

Autonomy, Finality, and the Choice Model of Hell

In the context of traditional Christianity, the doctrine of the afterlife is pervaded with the concept of finality. Hell is described as the “second death”, and the apocalyptic imagery includes a description of a Final Judgment involving a great white throne.

It is natural to think of such finality in terms of the language of “once and for all”: there is a determinate consummation toward which history is aimed, a point at which one’s fate for all eternity is settled once and for all. When clarified in such terms, contemporary philosophical thought about hell seems seriously deficient, as will emerge in what follows. My purpose here is to investigate the issue of finality to determine whether and how contemporary thinking about hell can be reconciled with it.

Before embarking on our journey, however, it is important to be clear about the language of heaven and hell and the precise nature of the problem I want to address. It is easy to think of these notions in geographic terms--that they are places, one where God is and one where God isn’t. Such conceptualization will be avoided here given the serious problems with geographic conceptions. (In brief, the problem is that no matter what the actual character of any location, one can imagine people who find such an environment unpleasant. What makes heaven heavenly is the experience of the union with God it involves, not golden streets and the like. Moreover, it is incoherent to describe God as omnipresent and yet hold that hell is a place where God isn’t. What’s lacking in hell is, rather, the blessing and beauty of a joyful union with God for all eternity. The language of heaven and hell must be understood as relational, not geographic.)

So the language of heaven and hell should be thought of in terms of some ultimate good

that is available to us, and my philosophical interest in the doctrine of hell is driven by what I have called the problem of hell, which is a version of the problem of evil. In order to appreciate the full scope of the problem of hell, we need a more general understanding of the character of hell than can be provided by any geographic conception of it. Once we have before us this more general characterization, we will see that adding the feature of finality to it exacerbates the problem of hell rather than diminishes it. We can begin, then, by characterizing the fundamental distinction between heaven and hell that gives rise to the most general version of the problem of hell.

Every religion posits some advantage to following its tenets, and some disadvantage in not doing so. It is this distinction that underlies the language of heaven and hell. In eschatological religions such as Christianity, the advantage in question is tied to God's purposes in creation, purposes that are complex and manifold, but which include an afterlife of joyous and eternal communion with God. In this way, the fundamental logic of heaven and hell is that heaven is complete and total fulfillment in accord with God's purposes in creation and hell is the loss of this unsurpassable good. To this negative characterization, various traditions add literary flare: hell is the abode of the damned, a land of outer darkness, a place of fire and brimstone, of weeping and gnashing of teeth, where the worm does not die and the fire is not quenched; a place where one loses one's soul, where one becomes merely a war of strongest desires, a place where one is treated as one treated others, etc. These accretions to the fundamental character of hell need to be added and defended only after the problem of hell is answered in the face of the more fundamental distinction between heaven and hell. The reason for this priority is two-fold. First, if the fundamental problem of hell cannot be answered, it is pointless to add to the description of

hell in any way at all—it is simply an untenable doctrine, for the same reason that adding further information to a contradiction doesn't make the inconsistency disappear. Second, if we find an acceptable answer to the fundamental problem of hell, that answer may inform us as to what additional language can be allowed and how it should be interpreted.

This point is important, since it will help us avoid a common flaw in discussions of hell. Some are given to making the following kind of contrast: “That guy doesn't believe in hell; he thinks the unredeemed are simply annihilated!” Such a remark confuses the fundamental logical contrast between heaven and hell with some more particular conception of hell. If hell is defined in terms of fire and brimstone where even worms exist forever, then defenders of annihilationism do not think that people go to hell. Such a way of defining hell, though, simply confuses the philosophical issues surrounding hell, since annihilationism is subject to the same general problem of hell plaguing versions of the doctrine that imply eternal conscious existence. A better approach is to think of hell as the negative complement of a doctrine of heaven.¹ Then both the fire and brimstone crowd and the annihilation crowd oppose the universalist crowd, since the first two believe that some go to hell and the third denies it. In short, heaven is tied to the benefits of the religion, and hell to the costs of rejecting the religion. In the context I'll presuppose here, that means that heaven is understood in terms of God's goals in creation, and hell in terms of the frustration of those goals.

This point is important in another way as well. Something akin to a doctrine of hell is not optional for any religion, and there is no branch of Christianity involving a doctrine of the afterlife that can sensibly sing out, “No hell, no hell” (sung to chorus of “The first Noel”). Some Christians maintain that no one will ever be consigned to hell eternally, but that is different from

denying the doctrine of hell entirely. Every religion must be able to make sense of the warnings it contains, and Christians need to make sense of warnings about the wide and narrow roads. To do so, an appeal must be made to the contrast between God's goals in creation and the results of the frustration of that goal. Various theories of hell issue from descriptions of these results, but the logical core of the concept of hell is the contrast it presents to the doctrine of heaven. Failure to be sufficiently general in one's understanding of hell makes it appear that the easy way out is to deny the doctrine of hell entirely. But the problem of hell, the problem of explaining how a perfectly good God could create a world in which there is a point to warnings about the consequences of failing to love God with one's whole mind, heart, and strength, would still remain. (One might think that this description is prejudiced against universalism, but that is not so at all. Universalists simply deny that anyone goes to hell; they don't deny the existence of a logical or conceptual contrast to heaven nor should they be understood to deny that there is any point to the Biblical warnings. Hell does not cease to be real simply because unpopulated.)

What I'm interested in defending, explicating, and investigating is the idea that there is a doctrine of hell that makes sense for God to author; not to give some exaggerated house of horrors description and then be put in the incoherent position of having to deny the doctrine. Such a position is incoherent in the following sense: it begins hoping to address the problem of hell, but ends up only avoiding certain versions of that problem. Better to address the most general version of the problem and then determine which particular doctrines survive scrutiny than to proffer a particular doctrine and then watch it, to use an apt metaphor, go up in flames.

I've argued in print that there is a solution to this most general problem of hell,² but did not devote much attention to the problem I will address here, the problem arising when one adds

the notion of finality to a fundamental understanding of the nature of heaven and hell. Any traditional understanding of hell in Christianity must honor the finality aspect with which I began. If we think of hell in terms of the contrast to heaven, adding to this understanding the idea that at some point, one's eternal destiny is settled for all of time and eternity, what can we say about the problem of hell?

Two Approaches to Hell

Recent thinking about hell contrasts two quite different approaches to the subject. The traditional approach in Christianity involves retribution or punishment. More carefully, the traditional approach makes retributive punishment the core element in an account of hell. In addition to this core element, various accoutrements can be added or left out. Traditional Christians typically add that escape from hell is not possible, that the inhabitants of hell include at least some human beings, and that hell is a place of unending conscious suffering.

Mitigations of this traditional view of hell are constructed by adopting the punishment model of hell and dropping one of the latter requirements. Universalists deny that any human being will be in hell, or at least that any human being will be in hell forever. Annihilationists deny that hell is a place of conscious suffering; instead, hell is a description of non-existence: the unredeemed simply drop out of existence entirely. And second chance theorists affirm the possibility that once in the afterlife when the alternatives are finally clear to you, you'll have another chance to make the obvious and rational choice to avoid hell.

In opposition to the traditional model of hell and its mitigations is the more recent choice

model, as articulated and defended by C.S. Lewis, Richard Swinburne, Jerry Walls, Eleonore Stump, and myself.³ On the choice model, people are in hell because, to put it crudely, that's what they choose. As Lewis puts it, if the doors of hell are locked, they are locked from the inside.

One of the problems with the choice model, however, is the problem of finality. If hell is only locked from the inside, then those in hell can unlock it and go to heaven. Perhaps they won't, but the mere fact that no one ever goes from one eternal place to the other doesn't seem sufficient for the notion of finality involved in the idea of an eschatological consummation. Something stronger than a merely contingent fact seems to be required. The options here can be ordered in terms of modal strength: metaphysical, logical, nomological, etc. The very weakest we should be willing to accept here is counterfactual necessity: if you were to end up in hell, you wouldn't ever leave; if you were to end up in heaven, you wouldn't leave there either.

Perhaps I've been too hasty in dismissing a merely universal account of finality. Can't one insist that exceptionless universality itself is necessity enough? If we allow mere universality to count as finality in the intended sense, the choice model can easily account for finality simply by adding this contingent claim to whatever the details of one's favored embellishment of the choice model. I will return to this issue at the end of this paper, but for now I will table the suggestion, adopting instead the goal of taking on the harder problem for the choice model. So I will here assume that something more than mere universality is required for finality; that some real necessity is needed—counterfactual, logical, nomological, conceptual, or metaphysical.

If some kind of real necessity is needed, however, it is hard to see how the choice model

can sustain any such necessities. If presence in heaven or hell depends on the exercise of free choice, conceived along libertarian lines, there are several lines of argument that cause problems. Against the ideas of metaphysical, logical, and nomological necessity is the plausibility of the Principle of Alternative Possibilities (PAP). And against the idea of counterfactual necessity is the problem of counterfactuals of freedom which Molinists posit and everyone else disputes.

Two or Three Problematic Possibilities

These points leave open three fairly obvious paths for a defender of the Choice Model to take in explaining finality. The two I'll spend a little more time on concern PAP and Molinism, but there is also the path of adopting a compatibilist account of freedom alluded to above in noting the libertarian conception of freedom typically associated with the Choice Model. By adopting such an alternative conception of freedom, finality could be achieved in virtue of God's activity itself, since God could bring about conditions that cause one to be in whatever internal states cause such a permanent choice. The idea of this position is that God can't directly cause one's presence in heaven or hell, but indirect causation of the right sort is perfectly fine.

Compatibilist freedom, however, is not the only commitment needed for this approach. The list of commitments becomes quite large, and, at least to my mind, a bit philosophically unwieldy. Let me point out what I think are the most problematic elements. The view has to hold that we live in a deterministic world as well (a view that does not cohere well with the available scientific evidence, by the way). Moreover, there is a loss of univocity in the account of freedom, since God's freedom in creation cannot be understood in compatibilistic terms, on

grounds of explanatory circularity (God chooses the laws, so they better not be needed to explain God's choices). The best option here is to explain God's freedom in terms of being unconstrained by factors external to Himself, but then divine and human freedom are construed differently (compatibilist freedom cannot avoid the claim that free actions are nonetheless constrained by external factors).

These issues are deep and difficult and we could get lost in them for nearly an eternity, and since my intention is to focus on other issues, I'll rest content with noting that most versions of the Choice Model assume a libertarian conception of freedom, and that is the version I want to focus on here (at least in part because it is the view of freedom I find most congenial). As my remarks above indicated, there are two other paths to consider, one concerning PAP and the other concerning Molinism. I'll discuss the PAP route first.

The argument against the possibility of finality on the Choice model appealed to PAP, but PAP has come under fire ever since Harry Frankfurt's attack on the principle in 1969.⁴ Frankfurtians hold that an action can be free and the agent responsible for it even if the action itself is necessitated. The usual formulations of PAP say that one is free, or morally responsible, for bringing about a certain state of affairs A only if it is possible for one not to bring about A. To undermine this principle, Frankfurt's demon is ever watchful to see if you'll do some dastardly deed, and leaves you alone as long as you go through with it. But he'll intervene should you show any signs of not going following through, leaving it impossible for you to avoid it.

The failure of PAP, however, doesn't seem to help the Choice Model with finality. What is needed is an explanation of how some choice of eternal destiny is *permanent*, in the sense that

it cannot be revoked. Frankfurt's demon only shows that such permanence obtains only because the ever-watchful being will secure a given outcome if the agent in question won't. The Choice Model, however, needs an explanation in terms of choices of the agent, not one depending on coercion by outside forces.

Deniers of PAP will protest this characterization, however. The language of coercion is appropriate in contexts where a person is forced to do what they do not choose to do, but in the case in question, the person does choose. It is the choice itself that is necessitated, so even if it is necessitated by God's intervention, one's eternal destiny is a function of one's choices and the language of coercion out of place.

There are two points to make to this line of argument. The first is that such an approach to the Choice Model eviscerates it in order to preserve its vestige. Philosophical accounts of hell are motivated by a desire to be able to explain how each individual is morally responsible for their eternal destiny. To adopt a version of the Choice Model that explains eternal destiny in terms of individual choices, but in such a way that the individual is not morally responsible for those choices, would be disastrous for an account of hell. Moreover, Frankfurt's counterexample to PAP is meant only to show that one can be responsible even if one couldn't have done otherwise *because the demon may need to do nothing at all*. Frankfurt's example would lose all of its appeal if it involved the actual intervention of the demon to produce the desired behavior. Moral responsibility exists in Frankfurt examples only when the demon idly observes, not when the demon actually has to intervene. So if one preserves the Choice Model by appeal to Frankfurt counterexamples to PAP by applying Frankfurt's technique to the choices themselves while admitting that in some cases intervention is required, one will have preserved the Choice

Model only by abandoning its connection to moral responsibility. That theory would be only a shadow of a substance we can't do without.

It is here that careful attention to the formulation of PAP is instructive and relevant as well, since the usual attacks on PAP woefully underappreciate the resources available to a defender of PAP. Once this point is appreciated, we will see that little hope remains of grounding finality in some necessity based on a denial of PAP.

The crude formulation of PAP uses the unexplicated phrase "could have done otherwise." Frankfurt's attack on PAP assumes that this phrase should be understood so that, where the action in question is A, the "otherwise" locution refers to the absence of the action in question: one could have done otherwise in a situation in which one A's iff one could have failed to A. That's only one possible interpretation of the phrase, however. Here's another. One can talk about what one intends rather than what one does: one is free, or morally responsible, in bringing about A only if it was possible for one to fail to intend to bring about A. The demon may be able to force you to do the deed, but not to intend or try to do it. Perhaps moral responsibility depends on some optionality with respect to the intentional realm, with respect to what we might call "tryings". Maybe Adam had to eat the apple (at least he seemed to claim Eve made him do it), but he could have tried not to and he didn't.

This response helps to defend PAP, but it is not by itself sufficient. For any action that is not an instantaneous action, including intendings and tryings, the demon can see the first signs of failure to perform the action and intervene at that point (if we imagine him prescient enough). So if your intending not to A takes more than an instant, the demon can see its beginning and prevent its completion. In order to fix this problem, we'll have to posit instantaneous "flickers of

freedom,” which the demon can’t extinguish.⁵ Maybe Frankfurt’s demon can prevent a full trying or intending from occurring, but he can’t prevent the beginning of such, and maybe that flicker of freedom is all a defender of PAP needs.

I’m not certain that there are any such things as instantaneous actions, but if there are no such things, it is hard to see why. If we admit the possibility of instantaneous actions of this sort, however, the possibility of defending finality by denying PAP is lost. Since I can see no reason for thinking that there can’t be instantaneous actions, I think defenders of the Choice Model will have to look elsewhere for a solution to the problem of finality.

An alternative way to build the Choice Model so as to include finality is the way of the Molinist. The Molinist holds that there are true counterfactuals of freedom, counterfactuals of the form “if S were put in circumstances C, S would freely do A,” where the kind of freedom in question is assumed to be libertarian freedom. The doctrine of Molinism refers to God’s knowledge of such counterfactuals as “middle knowledge,” coming logically after his natural knowledge (i.e., his knowledge of necessary truths) and before his free knowledge (knowledge of contingent matters of fact true in virtue of God’s creative activity).⁶

If we suppose that there are such true counterfactuals of freedom, we need only add one further element to build the notion of finality into the choice model. That further element is that any omniscient being knows which counterfactuals of freedom are true and which antecedents will actually occur. Given this knowledge, it is relatively simply to explain how it could be that one’s afterlife destiny is counterfactually final: if in either afterlife situation, one would never undergo the changes needed to move from one to the other.

This is a neat package if there are true counterfactuals of freedom. It is the “beautiful

game” of philosophical theology, since it incorporates a commitment to libertarian freedom while at the same time refusing to compromise on the question of God’s providential control of all of time and eternity. The hitch, however, is whether there are true counterfactuals of freedom. On the side of the existence of such is the intuitive argument: we use subjunctives in a variety of contexts, especially when deliberating, and would have no problem including the language of freedom in them if asked about it. Think of “He wouldn’t have signed even if we’d offered him \$10,000 more” to explain why we should give up on trying to buy that house; “If he’d hung that curveball again, I’d have hit it out of the ballpark” to lament striking out again; or, the ignored academician’s lament, “if they’d only read my stuff, they’d see...” In each case, a counterfactual is expressed by a sentence in the subjunctive mood, and even though none are counterfactuals of freedom, we wouldn’t balk at inserting the language of freedom into the sentences in question. The reason we don’t has to do with Gricean maxims⁷ to the effect that one’s contribution to a discussion should be informative and relevant, so that including items that everyone will legitimately assume to obtain is tedious and overdone. So, don’t mention the language of freedom when speaking of human action unless it is somehow in question in the conversation.

On the other side of the coin are the worries about how to explain the truth of a counterfactual of freedom. This concern is sometimes called the grounding objection, but I find that language puzzling, obtuse, and irrelevant. When someone asks what grounds the truth of a certain claim, they’ve waxed metaphorical in a way we should move beyond. Giving up the metaphor can be done, however. Just ask about the truth conditions, or truth-makers, for counterfactuals of freedom. I’ll focus on truth conditions. It is here that formal semantics can give us some insight into the truth conditions of sentences, in terms of the logical form of the

sentences and the satisfaction conditions for sentences having that form. Since the 1970's, the standard, albeit not wholly satisfactory, semantics for counterfactuals has appealed to possible worlds and some ordering of such at least weakly centered on the actual world.⁸ What this means, in non-technical language is that some ways of imagining the world to be different than it actually are less similar to actuality than others. For simplicity, assume that for each particular way of imagining the world to have been different, there is one world that is most similar, though not identical, to the actual world (involving this particular imaginative difference). Then a counterfactual with that imagined difference as antecedent is true just in case the consequent of that counterfactual is true in this most similar world. A quick example may help. Consider the claim that if I'd been offered \$100,000 to write this paper rather than offered the opportunity to do it *gratis*, I still would have given it. Imagine the world changed to accommodate this wholly undeserved possibility, and then ask yourself, "Would Kvanvig be writing in such a situation?" The answer is, obviously, "Yes;" in fact, I not only would have the paper, I would have taken you all out to dinner this evening! So the counterfactual in question is true.

"But wait," you say. "You could have refused the offer, couldn't you?" The answer is, again, "Yes." So now there are two worlds in which the offer is made, one in which I give the lecture and one in which I don't. If the first is somehow more similar to the actual world than the second, what explains this difference? The usual answers by defenders of the standard semantics cite features such as: same laws of nature, same history up to the point in question, small insignificant miracles favored over large ones, and so on. (These items are ordered in terms of importance: same laws trumps same history which trumps miracles, etc.)

The problem is that this account doesn't help with the example, assuming as I am that I

have libertarian freedom with regard to lecturing. In one world I lecture and in another I don't. Each of these worlds have the same laws and same history up to the point at which my lecture began. We assume the same panoply of miracles in each world up to that time as well, so the only differences in the two worlds are future differences. So which world is more similar to the actual world? On all these criteria, the worlds are tied.

What might we try here? I'll not go into the technical details needed to provide an answer here, but there are a couple of general points worth making. The standard semantics is particularly well-suited to accounting for the truth of counterfactuals under the assumption of determinism, for then, once you freeze the laws and the history of the world, the only thing that can get things to be different from the actual world is a miracle or some change to the past. But, to put the point tendentiously, nobody should assume determinism anymore and if we don't, we have one of two options. The first is to find a semantics for counterfactuals that is more at home with denials of determinism, or adopt the view that our counterfactual talk is really best understood as a stand-in for more precise talk about probabilities.⁹

Here's how things might go on the probabilistic story. Instead of holding that it is strictly true that if circumstances C were to obtain, S would freely do A, one should hold that the strict truth is something like: "it is probably true that in C, S would freely do A," or "the probability of S's freely doing A, given C is very high". There is a deep problem with such views, however. Suppose you say to me "if you were to utter a profanity during your talk, I'd get up and leave." This is a claim I know how to test, (but won't!). And I know what circumstances would constitute a decisive refutation of your claim, and so do you. Here they are: I utter a profanity and you stay where you are. But notice that this set of circumstances does not constitute a

decisive refutation of any probability claim. The point to notice is that no matter what semantics we adopt for subjunctive conditional, that semantics had better honor the point that such a conditional is always false when it has a true antecedent and false consequent.

Choice and Finality

I will not press the case for Molinism further here, however, in order to focus on the question of what happens if the beautiful game of the choice model plus Molinism collapses. Here's what we're left with if we stick with the choice model. First, real omniscience has to be abandoned, since exhaustive foreknowledge of the future will no longer be within God's reach.¹⁰ And once we have a choice model tied to a lack of omniscience, it looks like the idea of finality is lost forever, since there might be people in hell for whom there exists forever the open-ended option of changing so as to get out of hell.

To use a common term for a view such as this, let's call the position that combines the choice model with loss of omniscience "Open Theism". To put the point as starkly as possible, must an open theist deny the coherence of the Final Judgment, the coherence of eschatology conceived as the doctrine of the Last Things? OK, a bit unfair, but you see the point!

To try to account for finality, the defender of openness will have to place restrictions on the range of autonomy. One's presence in heaven or hell might initially be something we choose, but the inability to leave will not. One might imagine a position where the option of leaving hell is closed off, but it is hard to see how any point chosen will make the position better at dealing with the problem of hell than the traditional retributivist understanding for which an alternative is

thought to be needed.

To see why, consider the following attempt. We hold that presence in hell is a result of one's choices, and in the process of choosing in such a way as to end up there, one turns oneself into the kind of person for whom it is psychologically impossible to choose to leave. This account of finality, however, has no advantages over Molinism. Either the impossibility in question is sufficient to imply Molinist counterfactuals, or it isn't. If it implies that one gets oneself into such a state that one wouldn't choose otherwise, then the view has no advantages over standard Molinism (unless, of course, it posits that there is no possible world with the history in question in which the person chooses otherwise, a claim fraught with explanatory problems of its own¹¹). If, however, it posits a type of impossibility compatible with the claim that one counterfactually might still choose otherwise (i.e., the denial of a Molinist counterfactual), the sense of impossibility seems to lose all force whatsoever. What more could such a claim mean beyond the claim that one will permanently refuse the choice to leave? And if that is all there is, we have no finality beyond that posited by mere universality.

A more attractive option, then, is the universalist view, according to which God finally decides that if one has not freely chosen heaven, there will come a time where one will be brought to heaven against one's will. One will experience, in this sense, coercive redemption at some point.

This option allows that autonomy is valuable, but not so valuable as to allow the befalling of utter ruin. It achieves a mitigation of hell by defending a mitigation of the value of autonomy.

There is a question here about whether this position counts as a version of the Choice Model any longer, though ultimately the answer doesn't tell one way or another against the

position. My initial inclination is to think it abandons the Choice Model. Even though initial presence in heaven or hell is a matter of what one chooses, one's eternal destiny may not be a matter of what one chooses. There is a way for the open theist to retain the choice model, however, by objecting to my description of their viewpoint given above, according to which we may be saved against our will. In place of my description, they might prefer to contrast libertarian freedom with its close cousin, compatibilist freedom. When God's patience with one's misuse of libertarian freedom is exhausted, they might say, he needn't act against our will. Instead, he might allow freedom to be retained, though in a different sense. He might remove libertarian freedom and replace it with compatibilist freedom, and put us then in the position that we will freely choose heaven. "Choose," not in the libertarian sense, but in the compatibilist sense.

If the universalist takes this route, they will need to claim that the value of libertarian freedom exceeds that of compatibilist freedom. Without this addition, there is no reason to resist compatibilism from the very beginning. Given this value claim, however, this universalist does not need to say that God will ultimately save us against our will, or that autonomy will ultimately give way. Instead, only the most valuable sort will if need be, and since God does not know in advance whether any such need will exist, it remains an open question whether he will have to limit freedom in this way. Whether or not he does remove the most valuable freedom, however, it remains the case that one's eternal destiny is a matter of one's choices.

One ought to have some hesitation in thinking this way of retaining choice makes any difference if one has libertarian sensibilities. For such people—me, for example--the difference between doing something against one's will and doing it with compatibilist freedom is a

difference that makes no evaluative difference. That is, libertarians will view anything less than libertarian freedom as equally lacking in value, no matter how described. It might sound better to the ear to be able to describe it as if it were a kind of freedom, in the way that describing death in terms of going home is found comforting, but there is in fact no evaluative difference between doing something against one's will and doing it with compatibilist freedom.¹² But I will not press this point further.

There is a different point I want to press, however, and it is the point that this position confuses the fundamental distinction between heaven and hell. To move toward this conclusion, note first what this view will need to say about people who view heaven as abhorrent, union with God as a loss of all that matters to them. The universalist who wishes to preserve finality says that God has a recipe for that. He can wipe out the present views and replace them with new ones, he can eliminate affective states and replace them with states of pure joy. The hope of the universalist is that God can do this indirectly, by exposing the individual to experiences aimed at prompting such responses in the way libertarians cherish. But since there is no guarantee that such will work, the only guarantee available is to do it more directly, by bringing about compatibilistically free responses of the sort in question.

Here's the fundamental problem with the view, and it arises from returning to fundamental distinction between heaven and hell, with the second being properly characterized in terms of a loss of the goods proffered by the first. On the present picture, the first involves the union and intimacy with God for which we were created. So the second involves a loss of this possibility. On the picture just imagined, there are two classes of people. Both are described as being in heaven, but it is not clear why. There is no language of fire and brimstone, of

punishment and desert for the lesser crowd, but there is loss. There is the loss of the pure and total fulfillment of the union of libertarianly autonomous being with the Creator, the admitted goal of creation by both sides of the debate. The universalist says there will be second-class citizens in heaven. They, perhaps, won't be able to tell that they are not experiencing the goal for which they were created, but the fact of the matter is that they won't be experiencing the goal. This version of universalism is one in name only. It is really a position that describes a much less troubling doctrine of hell. Those in hell are not in pain; they are not tormented day and night forever. They may not even understand their loss. But they have suffered a great loss, one that falls outside the primary intention of the perfectly good and wise Creator. It is incorrect to describe them as experiencing the joy of the beatific vision, since that experience requires to autonomous surrendering to the will of the Creator. Even if they can't tell the difference between their experience and the experience of the blessed, there is one, and at least God knows it. So this version of universalism is not universalism at all; it is simply as strong a mitigation of the experience of hell that can be imagined. Much as the denizens of Descartes' evil demon world cannot tell the difference between their world and ours, between their illusory experience and our veridical experience, just so, those in hell can't tell the difference between their experience and the experience of the redeemed. But those of us being presented with the two options know the difference. They have suffered a great loss, they just may not be able to tell that they have. When we identify heaven properly in terms of the obtaining of the great good for which we were created, they are not in heaven. They think they are, perhaps; they can't tell that they are not, perhaps; but they are not in heaven.

The only way to try to avoid this result is to deny that the goal of union with God involves

(libertarian) free choice at all. But then the question is why God would have wanted freely chosen union in the first place. If it makes union more valuable, more worthwhile, then there is a reason, and it would be hard to see why God wouldn't have made that the goal. If it adds nothing to union, then it is an arbitrary accretion. I have no objection to arbitrary elements in action, but it makes no sense to cause pain and suffering to an individual for the sole purpose of achieving some arbitrary goal that adds no value whatsoever to the resulting endstate.

Ersatz Universalism and Quasi-Annihilationism

As a result, the open theism position described is not a version of universalism; I'll call it *ersatz* universalism, or EU for short. EU admits that some are saved and some are lost, it is just that the loss isn't experientially appreciable in the way conscious burning in a fire where the worm dieth not and the fire is not quenched would be.

Elsewhere, I've argued for a different picture where people ultimately get what they want, which is, for the damned, total and complete separation from God, which is annihilation. Which of these two views better addresses the problem of hell? In my view, both rob the problem of hell of its bite, differing only on the value question regarding libertarian freedom. The annihilation view of hell treats the creation of libertarian freedom as completely serious; the open theist view of hell treats it as less serious, viewing preference-satisfaction as outweighing it on the scales of value. Perhaps the difference here is between those of Kantian intuitions in the theory of value and those with utilitarian intuitions. From the perspective of those concerned about the problem of hell, however, this is a pleasing result. The solution to the problem

depends on the solution to the axiological dispute between Kant and his opponents: does value ultimately trace to the value of a good will, properly understood, or to the value of preference satisfaction? Here I'm with Kant, though naked of argument.

There's one difference though, a difference concerning the issue of finality with which I began. Ersatz universalism accounts for finality by allowing freedom to run loose only up to a certain point. At that point, God ends the openness of the future, and the fate of all is determined by his decree. The annihilation view does not have this option without embracing either the denial of PAP route or the Molinism route. In this respect, it appears that EU has an advantage over annihilationism.

It is important to see where exactly the loss of finality happens on the annihilation view. Central to the view, as I've defended it, is the point that one should not always honor the choices of human beings, even when they are full adults. People are sometimes depressed, sometimes careless, and when they make momentous choices afflicted in these ways, intervention is surely warranted. As a result, merely choosing separation from God is not sufficient, on this view, for the choice to be honored. That leaves open the possibility that individuals might choose separation from God and yet never satisfy the conditions necessary for their choice to be honored, leaving the possibility of unending separation from God short of annihilation. Moreover, the unending separation would never, at any point, be final in any modally strong way. Finality results only when union with God is achieved or annihilation occurs; short of that is the intermediate state of, to put it a bit misleadingly, never-ending uncertainty.

The objection this view must address is whether, so conceived, this position founders on this failure of finality. All that is left is what I termed earlier "mere universal finality." It is not

metaphysically impossible to leave hell once there, nor logically, nor nomologically, nor even counterfactually impossible (given the assumption that Molinism won't work). All that remains is universality—that those in hell will never leave.

Merely universal finality can, of course, be added to the Choice Model, since it is compatible with it. The disturbing question, though, is on what basis it can be added. Given the assumption of the failure of Molinism, not even God can know what choices would result from presence in heaven or presence in hell. It may be a fact of the matter that no one will ever leave, but we couldn't have Molinist-like grounds for thinking so. So what grounds could we have? All that is left is the mysterious position of David Hunt that God has simple foreknowledge,¹³ knowing the complete future as it actually is, but not knowing it on any Molinist basis. Here the question of how God has such exhaustive foreknowledge is not answered. Perhaps it can be answered by endorsing the doctrine of God's eternity, supposing God to be outside time, so that there is no more perplexity about God knowing the future than about God knowing the past and present. We will all be forgiven for thinking of this option akin to having our complaints about being stuck in the dark answered by being forced to look directly at the sun.

Conclusion

I will close with some sheer, total, unmitigated confession and speculation. I'm not quite happy with the result achieved, even if a way can be found to explain how God has simple foreknowledge of the future. I want some modal strength in the account of finality. I want to be able to say that autonomy is valuable but that the beatific vision and its loss in hell involve a

metaphysical change in our natures that renders autonomy otiose. Autonomy is a tool we use to become what we will. The goal is to have become what we have chosen, so there is no other path to that end; but once there, we can kick away the ladder we used to get there. I do not pretend here to anything even as much as seeing through a glass darkly, however; it is what I would find satisfying but do not yet see how to get.

Endnotes

1. On this account, limbo should be construed as a less severe compartment of hell, and purgatory as a less comfortable part of heaven.
2. In *The Problem of Hell*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).
3. See C.S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, (New York: MacMillan, 1944); Richard Swinburne, *The Coherence of Theism*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977); Eleonore Stump, "Dante's Hell, Aquinas's Moral Theory, and the Love of God," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 16 (1986), pp. 181-196; Jerry Walls, *Hell: The Logic of Damnation*, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992); Jonathan L. Kvanvig, *The Problem of Hell*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).
4. Harry Frankfurt, "Alternate Possibilities and Moral Responsibility," *Journal of Philosophy* 66 (1969), pp. 829-39. Frankfurt's argument is against a principle of alternative possibilities for moral responsibility rather than for freedom, but since libertarians typically connect freedom with moral responsibility, it is relatively easy to adapt his objections to the context of freedom itself.
5. The phrase "flicker of freedom" is borrowed from John Fischer, *The Metaphysics of Free Will*, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1994).
6. Luis de Molina, *On Divine Foreknowledge*, Part IV of *Concordia*, translated with an introduction by Fred Freddoso, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988).
7. Gricean maxims are principles about communication that go beyond semantic content. See, especially, "Logic and Conversation," in *Syntax and Semantics, 3: Speech Acts*, ed. P. Cole & J. Morgan, (New York: Academic Press, 1975), which is reprinted together with other relevant essays in *Studies in the Way of Words*, ed. H. P. Grice, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University

Press, 1989).

8. See David Lewis, *Counterfactuals*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1973).

9. This probabilistic interpretation is now standard for indicative conditionals; see what has come to be called the Jeffrey-Adams-McGee (JAM) tradition of providing a probabilistic semantics for indicative conditionals (Richard Jeffrey, “If,” *Journal of Philosophy*, 61(21):702–703, 1964; Vann McGee, “Conditional probabilities and compounds of conditionals,” *The Philosophical Review*, 48:485–541, 1989; Ernest Adams, *The Logic of Conditionals*, Reidel, Dordrecht, 1975). Various problems plague this account, to my mind the most important being that conditional probability is too coarse semantically to account for semantically distinguishable conditional sentences (see Patrick Suppes, “Some questions about adams’ conditionals,” in Ellery Eells and Brian Skyrms, editors, *Probability and Conditionals: Belief Revision and Rational Decision*, Cambridge University Press, 1994, pp. 5-11) and that this interpretation of JAM-conditions does not accommodate properly reductio arguments expressed using conditional sentences (see Isaac Levi, *Mild Contraction*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 2004). This approach is instructive in the present context, since a probabilistic approach to subjunctives faces a version of the latter problem (a refutation of a subjunctive conditional occurs when its antecedent is true and its consequent is false), but also because the truth conditions for indicatives differ from the truth conditions for subjunctives, so there would need to be some difference in the conditional probability semantics for each.

10. I resist strongly the idea that there aren’t any truths about the (undetermined) future—that’s a failure to grasp the significance of tense (present tense sentences allow us to say true things about the present, past tense about the past, and future tense about the future). The best reason to

succumb here is a failure to see what's wrong with the argument for logical fatalism that appeals to such truths. Once we see what's wrong with that argument, there's no reason to think the openness of the future requires absence of truth-value for certain claims about the future.

Moreover, we should also resist temptation to run an analogy with omnipotence so that omniscience requires only knowing all that is knowable just as omnipotence only requires being able to do all that is possible. Proper care in developing the analogy with omnipotence takes one to the conclusion that omniscience doesn't require a being to know everything, only everything true, so a failure of exhaustive foreknowledge is simply a failure of omniscience. In brief, here's why. Omnipotence is a modal notion while omniscience is not. When the idea of doing everything is proposed as a requirement for omnipotence, two responses can be made. The first is that an omnipotent being only needs to be able to do what's possible, and the other that an omnipotent being only needs to be able to do what's actually done. Why prefer the former to the latter? The answer is simple: omnipotence is a modal notion, so the modal account is preferable. (Besides, the non-modal version gives us no reason to think that there are miracles God has the power to perform but doesn't.) So when the idea is proposed that an omniscient being has to know everything, two responses can be made as well. Well, actually three. One is in terms of knowing all that can be known (a modal restriction), and the other two are non-modal: knowing all that is true or knowing all that is actually known. Since omniscience is, in the relevant sense, a non-modal concept, we should prefer one of the latter two over the former. Knowing all that is actually known is too weak—God could be omniscient just by knowing the sum of everything his creatures know. So if we want a non-modal restriction, we should prefer the requirement of knowing all truths. (For an fuller statement of this argument, see my “The Analogy Argument

for a Limited Account of Omniscience," *International Philosophical Quarterly* 29.2 (June 1989), pp. 129-137.) Such a conclusion has a happy result in the face of the specter of skepticism. If we conceive of the gloomy scenario in which Peter Unger is right, that knowledge is really an absolute concept that cannot be instantiated, then everything is omniscient on either of the other two accounts, since everything would know everything that is known and everything that is knowable. Omniscience is supposed to be awe-inspiring, but if somehow it is philosophically conceivable that my coffee cup, without alteration of its intrinsic nature, displays it as much as God, then we have failed to grasp the nature of omniscience. (For a way of avoiding this nasty consequence, but without addressing the difficulties the analogy faces, see Peter van Inwagen, "What Does an Omniscient Being Know about the Future?" in *Oxford Studies in Philosophy of Religion, Volume 1*, edited by Jonathan L. Kvanvig, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).)

All this without yet mentioning the implications for those of us retaining a high view of Scriptural authority. Here I think especially of Psalm 139, and the most difficult part of it to explain away: "My very self you knew; my bones were not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, fashioned as in the depths of the earth. Your eyes foresaw my actions; in your book all are written down; my days were shaped, before one came to be." The author may, of course be waxing hyperbolic, but the language is just the awe-inspiring sort any adequate account of God's nature ought to include.

11. These problems are discussed in "Losing Your Soul," this volume.

12. To say nothing, either, about the gross philosophical mis-step of taking various theories of X, turning the term for the theory into an adjective, and pretending as if there are now various kinds of X identifiable by prefacing 'X' with that adjective, thus getting, e.g., foundationalist

justification and coherentist justification, real properties and nominal properties, as well as libertarian and compatibilist freedom. I understand such adjectival temptations, and also how to interpret them in terms of theories of the thing in question, but as used in the text, such an interpretation is barred. But then it is simply a confusion: the existence of a compatibilist theory of freedom does not at all imply that there is such a thing as compatibilist freedom.

13. See his contribution to *Divine Foreknowledge: 4 Views*, (Downers' Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2001).