

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