

REASONED  
FAITH



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*in Honor of*  
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*The Problem of Hell:  
A Problem of Evil for Christians*

Since the 1950s, syllabi in analytic philosophy of religion have given the problem of evil pride of place. So-called atheologians have advanced as an argument against the existence of God the alleged logical impossibility of the statements

- (I) God exists, and is essentially omnipotent, omniscient, and perfectly good

and

- (II) Evil exists.

The decision of Christian philosophers to reply from a posture of "defensive apologetics" and to let their (our) opponents define the value terms has carried both costs and benefits. For if it has limited the store of valuables available as defeaters of evil, it has also restricted the range of ills to be accounted for, to the ones secular philosophers believe in.

In my judgment, this bargain has proved bad, because it has been a distraction from the most important dimensions of the problem of evil. If what is fundamentally at stake—for David Hume and J. L. Mackie, as for Christian philosophers—is the consistency of *our* beliefs, then *our* value theory is the one that should come into play. Moreover, the agreement to try to solve the problem by exclusive appeal to this world's (i.e., non-transcendent, created) goods has been curiously correlated with a reluctance to confront this world's

worst evils (viz., horrors participation in which seems *prima facie* to suffice to ruin individual lives). The best-of-all-possible-worlds and free-will approaches try to finesse the existence of the worst evils by operating at a vague and global level. Elsewhere I have urged Christian philosophers to renounce secular value parsimony, to reach under the lid of our theological treasure chest for the only good big enough to defeat horrendous evils—viz., God Himself!<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, our refusal to trade with our own store of valuables has allowed us to avoid dealing publicly with our own dark side.<sup>2</sup> For even if, as I argue, this-worldly horrors can be given positive meaning through integration into an overall beatific relation of loving intimacy with God, what about the postmortem evil of hell, in which the omnipotent creator turns effectively and finally against a creature's good?

My own view is that hell poses the principal problem of evil for Christians. Its challenge is so deep and decisive, that to spill bottles of ink defending the logical compossibility of (I) with this-worldly evils while holding a closeted belief that

(III) Some created persons will be consigned to hell forever

is at best incongruous and at worst disingenuous. My purpose here is to engage the problem of hell at two levels: a theoretical level, concerning the logical compossibility of (I) and (III); and a pragmatic level, concerning whether or not a God who condemned some of His creatures to hell could be a logically appropriate object of standard Christian worship. My own verdict is no secret: statement (III) should be rejected in favor of a doctrine of universal salvation.

## 1. The Problem, Formulated

### 1.1. Theoretical Dimension

The argument for the logical impossibility of (I) with (III), mimics that for (I) with (II):

- (1) If God existed and were omnipotent, He would be able to avoid (III).

<sup>1</sup> Cf. my article "Problems of Evil: More Advice to Christian Philosophers", *Faith and Philosophy* 5 (1988): 121-43; esp. pp. 135-37; and "Theodicy without Blame", *Philosophical Topics* 16 (1988): 215-45; esp. pp. 234-37.

<sup>2</sup> The ability thus afforded has actually been cited as a strategic advantage by some Christian philosophers.

2. If God existed and were omniscient, He would know how to avoid (III).
3. If God existed and were perfectly good, He would want to avoid (III).
4. Therefore, if (I), not (III).

Obviously, the soundness of this argument depends on the con- struals given to the attribute terms and to 'hell'. As just noted, there is an important disanalogy between this and the parallel argument for the general problem of evil: viz., that if 'evil' takes on varying extensions in different value theories, nevertheless, (II) gets its bite from the fact that most people agree on a wide range of actually extant evils. By contrast, (III) enjoys no straightforward empirical support but rests on and must be in the first instance interpreted by the authorities that tell us so. Tradition counts Scripture among the witnesses. For example, the Gospel according to Matthew speaks in vivid imagery of the disobedient and unfaithful being "cast into outer darkness" where there is "weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matt. 13:42, 50; 22:13) or being thrown into the "unquenchable fire" "prepared for the devil and all his angels" (Matt. 13:42, 50; 18:8-9; 22:13; cf. 3:10). Cashing the metaphors, it says of Judas that it would have been better for him never to have been born (Matt. 26:24). Mainstream medieval theology took such pictures at face value. Duns Scotus is typical in understanding that the reprobate will be forever given over to their guilt<sup>3</sup> and the torment of their inordinate appetites, deprived of both natural and supernatural happiness, and made to suffer perpetual fiery torture, which distracts their intellects so much that they can think of nothing else.<sup>4</sup>

Likewise, we can distinguish an *abstract* from a *concrete* version of the problem, depending on whether "some created persons" in statement (III) ranges over persons created in utopian antemortem environments and circumstances or only over persons in circumstances with combinations of obstacles and opportunities such as are found in the antemortem life experiences of persons in the actual world. Since the doctrine of hell is asserted by many Christians to be not merely logically possible but true, faith that embraces both (I) and (III) and seeks understanding will not complete its task unless it faces the concrete as well as the abstract version of the problem.

Premiss (1) is true because an omnipotent creator could altogether

<sup>3</sup> Duns Scotus, *Opus Oxoniense* in *Opera Omnia* (Paris: Vives, 1891), IV, d. 46, q. 4, n. 6; Wadding-Vives 20, 459.

<sup>4</sup> Duns Scotus, *Op. Ox.* IV, d. 46, q. 4, n. 5; Wadding-Vives 20, 457.

refrain from making any persons or could annihilate created persons any time He chose; either way, He could falsify (III). Again, many traditional theologians (e.g., Augustine, Duns Scotus, Ockham, Calvin) have understood divine sovereignty over creation—both nature and soteriology—to mean that nothing (certainly not creatures' rights) binds God as to what soteriological scheme (if any) He establishes. For example, God could have had a policy of not preserving human persons in existence after death, or He could have legislated temporary reform school followed by life in a utopian environment for all sinners. In these, and many other ways, God could avoid (III), and such was within His power.<sup>5</sup>

Likewise, (3) would be true if "perfectly good" is construed along the lines of person-relative goodness:

'God is good to a created person *p*' iff God guarantees to *p* a life that is a great good to *p* on the whole, and one in which *p*'s participation in deep and horrendous evils (if any) is defeated within the context of *p*'s life',

where

'Evil is horrendous' iff 'Participation in *e* by *p* (either as a victim or a perpetrator) gives everyone *prima facie* reason to believe that *p*'s life cannot—given its inclusion of *e*—be a great good to *p* on the whole'.

The traditional hell is a paradigm horror, one which offers not merely *prima facie* but conclusive reason to believe that the life of the damned cannot be a great good to them on the whole. Any person who suffers eternal punishment in the traditional hell will, on the contrary, be one within whose life good is engulfed and/or defeated by evils.

For all we know, however, (3) may be false if divine goodness is evaluated in relation to God's role as producer of global goods. It is at least epistemically possible that (III) be true of a world that exhibits maximum variety with maximum unity or of a very good world that displays the best balance of moral good over moral evil which God could weakly actualize.<sup>6</sup> And in general, it is epis-

<sup>5</sup> Cf. my *William Ockham* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1987), chap. 30, 1257–97; and "The Structure of Ockham's Moral Theory", *Franciscan Studies* 46 (1986): 1–35.

<sup>6</sup> Alvin Plantinga takes this line in numerous discussions, in the course of answering J. L. Mackie's objection to the free-will defense, that God could have made sinless free creatures. Plantinga insists that, given incompatibilist freedom in creatures, God cannot strongly actualize any world He wants. It is logically possible that a world

temically possible that the world have a maximally good overall order and still include the horrors of damnation for some created persons. Aquinas rationalizes this conclusion when he explains that since the purpose of creation is to show forth God's goodness, some must be damned to manifest his justice and others saved to advertise His mercy.<sup>7</sup>

### 1.2. Pragmatic Implications

The pragmatic consequences of reconciling (I) with (III) by restricting divine goodness to its global dimension are severe. First of all, this assumption makes human life a bad bet. Consider (adapting John Rawls's device) persons in a preoriginal position, surveying possible worlds containing managers of varying power, wisdom, and character, and subjects with diverse fates. The subjects are to answer, from behind a veil of ignorance as to which position they would occupy, the question whether they would willingly enter a given world as a human being. Reason would, I submit, render a negative verdict already for worlds whose omniscient and omnipotent manager permits antemortem horrors that remain undefeated within the context of the human participant's life and a fortiori for worlds some or most of whose human occupants suffer eternal torment.<sup>8</sup>

Second, it would make pragmatically inconsistent any worship behavior that presupposes that God is good to the worshipper or to created persons generally. For given the traditional assumption that the identity of the elect is secret, so much so that there are no certain (or even very probabilifying) empirical signs by means of which humans can make an antemortem distinction between the saved and the damned, actual created persons are left to worry about whether this latter "fate-worse-than-death" is theirs. Nor would the knowledge that *we* were among the elect greatly relieve our pragmatic difficulty, given Christ's command to love our neighbors as ourselves.

If (III) were true, open-eyed worship would have to be of a God who mysteriously creates some persons for lives so horrendous on the whole and eternally, that it would have been better for them never to have been born, of a God who is at worst cruel (not that He

with evils in the amounts and of the kinds found in this world is the best that He could do, Plantinga argues, given His aim of getting some moral goodness in the world. See section 2.2 below.

<sup>7</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologica* I, q. 23, a. 5, ad 3.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. my "Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, Supplementary Volume 63 (1989): 297–310; esp. 303.

had any obligation to be otherwise) and at best indifferent to our welfare. Christian Stoicism practices a species of such worship, one in which the believer (i) recognizes his or her insignificant place in the universe and (ii) by a series of spiritual exercises humbly accepts it (thereby submitting to God's inscrutable will), (iii) praises its Maker for His world-organizing activity, and (iv) finds dignity in this capacity for self-transcendence. Some even speak of divine love for them, in making them parts of His cosmic order and endowing them with the capacity for dignity, even when they are crushed by it. But the fact of such love carries no implication that God is *good* to them in the sense defined in section 1.1.<sup>9</sup> Notice, however, that Stoic worship that is honest (i.e., not based on denial and repression) is very difficult, indeed psychologically impossible for many, perhaps most, people. Avoiding pragmatic inconsistency requires vigilance against smuggling in the assumption to which none would be epistemically entitled, that after all God does care for me!

## 2. Free Will and the Problem of Hell

Many Christians find the Stoic bullet hard to bite but insist that it is unnecessary even if (III) is true. Mounting a kind of free-will defense, they claim that God has done a good thing in making incompatibilist free creatures. Like any good governor or parent, He has established a set of general conditional decrees, specifying sanctions and rewards for various sorts of free actions. His preference ("antecedent" or "perfect" will) is that everyone should be saved, but He has given us scope to work out our own destinies. Damnation would never happen but for the errant action of incompatibilist free creatures within the framework of divine regulations. It is not something God *does*, but rather allows; it is neither God's means, nor His end, but a middle-known but unintended side effect of the order He has created. Thus, (3) is true only regarding God's antecedent but not His all-things-considered preferences, and the impossibility argument (in section 1.1) fails.

### 2.1. Exclusive Salvation according to William Craig

William Craig offers a remarkably bold presentation of this position in his "No Other Name": A Middle Knowledge Perspective on

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Diogenes Allen, "Natural Evil and the God of Love," *Religious Studies* 16 (1980): 439-56.

the Exclusivity of Salvation through Christ.<sup>10</sup> Motivated by his beliefs that (III) is asserted by Scripture and necessary to justify the missionary imperative, Craig takes Plantinga for his inspiration, and attempts to demonstrate the logical compossibility of (I) with

(III') [a] Some persons do not receive Christ, and [b] are damned,

by finding another proposition that is compossible with (I) and that together with (I) entails (III'): viz.,

(IV) God has actualized a world containing an optimal balance between saved and unsaved, and those who are unsaved suffer from trans-world damnation.<sup>11</sup>

By "optimal balance" Craig means the best that God could weakly actualize and still fill heaven.<sup>12</sup> Nor need this ratio keep the number of damned down to a few. For Craig thinks his defense also has the makings of a theodicy<sup>13</sup> and insists that "if we take Scripture [Matt. 7:13-14] seriously, we must admit that *the vast majority of persons in the world* are condemned and will be forever lost."<sup>14</sup>

Craig recognizes a need to defend his rejection of (3) for God's all-things-considered preferences and his claim that (IV) is logically compossible with (I), against the charge that

(3') A perfectly good being would prefer not to create any persons at all rather than see some suffer in hell.

Once again, Craig has the courage of his convictions, insisting that even if "the terrible price of filling heaven is also filling hell",<sup>15</sup> God's decision to create free creatures—not merely a handful but enough to fill heaven—and to accept this price does not count against His benevolence or fairness,<sup>16</sup> provided God has done everything He could (supplying grace to all). For their damnation is "of their own free will", "the result of their own free choice".<sup>17</sup> They are "self-condemned".<sup>18</sup> By the same token, the sufferings of the damned should

<sup>10</sup> William Craig, "No Other Name": A Middle Knowledge Perspective on the Exclusivity of Salvation through Christ," *Faith and Philosophy* 6 (1989): 172-88.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 184.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 182-83.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 186.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 176.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 183.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 186.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 184, 185.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 176.

not tarnish the heavenly happiness of the saved, because they too will recognize that the damned brought "this tragic circumstance" on themselves as a "result of their own free choice."<sup>19</sup> And Craig insists that divine distribution of graces through special and general revelation does give each created person a chance to comply with God's will.

## 2.2. Justice and Commensuration

Craig is concerned to maintain that God is neither "unjust"<sup>20</sup> nor "unfair" in damning those who do not accept Christ.<sup>21</sup> Here it is necessary to distinguish between (a) justice taken from the side of God (whether God would be just in the sense of living up to His obligations in weakly actualizing (III) or (III')), and (b) justice considered in relation to created agents and their acts (whether weakly actualizing (III) or (III') would exemplify a policy of treating like cases alike, of rendering to each according to his or her deserts, or of setting expectations within reasonable reach). I want to argue that either way 'justice' is the wrong concept, because justice trades in commensurables, whereas both God and eternal destinies are incommensurable with human beings and their acts.

2.2.1. *Divine Justice and the Ontological Gap.* I merely join the consensus of the great medieval and reformation theologians in recognizing that God and creatures are *ontologically incommensurate*. God is a being a greater than which cannot be conceived, the infinite being, in relation to which finite creatures are "almost nothing". Drawing on social analogies, Anselm contends that God is so far above, so different in kind from us, as not to be enmeshed in merely human networks of mutual rights and obligations; God is not the kind of thing that could be obligated to creatures in any way. Duns Scotus concurs, reasoning that God has no obligation to love creatures, because although the finite *goodness* of each provides a reason to love it, the fact of its *finitude* means that this reason is always defeasible, indeed negligible, almost nothing in comparison with the reason divine goodness has to love itself. Their conclusion from this ontological disproportion is that God will not be *unjust* to created persons no matter what He does.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 185.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 176.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 186.

2.2.2. *Finite Temporal Agency versus Eternal Destiny.* My earlier arguments<sup>22</sup> for the disproportion between human acts and eternal destinies centered on our limited capacities to do and suffer harm. Focusing on the "an-eye-for-an-eye" principle and its variants, I insisted that even if each human being were made to experience each of the harms she or he caused other humans, whether once, twice, or any finite multiple of times, the punishment thus mandated would eventually be over. I observed, however, that the notion of proportionate return already breaks down in ordinary cases where the numbers (though finite) get large, because in such cases we are irremediably unable to suffer precisely what we cause. For example, suppose I knock one tooth out of the mouth of each of thirty-two people each of whom has a full set of teeth. Is my losing one tooth thirty-two times and hence having no teeth not much worse than their each having thirty-one teeth? Or suppose I interrupt television transmission of the Superbowl game, thereby causing twenty million fans one hour of fury and frustration each. Surely, my suffering twenty million hours of fury and frustration is much worse. Harms are not atomic, their cumulative effect not simply additive; and so for large amounts, the notion of proportionate return already loses definition.

More recently, I have concentrated on the incommensuration between horrendous evils and human life and agency. For, on the one hand, *horrors have a power to defeat positive meaning disproportionate to their extension in the space-time worm of an individual's life*. And, on the other, *horrors are incommensurate with human cognitive capacities*. For (i) the human capacity to cause horrors unavoidably exceeds our ability to experience them. Many examples make this clear as to quantity: for example, on the traditional doctrine of the fall, Adam experiences one individual's worth of ignorance and difficulty, but his sin brought it on his many descendents; Hitler organized a holocaust of millions; small numbers of government leaders, scientists, and military personnel brought about the atomic explosions over Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Likewise for quality, it is probably true that, for example, a childless male soldier cannot experience anything like enough to the suffering of a mother whose child is murdered before her eyes. But (ii) where suffering is concerned, conceivability follows capacity to experience, in such a way that we cannot adequately conceive of what we cannot experience. Just as a blind person's

<sup>22</sup> Cf. my early article "Hell and the God of Justice," *Religious Studies* 11 (1974): 433-47.

color concepts are deficient because lack of acquaintance deprives him or her of the capacity for imaginative representation of colors, despite lots of abstract descriptive knowledge about them, so lack of experience deprives an agent of the capacity emphatically to enter in to what it would be like to suffer this or that harm, despite more or less detailed abstract descriptive knowledge about such suffering. To these observations, I add the claim (iii) that agent responsibility is diminished in proportion to his or her unavoidable inability to conceive of the relevant dimensions of the action and its consequences, and I draw the conclusion that human agents cannot be fully responsible for the horrendous consequences of their actions.<sup>23</sup>

Returning to the problem of hell, I maintain that damnation is a horror that exceeds our conceptual powers. For even if we could experience for a finite period of time some aspect of hell's torments (e.g., the burning of the fire, deep depression, or consuming hatred) or heaven's bliss (e.g., St. Teresa's joyful glimpse of the Godhead), we are unavoidably unable to experience their cumulative effect in advance and so unable more than superficially to appreciate what is involved in either. It follows that human agents are unavoidably unable to exercise their free choice with fully open eyes, the way Craig implies we do.

2.2.3. *Finite Agency in the Region of the Divine.* It may be objected that the ontological incommensuration between God and creatures redounds another way, however. For Anselm pointed out that the badness of sin is to be measured not simply in terms of what the creature is or does but in terms of the creature's relation to God, a being a greater/more worthy of honor, respect, and esteem than which cannot be conceived. Since God is infinitely worthy of honor, any offense against God is immeasurably indecent and hence infinitely culpable. Even if every created *harm* we caused were finite, at the very worst the ruin of finite created lives, Anselm's principle shows how we have the capacity to cause infinite *offense*. Any and every sin would turn out to be a horrendous evil. And if eternal torment for the creature is incommensurate with human agency taken in itself, it does not adequately measure the offensiveness of one small look contrary to God's will. Eternal torment is merely the closest approximation that creatures can make to experiencing the just punishment.

My reply is that it is not "fair" in Craig's sense (b) of setting rea-

<sup>23</sup> Cf. my "Theodicy without Blame."

sonable expectations to put created agency (even if we think of its starting in utopian Eden with ideal competence of its kind) into a position where the consequences of its exercise are so disproportionate to its acts. Suppose the powers that be threaten a nuclear holocaust if I do not always put my pencil down no more than one inch from the paper on which I am writing. Although it is within my power to meet such a demand, such disproportionate consequences put my pencil-placing actions under unnatural strain. Although in some sense I *can* comply, I am also in some sense *bound* to "slip up" sooner or later. Hence, the demand is unreasonable, the responsibility too hard for me to bear. Interestingly, medieval adherents of free-will approaches to the problem of evil worried about this. In some works, Augustine confesses that the corruptibility of human nature makes failure virtually inevitable, incompatibilist freedom notwithstanding.<sup>24</sup> And Duns Scotus worries that it might be too risky for God to give us the liberty of indifference in heaven, because sooner or later the fall would be apt to recur.<sup>25</sup> Craig's own reading of Matthew—according to which the vast majority of created persons in the actual world are damned—lends credence to these probability estimates.

I do not say that were God to create persons with the intention of condemning to hell any who fail to honor him appropriately, he would be unjust in the sense (a) of violating his (non-existent) obligations to them (us). I do claim that such punishment would be *unusual*, because acting in the region of the divine levels out the differences among created act types (e.g., between peeking out at prayers and torturing babies). Moreover, God would be "unfair" in sense (b) and hence *cruel* in setting created persons conditions relative to which not only were they (we) unlikely to succeed, but also their (our) lives were as a consequence more apt than not to have all positive meaning swallowed up by horrendous evil.

### 2.3. *The Idol of Human Agency*

Where soteriology is concerned, Christians have traditionally disagreed about human nature along two parameters. First, some hold that human nature was created in ideal condition and placed in a

<sup>24</sup> Cf. John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, rev. ed. (New York: Harper and Row, 1966, 1978), chap. 3, pp. 37–48.

<sup>25</sup> Duns Scotus, *God and Creatures: The Quodlibetal Questions*, translated with introduction, notes and glossary by Felix Alluntis, O.F.M., and Allan B. Wolter, O.F.M. (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1975), q.16, art. II, 377–79.

utopian environment: i.e., that *ab initio* humans had enough cognitive and emotional maturity to grasp and accurately apply relevant normative principles, while (on the occasion of their choice) their exercise of these abilities was unobstructed by unruly passions or external determinants of any kind. Others maintain, on the contrary, that humans are created immature and grow to adult competence through a messy developmental process. Second, where salvation is concerned, some take the human race collectively, while others consider humans individualistically. According to the Augustinian doctrine of the fall, Adam and Eve began as ideal agents in utopian Eden. The consequence of their sin is not only individual but collective: agency impaired by "ignorance" (clouded moral judgment) and "difficulty" (undisciplined emotions), which passes from the first parents to the whole family of their descendants. In his earlier works, Augustine insists that despite such inherited handicaps, the reprobate still bring damnation on themselves, because God has offered help sufficient to win the difficult struggle through faith in Christ.<sup>26</sup> In later anti-Pelagian works, Augustine abandons the idea that God confers on each fallen human grace sufficient for salvation; he concedes that damnation is the consequence of such divine omissions and Adam's original free choice to sin. Nevertheless, the damned deserve no pity, because the family collectively brought it on themselves through Adam's free choice of will.<sup>27</sup> Without being fully explicit, Craig seems to proceed individualistically, assuming that by the time we reach "the age of accountability", our agency is ideal enough for each to be entrusted with and held responsible for his or her own eternal destiny. Irenaeus stands on the other side as the patristic prototype of the developmental understanding of human nature.

In my judgment, the arguments from incommensuration offered in section 2.2 hold even where ideal human nature is concerned. For my own part, I reject the notion of a historical fall and read Genesis 2-3 the Irenaean way, as about the childhood of the human race. I deny not only that we human beings do have, but also that we ever had, ideal agency. Therefore, I conclude, that reasoning about it is relevant at most to the abstract and not to the concrete problem of hell.

<sup>26</sup> Augustine, *De libero arbitrio*. Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum, vol. 74. (Vindobonae: Hoelder-Pichler-Tempsky, 1956), passim.

<sup>27</sup> This position is especially clear in Augustine, *De gratia et libero arbitrio* (A.D. 426), and Augustine, *De correptione et gratia* (A.D. 426 or 427).

By contrast, a realistic picture of human agency should recognize the following: (a) We human beings start life ignorant, weak, and helpless, psychologically so lacking in a self-concept as to be incapable of choice. (b) We learn to "construct" a picture of the world, ourselves, and other people only with difficulty over a long period of time and under the extensive influence of other non-ideal choosers. (c) Human development is the interactive product of human nature and its environment, and from early on we humans are confronted with problems that we cannot adequately grasp or cope with, and in response to which we mount (without fully conscious calculation) inefficient adaptational strategies. (d) Yet, the human psyche forms habits in such a way that these reactive patterns, based as they are on a child's inaccurate view of the world and its strategic options, become entrenched in the individual's personality. (e) Typically, the habits are unconsciously "acted out" for years, causing much suffering to self and others before (if ever) they are recognized and undone through a difficult and painful process of therapy and/or spiritual formation. (f) Having thus begun *immature*, we arrive at adulthood in a state of *impaired freedom*, as our childhood adaptational strategies continue to distort our perceptions and behavior. (g) We adults with impaired freedom are responsible for our choices, actions, and even the character molded by our unconscious adaptational strategies, in the sense that we are the *agent causes* of them. (h) Our assessments of moral responsibility, praise, and blame cannot afford to take this impairment into account, because we are not as humans capable of organizing and regulating ourselves in that fine-tuned a way. And so, except for the most severe cases of impairment, we continue to hold ourselves *responsible to one another*.<sup>28</sup>

Taking these estimates of human nature to heart, I draw two conclusions: first, that such impaired adult human agency is no more competent to be entrusted with its (individual or collective) eternal destiny than two-year-old agency is to be allowed choices that could result in its death or serious physical impairment; and second, that the fact that the choices of such impaired agents come between the divine creator of the environment and their infernal outcome no more reduces divine responsibility for the damnation than two-year-old agency reduces the responsibility of the adult caretaker. Suppose, for example, that a parent introduces a two-year-old child into a room filled with gas that is safe to breathe but will explode if ignited. Assume further that the room contains a stove with brightly

<sup>28</sup> Cf. my "Theodicy without Blame," pp. 231-32.



colored knobs, which if turned will light the burners and ignite the gas. If the parent warns the child not to turn the knobs and leaves, whereupon the child turns the knobs and blows itself up, surely the child is at most marginally to blame, even if it knew enough to obey the parent, while the parent is both primarily responsible and highly culpable. Or suppose a terrorist announces his intention to kill one hundred citizens if anyone in a certain village wears a red shirt on Tuesday. The village takes the threat seriously, and everyone is informed. If some adult citizen slips up and wears his favorite red shirt on Tuesday, he will be responsible and culpable, but the terrorist who set up the situation will be much more culpable.

Once again, my further conclusion is not that God would (like the parent and the terrorist) be culpable if He were to insert humans into a situation in which their eternal destiny depended on their exercise of impaired agency, for I deny that God has any obligations to creatures (see section 2.2.1). Rather, God (like the parent or the terrorist) would bear primary responsibility for any tragic outcomes,<sup>29</sup> and God would be cruel to create human beings in a world with combinations of obstacles and opportunities such as are found in the actual world and govern us under a scheme according to which whether or not we go to the traditional hell depends on how we exercise our impaired adult agency in this life—cruel, by virtue of imposing horrendous consequences on our all-too-likely failures.

#### 2.4. The Possibility of Transworld Damnation?

Perhaps it will be objected that my arguments in section 2.3 are unfair because they abstract from one of Craig's important claims: that God supplies all the graces needed for success and thereby strengthens us, or at least (as early Augustine thought) offers us the means to strengthen our impaired agency, only to have such aid refused. This claim is, of course, connected with Craig's hypothesis of possible transworld damnation, which I reject twice-over.

2.4.1. *True Counterfactuals of Freedom?* First, I deny that any counterfactuals of freedom are true for the metaphysical reason that there is nothing to make them true.<sup>30</sup> It follows from the definition of 'in-

<sup>29</sup> Contrary to what Craig maintains, "No Other Name", pp. 176–77.

<sup>30</sup> I agree with the arguments offered by Robert Merrihew Adams in "Middle Knowledge and the Problem of Evil", reprinted in his *The Virtue of Faith and Other Essays* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), pp. 77–93. I am indebted to him

compatibilist freedom' that neither God's will nor causal nor logical necessity could account for the truth of propositions about the incompatibilist free choices of merely possible persons (or persons considered insofar as they are merely possible). Nor could the creature's actual character or choices make them true, because these are posterior in the order of explanation to the truth value of the counterfactuals about what the merely possible creatures would do were they to be actualized in certain circumstances.

2.4.2. *Transworld Damnation and the Logical Problem of Hell.* Second, Craig's notion of transworld damnation is supposed to mimic Plantinga's conception of transworld depravity: just as it is possible that some or all or the vast majority of created persons would be such that they would go wrong with respect to at least one morally significant action no matter what circumstances God strongly actualized, so—Craig maintains—it is possible that some or all or the vast majority of created persons would be such that they would refuse Christ and be damned no matter what situations God strongly actualized. Likewise, just as it is possible that God might be powerless to weakly actualize a world of sinless incompatibilist free creatures, so—Craig alleges—it is possible that God might be unable to weakly actualize a world in which heaven would be filled without the vast majority of created persons being damned. Moreover, just as God's powerlessness to determine the truth-values of counterfactuals of (created) freedom, together with the laudable desire of creating a world with a favorable balance of moral good over moral evil, rationalizes divine permission of moral evil, so God's powerlessness with respect to such counterfactual truth values is supposed to combine with His admirable desire to fill heaven, to explain His acceptance of damnation for some or all or the vast majority of created persons.

This comparison seems fatally flawed, however. Craig's replacement for (III) is:

(III') [a] Some persons do not receive Christ, and [b] are damned.

Note that it splits into two parts, which, given divine sovereignty over the soteriological process, are logically independent of one another. That is, it is logically possible that some or all or the vast majority of created persons might refuse to accept Christ or might

for many helpful discussions of this material, which have corrected various errors in earlier drafts of this section.

commit the sin of final impenitence, and yet God need not condemn them to hell but might maintain them in a world much like this one or annihilate them instead. Put another way, the existence of hell and the conditions for admission are among the things that fall within God's powers of strong-actualization, even if the truth values of counterfactuals of (created) freedom are not within His power. Thus, even if, relative to some possible world, the essence of each and every created person were infected with transworld final impenitence, still none would be transworld damned. Transworld damnation is not, after all, a logical possibility.

Given Plantinga's metaphysics, it is logically possible that

(IV') Created persons would not accept Christ in great enough numbers to fill heaven unless some or the vast majority of created persons were finally impenitent and consigned to hell forever.

By the same token the following will be taken as logically possible:

(IV'') Created persons would not accept Christ in great enough numbers to fill heaven unless (in addition to some or a large number who die finally impenitent) some or a large number of those who responded best to Christ were consigned to hell forever.

and

(IV''') Created persons would not accept Christ in great enough numbers to fill heaven unless (in addition to some or a large number who die finally impenitent) some or a large number of children two years old and under, who were never even morally competent agents, were consigned to hell.

Although each of (IV'), (IV''), and (IV''') combines with Craig's hypothesis that God weakly actualizes a world in which heaven is filled, to entail (III'), this does not suffice to establish the compossibility of (I) with (III) or (III'), for the latter conclusion requires the additional premiss that each is compossible with (I). Once again, God would not violate any of His (non-existent) obligations were He to proceed with His plans to fill heaven with incompatibilist free creatures, even in the face of such counterfactual fates. Nevertheless, I submit that God would be cruel to do so, middle knowing that He was bringing some or the vast majority into being for lives it would have been better for them never to have lived. Therefore, (I) would be compossible with (III) only if "good" in (I) were taken in a

sense that does not rule out cruelty. Contrary to Craig's hopes, he will not be able to rely on omnipotent powerlessness over counterfactuals of freedom to reconcile hell with divine goodness; he will have to follow the Stoic in tampering with the notion of "good" to be understood in (I).

The logical possibility (on Plantinga's scheme) of (IV'), (IV''), and (IV''') might even call into question an assumption that Plantinga locates at the heart of free-will approaches to evil: viz., that a "world containing creatures who are sometimes significantly free (and freely perform more good than evil actions) is more valuable, all else being equal, than a world containing no free creatures at all."<sup>31</sup> On reflection, is it not anthropocentric, another manifestation of our idolatry of human agency (cf. section 2.2), to suppose that the latter is so valuable that God would accept unredeemed horror to include it? Since our thoughts are not like God's, how can we be so sure that omniscient creativity could not find equally good or better worlds altogether devoid of incompatibilist free creatures<sup>32</sup>—in which case (I) might not be compossible with (III) or (III'), even where divine goodness were evaluated solely in relation to God's role as producer of global goods.

2.4.3. *Transworld Damnation as Theodicy?* Craig offers his reflections as grist for the mill, not only of defensive apologetics, but also of theodicy. Thus, he invites us to agree (a) that (IV') is not only logically possible but true, and yet (b) that for each actual created person, God has done everything He could to win that person over. I reject both claims.

2.4.3.1. *Congruent Grace versus Transworld Final Impenitence.* If I believed that counterfactuals of freedom could be true, I would replace (a) with Suarez's doctrine of congruent grace: namely, that God is able to provide each created person with such grace that she or he would freely consent to His will, and that God is able to do this for each, no matter which other created persons He additionally makes and graces. Craig considers this move but finds it impotent against his theodicy, because "we have no good grounds for believing" the Suarezian doctrine, and the burden of proof is on the Suarezian to "demonstrate" its truth.<sup>33</sup> By contrast, I see the onus of proof distrib-

<sup>31</sup> Alvin Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity*, chap. 9 (Clarendon Press, 1974), p. 166.

<sup>32</sup> I owe this suggestion to Robert Merrihew Adams.

<sup>33</sup> Craig, "No Other Name", p. 183.

uted otherwise: it favors his position no more than mine. The issue may be approached at two levels. First, if (as Plantinga assumes) nothing explains why one counterfactual of freedom should be true of an individual essence rather than another, their truth-values would seem to fall like "fates" independently of both the divine will and created wills. And if—so far as the theory of counterfactuals of freedom is concerned—it remains a mystery to us why or how the truth values should be distributed, we are left with appeals to ignorance or epistemic contingency about their actual distribution. Second, we might suppose with Plantinga that, while nothing makes such counterfactuals of freedom true, still some are more plausible than others. Both ways, the arguments favoring transworld impenitence or transworld redeemability<sup>34</sup> will be driven by other considerations: for Craig, by his belief that (III) and (III') are true because endorsed by Scripture and required to fire the missionary effort; for me, by confidence in God's ability to convince us that He is the Good that satisfies, in His power and resourcefulness to defeat evil thoroughly within the context of each created person's life.

For that matter, I, too, have a synoptic proof text (Matt. 19:24–26; Mark 10:25–27; Luke 18:25–27): Jesus' claim that all things are possible with God does not respond to worries about the size of stones God is able to make and lift or the possibility of His squaring the circle or making contradictories true but to the question how anyone can be saved, about how human hearts can be changed. I understand the answer to imply that God is so powerful, so witting and resourceful, that he can let created persons do their damndest and still save them.<sup>35</sup> I prefer the mystery of how God accomplishes this

<sup>34</sup> David P. Hunt of Whittier College opposes the notion of 'transworld salvation' to Craig's 'transworld damnation' in his interesting paper "Middle Knowledge and the Soteriological Problem of Evil," *Religious Studies* 27 (1991): 3–26.

<sup>35</sup> Note, I use the term 'proof text' lightly. I am not so naive as to assume that my citation of these passages and assertion of my interpretation constitutes a proof that the doctrines of congruent grace or universal salvation are biblical. My own general impression is of a variety of different biblical, indeed New Testament views, each of which deserves separate and careful consideration. Certainly, I do not think the biblical witness is so univocal as Craig alleges ("No Other Name", pp. 172–74). But neither am I so confident as Thomas Talbot ("The Doctrine of Everlasting Punishment," *Faith and Philosophy* 7 (1990): 19–42; esp. 23) as to advance the doctrine of universal salvation as the biblical view; apocalyptic theology, whatever is to be made of it, strikes too strong a chord in the New Testament. At any rate, this is the work of many other papers (and volumes), some of them mine. Cf. my "Separation and Reversal in Luke-Acts," *Philosophy and the Christian Faith*, ed. Thomas V. Morris (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), pp. 92–117; and "Hell according to Matthew?" presented at the Gordon College Conference on the Future of God, May 1989.

with incompatibilist free creatures to the equally impenetrable mystery of how transworld damnation falls on some individual essences rather than others.

Empirically, given that all adults have impaired freedom—where some impairments are worse than others due to factors beyond the agent's control, some increased by the agent's own choices—the belief that any of us is saved implies that God is able to change the hearts of sinners from good to bad. When I consider the way our neuroses are integrated into the cores of our personality, and the difficulty of ripping out such dysfunctions, I doubt that there is much to choose among them from God's point of view: if God can change any of them, there is insufficient reason to believe He could not change the others, too.

2.4.3.2. "Sufficient" Grace Universally Distributed? Insofar as Craig intends not merely a defense but a soteriological theodicy, he must confront the concrete problem of hell, and construe (III) and (III') to be about, not just some possible persons in some possible situations or others, but about possible persons in antemortem situations of the sort in which people find themselves in the actual world (i.e., with like traumas, impairments, disasters, and hardships to work against). I do not find it credible that all such actual antemortem situations contain grace sufficient for faith in and cooperation with God (Christ) were it not for the creature's incompatibilist free refusal. (Consider, e.g., the predicament of gangland youths in South Central Los Angeles, individuals who have been subject to physical and sexual abuse from childhood.) Rather, God seems for the most part to have a policy of distributing the graces bit by bit, so that our way out of our sinful habits and so on is itself a developmental process. Some people die before they get very far, and sometimes this seems to be through no fault of their own.

## 2.5. Pragmatic Implications

In my judgment, Craig's theological picture is not only theologically mistaken, but also pragmatically pernicious. For according to it, a created person can view God as friendly—i.e., as good to him or her—only by counting himself or herself among the elect. But this breeds Pharisaism thrice-over: (1) To the extent that I do succeed in walking the straight and narrow, I will be contrasting myself with my brothers and sisters who don't, which easily leads to self-congratulation. (2) To the extent that it is difficult for me to toe the line, because of my developmental impairments, it produces the feeling of the one-talent man (Matt. 25:14–30; Luke 19:12–27), that

God is harsh and demanding. (3) Insofar as sincere obedience to the first and great commandment needs to be laid on the psychological assurance of divine goodness to oneself, it will be difficult to obey the first while obeying the second.

### 3. The Hermeneutics of Charity

When authorities seem to say things that are inconsistent or unreasonable, our first move is, not to cut off, but to twist the wax nose a bit, so that without crediting the troublesome pronouncements taken literally, we can "make something" of them by finding some deeper and more palatable truths which (we may claim) they were attempting to express. In this spirit, some agree that the notion of hell as an eternal torture chamber, as a punitive consequence for not accepting Christ, is not compatible with any tolerable understanding of divine goodness. That is, if 'hell' is understood the traditional way, then they construe 'perfectly good' in such a way as to render true the statement:

3. If God existed and were perfectly good, he would want to avoid (III).

Rather than abandon the doctrine of hell altogether, they modify or reinterpret it as some other fate involving permanent exclusion from heaven.

#### 3.1. *Hell as Leaving People to the Natural Consequences of Their Choices*

On Craig's politico-legal model, the relation between a person's sinning to the end and his or her suffering eternal punishment is extrinsic and contingent (as is that between speeding and paying a monetary fine). Other philosophers think there is a better chance of construing (III) in such a way as to be compatible with (I) if one discovers an intrinsic connection between the created persons' choices and their postmortem punishments or deprivations. Thus, Richard Swinburne maintains that "heaven is not a reward for good behavior" but "a home for good people"<sup>36</sup> He insists on the high value not only of created free agency but also of the autonomy of

<sup>36</sup> In several places, including "A Theodicy of Heaven and Hell," in *The Existence and Nature of God*, ed. Alfred Freddoso (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), 37-54; the second quotation is from page 43.

created persons to determine their own destinies. Noting psychological commonplaces about how patterns of choice build habits of thinking, wanting, valuing, and doing, and the more entrenched the habit, the harder it is to break, Swinburne reckons such habits may become so entrenched as to be unbreakable. For a person may so thoroughly blind himself or herself to what is really worth going for, that she or he can no longer see or rationally choose it. Since heaven is a society organized around the things that are really worth wanting, being, and doing, people locked into their vices could not enjoy it there.

Swinburne is less interested in (III) than in

- (III') Some persons that God creates are permanently excluded from heaven.<sup>37</sup>

He is willing to recognize "various possible fates for those who have finally rejected the good": (i) "they might cease to exist after death"; (ii) "they might cease to exist after suffering some limited amount of physical pain as part of the punishment for their wickedness"; or (iii) "they might continue to exist forever pursuing trivial pursuits"<sup>38</sup> In Swinburne's estimation, "the crucial point is that it is compatible with the goodness of God that he should allow a man to put himself beyond possibility of salvation, because it is indeed compatible with the goodness of God that he should allow a man to choose the sort of person he will be,"<sup>39</sup> even where these decisions have eternal consequences.

Likewise, dismissing literal construals of Matthew 25:41-46 and Luke 16:19-26 as "a crude and simplistic account of the doctrine of hell,"<sup>40</sup> Eleonore Stump turns to Dante, who understands the fundamental awfulness of hell in terms of eternal deprivation of union with God. Stump takes Dante's "graphic images" at theological face value and suggests that the latter is fully compatible with a Limbo of beautiful physical surroundings "in which the noblest and wisest of the ancients discuss philosophy."<sup>41</sup> Moreover, in the more punitive regions of hell, external tortures are not suffered the way they would be in this world but serve rather as outward and visible signs

<sup>37</sup> Swinburne, "A Theodicy of Heaven and Hell," pp. 37, 52.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 52.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> Eleonore Stump, "The Problem of Evil," *Faith and Philosophy* 4 (1985): 392-423; esp. 400.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 400.

of inner psychological states—afflictions which are nevertheless compatible with long and leisurely intellectual discussions. So far as the problem of hell is concerned, Stump maintains, "Everlasting life in hell is the ultimate evil which can befall a person in this world; but the torments of hell are *the natural* conditions of some persons, and God can spare such persons those pains only by depriving them of their nature or their existence. And it is arguable that, of the alternatives open to God, maintaining such persons in existence and as human is the best."<sup>42</sup> In other words, when 'hell' in (III) is thus reinterpreted, Stump finds the logical compossibility of (I) with (III) defensible.

Once again, my principal complaint about these approaches centers on their understanding of human nature. Swinburne and Stump/Dante begin by taking human psychology very seriously: that entrenched habits of character, established tastes, and concomitant states of inner conflict are *naturally* consequent upon sinful patterns of choice is supposed to explain the *intrinsic* connection between the sinner's earthly behavior and his or her exclusion from heaven and/or consignment to hell. By contrast, their estimates of the *natural* effects of vice over the very (i.e., eternally) long run leave human psychology far behind. For vice is a psychospiritual disorder. Just as running a machine contrary to its design leads, sooner rather than later, to premature breakdown, so also persistent psychological disorders caricature and produce breakdowns even in the medium run of twenty to seventy years. My own view resonates with C. S. Lewis's suggestion in *The Problem of Pain*,<sup>43</sup> that vice in the soul preserved beyond three score and ten brings about a total dismantling of personality, to the torment of which this-worldly schizophrenia and depression are but the faintest approximations. A fortiori excluded is the notion that persons with characters unfit for heaven might continue forever philosophizing, delivering eloquent speeches, or engaging in trivial pursuits.<sup>44</sup> Likewise, either union with God is the natural human telos, in which case we cannot both eternally lack it and yet continue to enjoy this-worldly pleasures forever; or it is not, because we are personal animals and unending life is not a

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., p. 401.

<sup>43</sup> C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (New York: Macmillan, 1979), chap 8, pp. 124–26.

<sup>44</sup> Years ago, I agreed with Dante that philosophy could keep one entertained for eternity. Extensive conversations with the Reverend A. Orley Swartzentruber persuaded me of what Augustine and Anselm confirm: that philosophy can only seem infinitely fascinating because it involves insights into the Christ, the Divine Word, clearer knowledge and love of whom is the only thing that can satisfy forever.

natural but a supernatural endowment. For God to prolong life eternally while denying access to the only good that could keep us eternally interested would likewise eventually produce unbearable misery.<sup>45</sup> In short, I think that the Swinburne/Stump/Dante suggestion that God might keep created persons in existence forever but abandon them to the consequences of their sinful choices collapses into the more traditional doctrine of hell, when such consequences are calculated from a realistic appraisal of human psychology.

### 3.2. Annihilation by the Creator?

Among others, Swinburne mentions the option of replacing (III) with

(III''') Some created persons who die with characters unfit for heaven will be annihilated, either at death or after the Judgment.

Nor is this suggestion without ancient precedent: the non-canonical apocalyptic work, I Enoch, predicts that after the Judgment, the wicked will suffer for a while until they wither away. As contrasted with the positions examined in sections 2 and 3.1, this move has the advantage of avoiding the claim that God has subjected created persons to cruel and/or unusual punishment by extending their life span into an eternity of horrendous suffering.

True to my Suarezian bias, I reject it, on the ground that it involves an uncharitable estimate of divine wisdom, goodness, and power. St. Anselm reasons that omnipotent, all-wise goodness would do the hard as well as the easy. For God, it is easy to make good from the good; what is more remarkable, it is no effort for Him to make good out of nothing. For Him, the real challenge would be to make good out of evil; so He must be able to do that.<sup>46</sup> Moreover, St. Anselm argued that it is unfitting to omnipotent wisdom either to change its mind or to fail in what it attempts.<sup>47</sup> I agree both ways. To me, it is a better theological bargain to hold the mystery that God will not give up on the wicked, will eventually somehow be able to turn them to good, than to swallow the tragic idea that created persons, finite and dependent though we are, are able ultimately and

<sup>45</sup> Cf. Swinburne, "A Theodicy of Heaven and Hell", p. 41.

<sup>46</sup> St. Anselm, *Proslogion*, chap. ix; *Sancti Anselmi: Opera Omnia*: 6 vols., ed. F.S. Schmitt (Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson, 1946–61); Schmitt I, 108.

<sup>47</sup> St. Anselm, *Cur Deus homo* II, chap. IV; Schmitt II, 99; cf. *Proslogion*, chap. vii; Schmitt I, 105–6.

finally to defeat our Creator's purpose, the mystery of transworld final impenitence ending in the Creator's destroying His own creation.

### 3.3. *Truths Told by the Doctrine of Hell*

Like Craig, I take the Bible seriously; indeed, as an Episcopal priest, I am sworn to the claim that "the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments" are "the Word of God" and "contain all things necessary to salvation".<sup>48</sup> Like Swinburne, Stump, and Lewis, I feel bound to weigh the tradition behind (III). I, too, pay my respects by identifying some deep truths expressed by the doctrine of hell. (T<sub>1</sub>) The first (mentioned in section 2.2.1 above) is that created persons have *no rights* against God, because God has *no obligations* to creatures: in particular, God has no obligation to be good to us; no obligation not to ruin us whether by depriving our lives of positive meaning, by producing or allowing the deterioration or disintegration of our personalities, by destroying our bodies, or by annihilating us. (T<sub>2</sub>) Second, the horrendous ruin of a created person represented by eternal torment in hell constitutes a (negative and mirror image) measure—perhaps the most vivid we can understand—of how *bad* it is, how utterly indecent, not to respond to God appropriately; and for all that, because of the radical incommensuration between God and creatures, the measure is inadequate.

Nevertheless, I have insisted in print for more than twenty years that (T<sub>3</sub>) the doctrine is false on its traditional construal, because neither the ontological gap between God and creatures nor the radical impropriety of our comportment toward God is a good indication of God's intentions and policies toward us. God does not stand on rights and obligations, nor does He treat us according to such "deserts".

As I see it, both the defenders of hell and I are confronted with a theological balancing act. The *prima facie* logical impossibility of (I) and (III) and the accompanying pragmatic difficulties force us into a position of weighing some items of tradition more than others. Like many Christians, Craig begins with a high doctrine of the authority of Scripture, which combines with a certain hermeneutic, to make (III) obligatory. He then appeals to an equally high doctrine of human freedom to try to reconcile (I) with (III). For this, he pays the price of denying that God will be *good* to every person He creates (in

<sup>48</sup> "The Ordination of a Priest", *The Book of Common Prayer* (1979), p. 526.

the sense defined in section 1.1) and further of understanding divine goodness to be compatible with the damnation of the vast majority of actual created persons. Likewise, Craig's God shares the limitations of human social planners: (i) He cannot achieve the optimal overall good without sacrificing the welfare of some individual persons; (ii) nor can He redeem all personal evil: some of the wicked He can only quarantine or destroy.

By contrast, I emphasize a high doctrine of divine resourcefulness (assigning God the power to let creatures "do their damndest" and still win them all over to heavenly bliss) and a low doctrine of human agency (both ontologically, in terms of the gap between God and creatures, and psychologically, in terms of developmental limitations and impairments). Because I do not regard Scripture as infallible on any interpretation, I do not feel bound to translate into theological assertion some of the apocalyptic imagery and plot lines of the New Testament. Nevertheless, I do not regard my universalist theology as un-Scriptural, because I believe the theme of definitive divine triumph is central to the Bible, is exemplified in Christ Jesus, and is the very basis of our Christian hope.

### 3.4. *The Pragmatics of Universalism*

Surprisingly many religiously serious people reject the doctrine of universal salvation, on the pragmatic ground that it leads to moral and religious laxity. Withdraw the threat, and they doubt whether others—perhaps even they themselves—would sustain the motivation for moral diligence and religious observance.

My pastoral experience suggests, on the contrary, that the disproportionate threat of hell (see sections 2.2 and 2.3) produces despair that masquerades as skepticism, rebellion, and unbelief. If your father threatens to kill you if you disobey him, you may cower in terrorized submission, but you may also (reasonably) run away from home. My brand of universalism offers all the advantages of Augustine's and Calvin's *sola gratia* approaches (like them, it makes our salvation utterly gratuitous and dependent on God's surprising and loving interest in us) and then some (because it gives everyone reason to hope and to be sincerely thankful for his or her life).<sup>49</sup>

<sup>49</sup> To be sure, Augustine thinks the damned should praise the divine justice that damns them, but to do this sincerely seems psychologically impossible for humans. Cf. my "Theodicy without Blame", pp. 221–34.

## 4. The Relevance of Feelings

Craig and Swinburne do not enter at any length into how bad horrendous sufferings are. For example, Craig hurries by with two scant mentions that damnation of many is "a terrible price" and "an admittedly tragic fate".<sup>50</sup> Both close their essays with a quasi-apology, anticipating that some will be offended by their value judgment that the existence of free creatures autonomously deciding their destinies, enough to fill heaven, is worth the price of the eternal exclusion and misery of many. Both imply that those who are offended will be motivated by understandable feelings, which are nevertheless not relevant to a rational consideration of the subject.<sup>51</sup>

I want to close with a contrary methodological contention (one already implicit in my argument in section 2.2): namely, that feelings are highly relevant to the problem of evil and to the problem of hell, because they are one source of information about how bad something is for a person. To be sure, they are not an infallible source. Certainly they are not always an articulate source. But they are a source. Where questions of value are concerned, reason is not an infallible source either. That is why so-called value calculations in abstraction from feelings can strike us as "cold" or "callous". I do not believe we have any infallible faculties at all. But our best shot at valuations will come from the collaboration of feelings and reason, the latter articulating the former, the former giving data to the latter.

Personally, I am appalled at Craig's and Swinburne's valuations, at levels too deep for words (although I have already said many). I invite anyone who agrees with Craig—that the saved can in good conscience let their happiness be unaffected by the plight of the damned because the destruction of the latter is self-willed—to spend a week visiting patients who are dying of emphysema or of the advanced effects of alcoholism, to listen with sympathetic presence, to enter into their point of view on their lives, to face their pain and despair. Then ask whether one could in good conscience dismiss their suffering with, "Oh well, they brought it on themselves!"<sup>52</sup>

<sup>50</sup> Craig, "No Other Name", pp. 183, 185.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., pp. 186–87; and Richard Swinburne, "Knowledge from Experience, and the Problem of Evil," in *The Rationality of Religious Belief: Essays in Honour of Basil Mitchell*, ed. William J. Abraham and Steven W. Holtzer (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987) 141–67; esp. p. 167.

<sup>52</sup> Years ago, Rogers Albritton persuaded me, at the theoretical level, that some suffering is too bad for the guilty. My introspective and pastoral experience since then tells in the same directions.

I do not think this is sentimental. Other than experiencing such sufferings in our own persons, such sympathetic entering into the position of another is the best way we have to tell what it would be like to be that person and suffer as they do, the best data we can get on how bad it would be to suffer that way. Nor is my thesis especially new. It is but an extension of the old Augustinian-Platonist point, that where values are concerned, what and how well you see depends not simply on how well you think, but on what and how well you love (a point to which Swinburne seems otherwise sympathetic).<sup>53</sup> I borrow a point from Charles Hartshorne<sup>54</sup> when I suggest that sensitivity, sympathetic interaction, is an aspect of such loving, one that rightfully affects our judgment in ways we should not ignore.<sup>55</sup>

<sup>53</sup> Swinburne, "A Theodicy of Heaven and Hell", pp. 46–49.

<sup>54</sup> Charles Hartshorne, *The Divine Relativity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1948, 1964), chap. 3, 116–58.

<sup>55</sup> Over the years, my ideas about the doctrine of hell have been shaped by others, some of whom ultimately disagree with my conclusions. Among the medievals, I am especially indebted to Anselm, Aquinas, Duns Scotus, Ockham, and Julian of Norwich; among my contemporaries, Robert Merrihew Adams, John Hick, Jon Hart Olson, A. Orley Swartzentruber, and the members of the Philosophy Department at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan.