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Hell: Against Universalism

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Abstract

Christian tradition speaks mainly of two possible post-mortem human destinies. It holds that those human beings who, in their earthly lives, acted according to God's will and accepted God's love will be reconciled to Him in heaven; whereas those who have acted against God's will and refused His love will be consigned to the everlasting torments of hell. The notion that hell is everlasting and also a place of unending suffering inevitably gives rise to the following question for theists: how could an omnipotent, all-good and all-loving God allow anyone to suffer the torments of hell for eternity? The problem of hell is arguably the most severe form of the problem of evil because the evil found in hell is eternal with no possibility for redemption. Thus, the doctrine of hell gives rise to a specific moral problem caused by the apparent incompatibility between God's goodness and love and everlasting torment in hell. There have been several attempts to shore up the doctrine of hell in the face of this problem. 'Particularists' argue that the doctrine is morally defensible and that some people will experience eternal torment in hell as a result of their rejection of God. Others try to evade the problem by claiming that a doctrine of hell is not in fact taught in the scriptures (at least in its traditional form), and that Christians are therefore able to reject particularism and affirm that all human beings will be saved in the end. Those who make this optimistic eschatological observation are known as 'universalists'.

My thesis focuses on 'universalists' and, in particular, on three contemporary Christian philosophers who defend universal salvation, namely: John Hick, Thomas Talbott and Marilyn McCord Adams. All three maintain that God's love for His human creatures is inconsistent with the claim that God does not desire to bring about their salvation. Their accounts share common roots: they are founded on an understanding of God's nature as omnipotent love, and on an understanding of human freedom, as well as on an account of curative post-mortem punishment for sinners. All three philosophers hold that God will eventually succeed in reconciling all human beings to Himself and so no one will be damned in hell.

In this thesis, I argue that Hick, Talbott and Adams fail in their attempts to make a plausible case for universalism. One of the main criticisms I consider is that there is significant tension between their universalist accounts and the value of human freedom. The necessary correlation that they assume between God's love and the outcome of this

love does not recognize the capacity for each person freely to reject the offer of salvation. Another criticism I consider is that their accounts of post-mortem punishment do not guarantee either that salvation and reconciliation with God will be the outcome of a free choice made out of love, or that all sinners will eventually be saved. In bringing these three universalist accounts into question, I examine the notions of freedom of choice and punishment as well as the relation between free choice and rationality.

The bells of hell will ring-a-ling-a-ling
For you, but not for me
The angels will all sing-a-ling-a-ling
For me, but not for you... [Traditional]

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Chapter One: Introduction

No other doctrine in the Christian tradition has captured the human imagination to the extent that the doctrine of hell has. It has also sparked one of the most heated debates among theists. Hell occupied Christian thought throughout the centuries and its influence and significance is reflected not only in numerous theological and philosophical works but also in various works of art, literature and poetry. The horrors of hell are vividly described in Dante's *Inferno* and Milton's *Paradise Lost*, and the representations of hell found in these classic works are suggestive about why many people feel unease when they think about hell.¹ The fate of Mohammed in hell, as it is presented in Dante's *Inferno*, gives us a gruesome picture of hell:

No cask stove in by cant or middle ever
 So gaped as one I saw there, from the chin
 Down to the fart-hole split as by a cleaver.
His tripes hung by his heels; the pluck and spleen
 Showed with the liver and the sordid sack
 That turns to dung the food it swallows in.
I stood and stared; he saw me and stared back;
 Then with his hands wrenched open his own breast,
 Crying: "See how I rend myself! What rack
Mangles Mahomet! Weeping without rest
 Ali before me goes, his whole face slit
 By one great stroke upward from chin to crest.
All these whom thou beholder in the pit
 Were sowers of scandal, sowers of schism abroad
 While they yet lived; therefore they now go split.
Back yonder stands a fiend, by whom we're scored
 Thus cruelly; and over and over again
 He puts us to edge of the sharp sword
As we crawl through our bitter round of pain;
 For ere we come before him to be bruised
 Anew, the gashed flesh reunites its grain..."²

Dante's description is true to the fact that when many people think about hell the first thing that comes to mind is the eternal pains and torment which some will suffer. Hell is widely imagined as the place of the wicked—as a place where those who have refused God's love receive unending punishment with no possibility of escape. The notion that hell is

¹ Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy. Hell*, Dorothy L. Sayers, trans. (Penguin, 1949). John Milton's *Paradise Lost* was originally published by Samuel Simmons in 1667.

² Alighieri (1949), Canto XXVIII.

everlasting implies that the human race is to be forever divided by a ‘great gulf’.³ To any person who places great value on the human personality or the unity of human race, the thought of an eternal division and eternal torment in hell may be an intolerable one. The question that inevitably arises for theists is how an all-powerful, all good and all-loving God could allow anyone to be eternally punished in hell. Could anyone deserve such fate? How could any sin deserve an infinite punishment? It is hard to accept the fact that, however terrible hell is, divine justice and love reigns there: but this is what the doctrine of hell seems to require theists to believe.

1. The problem of hell

The doctrine was increasingly criticised and rejected on moral grounds from the late 18th century. Among the better-known criticisms and rejections of the doctrine are those of J. S. Mill (1806–1879) and Bertrand Russell (1872–1970). Mill writes:

I say nothing of the moral difficulties and perversions involved in revelation itself; though even in the Christianity of the Gospels, at least in its ordinary interpretation, there are some of so flagrant a character as almost to outweigh all the beauty and benignity and moral greatness which so eminently distinguish the sayings and character of Christ. The recognition, for example, of the object of highest worship, in a being who could make a Hell; and who could create countless generations of human beings with the certain foreknowledge that he was creating them for this fate. Is there any moral enormity which might not be justified by imitation of such a Deity? And is it possible to adore such a one without a frightful distortion of the standard of right and wrong? Any other of the outrages to the most ordinary justice and humanity involved in the common christian conception of the moral character of God, sinks into insignificance beside this dreadful idealization of wickedness.⁴

³ The parable of Lazarus and Dives in Luke 16:19–31 illustrates this division. According to the parable: Lazarus, a poor man dies and is carried by angels to Abraham’s bosom. A rich man dies as well and goes to Hades where he is tormented. In his torment he looks up to heaven, sees Lazarus and Abraham, and makes two requests which Abraham denies. Firstly, he requests a drop of water, but Abraham invokes the great gulf between the blessed and the wicked. Secondly, he requests Abraham to send Lazarus to earth to warn his brothers about the torments of the afterlife they will experience if they continue being bad. But Abraham denies this as well because Lazarus and Dives are both dead. For more discussion see Alan E. Bernstein, *The Formation of Hell: Death and Retribution in the Ancient and Early Christian Worlds* (UCL Press, 1993), pp. 239–240. This parable emphasizes not only that hell is inescapable but also that there is no possibility of spiritual development in hell. See Michael Wheeler, *Heaven, Hell and the Victorians* (Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 194.

⁴ John Stuart Mill, ‘Utility of Religion’, in *Three Essays on Religion* (Cosimo Classics, 2008), pp. 113–114.

About a century later, Russell argues along similar lines: ‘there is one serious defect to my mind in Christ’s moral character, and that is that he believed in hell. I do not myself feel that any person who is really profoundly humane can believe in everlasting punishment’.⁵

Both philosophers’ comments point out a serious problem for the Christian doctrine of hell, namely that it appears to be morally indefensible.⁶ The problem of hell is arguably the most severe form of the problem of evil because evil in hell is eternal with no future possibility for redemption.⁷ Before we continue, in order better to understand the problem of hell and the various approaches to it, it is important to look first at the problem of evil.

The problem of evil is one of the most serious difficulties confronting traditional Christianity, and it has been a focus of heated philosophical and theological discussions for centuries. Epicurus was the first to formulate the problem of evil as a philosophical dilemma (341–270 B. C.):

If God is perfectly good, He must want to abolish all evil, if He is ultimately powerful, He must be able to abolish all evil. But evil exists; therefore either God is not perfectly Good or He is not ultimately powerful.⁸

Later the problem received its classic formulation in David Hume’s *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* when Philo says to Demea:

Epicurus’ old questions are yet unanswered. Is he willing to prevent evil, but not able? Then he is impotent. Is he able, but not willing? Then he is malevolent. Is he both able and willing? Whence then is evil?⁹

The problem of evil, however, took its contemporary form in 1955 in J. L. Mackie’s famous article ‘Evil and Omnipotence’ where Mackie argues that the existence of evil is logically incompatible with that of an omnipotent and wholly good God.¹⁰ There seems to

⁵ Bertrand Russell, ‘Why I am not Christian’, in *Russell on religion: selections from the writings of Bertrand Russell* (Louis I. Greenspan and Stefan Anderson, eds., Routledge, 1999), p. 86.

⁶ Most opponents of the doctrine of hell, such as those who support universalism or annihilation, claim that this is one of the main reasons why the doctrine should be abandoned.

⁷ Michael L. Peterson and Raymond J. VanArragon, eds., ‘Is Eternal Damnation Compatible with the Christian Concept of God?’, in *Contemporary debates of Philosophy of Religion* (Blackwell Publishing, 2004), p. 271.

⁸ Quoted in John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love* (Macmillan, 1966), p. 5.

⁹ David Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* (Richard H. Popkin, ed., Hackett Publishing Company, 1998), Part X, p. 63.

¹⁰ J. L. Mackie, ‘Evil and Omnipotence’, *Mind* 64, no. 254 (April, 1955), p. 209. The problem of evil which Mackie presents is a ‘logical problem’. It is, he says, ‘the problem of clarifying and reconciling a number of beliefs’. Reprinted in Marilyn McCord Adams and Robert Merrhew Adams eds., ‘J. L. Mackie: Evil and Omnipotence’, in *The Problem Of Evil* (Oxford University Press, 1990), pp. 25–37. Also see J. L. Mackie,

be, he argues, some contradiction between these propositions: ‘God is omnipotent; God is wholly good; and yet evil exists’.¹¹ However, the contradiction between these propositions is not explicit and in order to make it explicit ‘additional premises or quasi-logical rules connecting the terms good, evil, and omnipotent’ are needed.¹² These additional premises are that a perfectly good being would always eliminate evil as far as it can and that there are no limits to what an omnipotent being can do. It follows, Mackie argues, that a wholly good, omnipotent being eliminates evil completely and that the propositions that a wholly good, omnipotent being exists, and that evil exists, are incompatible.¹³ So Mackie holds that theism is ‘positively irrational’ since ‘parts of the essential theological doctrine are inconsistent with each other’.¹⁴ The theist cannot ‘consistently adhere’ to all three propositions, but in denying any of them he is, in effect, denying the existence of God; at least ‘God’ as traditionally conceived.¹⁵

Some philosophers have argued that God’s existence is incompatible with some quantity or certain types of evil. The existence of evil in the world, they claim, is evidence against God’s existence, or at least the existence of some of these evils minimizes the possibility of the existence of the God in which theists believe. William Rowe in his ‘The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism’ argues that there are instances of evil which are pointless (unjustifiable) and so constitute good evidence against God’s existence.¹⁶

Purported solutions to the problem of evil have been proposed by various thinkers throughout the late 20th century. Perhaps the most important proposed solution to the problem is the claim that evil is not to be ascribed to God but to the actions of human

‘The Problem of Evil’, in *The Miracle of Theism: Arguments for and against the Existence of God* (Clarendon Press-Oxford, 1982), pp. 150–176. For a detailed discussion of the problem of evil and various responses see: Charles Taliaferro, ed., ‘The Problem of Evil and the Prospects of Good’, chap. 9 in *Contemporary Philosophy of Religion* (Blackwell Publishers, 1998). Kenneth Surin, *Theology and the Problem of Evil* (Basil Blackwell, 1986). Michael L. Peterson, ed., *The Problem of Evil: Selected Readings* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1992). Kelly James Clark ed., ‘God and Human Suffering’, Part Three in *Readings in the Philosophy of Religion* (Broadview Press, 2000). Brian Davies, ed., *Philosophy of Religion: A Guide and Anthology*, part V (Oxford University Press, 2000). Brian Davies, ed., ‘God and Evil’, chap. 10 in *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion* (Oxford University Press, 2004).

¹¹ Mackie (1955), p. 200.

¹² Ibid., pp. 200–201.

¹³ Ibid., p. 201.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 200.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 200.

¹⁶ This problem is also known as the evidential problem of evil. Difficulties in the logical problem of evil led to the formulation of the evidential problem. William Rowe argues that ‘There exist instances of intense suffering which an omnipotent, omniscient being could have prevented without thereby losing some greater good or permitting some evil equally bad or worse. An omniscient, wholly good being would prevent the occurrence of any intense suffering it could, unless it could not do so without thereby losing some greater good or permitting some evil equally bad or worse. There does not exist an omnipotent, omniscient, wholly good being’. See William Rowe, ‘The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism’, *American Philosophical Quarterly* 16 (1979), p. 336. Also see Clark (2000), pp. 229–237.

beings which God endowed with free will. Mackie and Antony Flew, writing independently, argued, as Mackie put it, ‘if God has made men such that in their free choices they sometimes prefer what is good and sometimes what is evil, why could he not have made men such that they always freely choose the good?’.¹⁷ Alvin Plantinga in his *The Nature of Necessity* replies to the charge made by Mackie and Flew by defending libertarian free will.¹⁸ I will say more about Plantinga’s argument in chapter two. There I explain how libertarian free will assist theists—universalists and non-universalists alike—to respond to the problem of hell.

The problem of evil, however, differs from the problem of hell in the following ways. Firstly, Christianity gives a clear reason why a doctrine of hell is supported in its tradition and explains the purpose of the doctrine, whereas Christianity remains largely silent on why evils occur or how they serve God’s divine purposes.¹⁹ Secondly, in defending God’s goodness in response to the existence of evil many theists argue that either evil is a necessary condition or can serve as means for a greater good or that evil is a consequence of a greater good.²⁰ In other words, God is promoting a greater good for humanity by permitting the existence of evil. In contrast, no good can be brought out of the evil of hell since hell, according to traditional Christianity, is eternal and the possibility of any future

¹⁷Mackie (1955), p. 209. For a more detailed presentation of Flew’s argument see Antony Flew, ‘Divine Omnipotence and Human Freedom’, in *New Essays in Philosophical Theology*, Antony Flew and Alasdair MacIntyre, eds. (SCM Press Ltd, 1955), Ch. VIII.

¹⁸ Plantinga, as we will see in chapter two, argues that it is possible for God to create a world with free human creatures that always choose to do right and behave well. However, God cannot create genuine free agents and then not permit them to bring about moral evils. People must freely decide to act morally and they cannot do that if the fact that they act as they do is determined by God. Plantinga has defended this position over several decades. The most developed version appears in *The Nature of Necessity* (Oxford Clarendon Press, 1974b). See also Alvin Plantinga, *God, Freedom and Evil* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd, 1974).

¹⁹ Jonathan Kvanvig makes a similar point in his book *The Problem of Hell* (Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 9.

²⁰ Those who attempt to defend God’s goodness usually offer either a defence or a theodicy. Those who offer a defence do not search for the reasons why God allows evil to occur but attempt to propose a hypothetical scenario according to which the reality of God is compatible with the reality of evil. Most notable defences are the Augustinian Free Will Defence. See St Augustine, *The City of God* (Demetrius B. Zema and Gerald G. Walsh, trans., Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1950), XI, XII. St Augustine, *On Free Choice of the Will*, Thomas Williams, trans. (Indianapolis; Cambridge: Hackett Pub. Co., 1993). Saint Augustine, *The Enchiridion on Faith, Hope and Love*, Thomas Hibbs, ed. (Regnery Publishing, 1961), XII, XIII, XXVI, XXV and XI. St Augustine, *The Confessions of Saint Augustine*, F.J. Sheed, trans. Chapter III (London: Sheed and Ward, 1943). Alvin Plantinga’s Free Will Defence in Alvin Plantinga, 1974a and 1974b. On the Greater Good Defence see, Melville Y. Stewart, *The Greater Good Defence* (University of Minnesota, 1983) and Keith E. Yandell, ‘The Great Good Defence’, *Sophia* 13, n. 3 (Oct., 1974), pp. 1–16. Those who propose a theodicy, attempt to justify the righteousness and justice of God in the face of fact of evil. It is an attempt to resolve the problem of faith in the face of the existence of evil. Most notable theodicies are Swinburne’s Free Will Theodicy; see Richard Swinburne, *Providence and the Problem of Evil* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998). St Irenaeus’ theodicy, see Eric Osborn, *Irenaeus of Lyons* (Cambridge University Press, 2001). John Hick’s ‘soul-making’ theodicy; See John Hick, *Evil and the Love of God* (Palgrave Macmillan and Co Ltd., 1966) and John Hick, *Death and Eternal Life* (William Collins Sons, 1976).

good is lost. As John Kvanvig observes ‘hell is apparently paradigmatic as an example of truly pointless, gratuitous evil’.²¹ There is no greater good to promote or to expect. The evil that is found in hell is eternal and can never be redeemed. Therefore, the doctrine of hell gives rise to specific moral problems caused by the apparent incompatibility between God’s goodness and love and a doctrine of eternal punishment in hell.²²

²¹ Kvanvig (1993), pp. 3–4

²² Libertarians who suppose that God can guarantee various outcomes, even when they depend in some way on libertarian choices, commonly take the Molinist view, i.e. they suppose that God has knowledge of the relevant counterfactuals of creaturely freedom. For the purposes of the thesis, I am going to set aside this account of divine providence but a brief explanation of the accounts of God’s knowledge would be useful. The relevance of omniscience to the doctrine of hell is less apparent than the relevance of God’s goodness. Theists and atheists are primarily concerned with one aspect of omniscience, that is, divine foreknowledge, because the idea of God’s foreknowledge has been thought to intensify the moral problem of hell. See Walls (1992), p. 33. The question of God’s knowledge is relevant to the question of salvation and damnation since it allows God to know what the outcome of each individual life would be in every set of circumstances. See Lindsey (2003), p. 31. It has been argued that if God created the earthly world with full awareness that the vast majority of people will be eternally damned in hell this seems to make Him responsible for an appalling evil. The criticism gains its force from the particular conception of God’s foreknowledge according to which: God has infallible foreknowledge of all events including human choices. This is the traditional view of foreknowledge. The claim that God has such knowledge has been challenged in two different ways. Firstly, it has been argued that it is not obvious how God can have knowledge of future events. And secondly it has been argued whether foreknowledge is compatible with libertarian freedom (sort of freedom we have if our actions are undetermined, and it is ‘up to us’ what choices to make). According to this view, God knows the future including future human choices. He determines who will act according to His will and so knows who will be saved. However, the main difficulty with this account of God’s knowledge is that it does not preserve human freedom. If a person has been determined by God to make certain choices, then he cannot do otherwise and his choices are not free, at least in the libertarian sense. From this it is obvious that problems arise for those who support a doctrine of hell i.e. if God foreknows that some will be damned forever, then he looks like ‘the perfect conception of wickedness rather than the exemplification of perfect goodness’. See Walls (1992), p. 36.

Attempts to show that there is a compatibility between God’s knowledge for all future events and human free choices led Luis de Molina, a Jesuit Priest in the 16th century, to develop a theory of foreknowledge based on the key idea of God’s ‘Middle Knowledge’. Molina calls it ‘Middle knowledge’ because it is between God’s Natural Knowledge and His Free Knowledge. According to Molina, ‘God’s natural knowledge is of metaphysically necessary truths and is known by him prior to his decision to create’. See Walls (1992), p. 37. The content of this knowledge is essential to God and it does not depend on the free decisions of His will. God has knowledge of every contingent state of affairs which could possibly obtain and ‘of what the exemplification of the individual essence of any free creature could freely choose to do in any such state of affairs that should be actual’. See Craig (1989), p. 176. God’s free knowledge is knowledge of all remaining propositions that are in fact true in the actual world and it is logically posterior to the decision of the divine will to actualize a world. The content of such knowledge is not essential to God, since He could have decreed to actualize a different world. See Craig (1989), p. 176. God’s middle knowledge is knowledge of all true counterfactual propositions, including counterfactuals of creaturely freedom. God knows what any free persons would do in any set of circumstances because this is how the person would freely choose. God thus knows that ‘were He to actualize certain states of affairs, then certain other contingent states of affairs would obtain’. See Craig (1989), p. 176. Middle knowledge is like natural knowledge in that such knowledge does not depend on any decision of the divine will; God does not determine which counterfactuals of creaturely freedom are true or false. However, unlike natural knowledge, whereas it is essential to God that He have middle knowledge, the content of His middle knowledge is not essential to Him. True counterfactuals of freedom are contingently true. So middle knowledge is like free knowledge in that it pertains to metaphysically contingent truths. The choices which a person makes are free in a very strong sense. A person S could freely decide to refrain from A in circumstances C, so that different counterfactuals could be true and be known by God than those that are. This suggests that what God knows depends on what choices free persons would make on their own account. Molina offering this account of Middle knowledge wishes to preserve libertarian freedom. In order to make sense of the notion that God justly punishes or rewards humans for the actions preservation of libertarian freedom is essential. Without libertarian freedom, it seems difficult to make sense of the fact that some people are damned in hell forever even if God wishes to save

This problem is reinforced by the fact that in the New Testament there are several passages where Christ himself is presented as preaching the fate of the wicked in hell. The later Christian tradition came to hold that salvation can be achieved only through Christ. Any disbelief of or attempt to remove the doctrine from the Christian dogma would undermine the very foundations of Christianity. So the doctrine cannot be so easily abandoned. Peter Geach, for example, argues:

We cannot be Christians, followers of Christ, we cannot even know what it is to be a Christian unless the Gospels give at least an approximately correct account of Christ's teaching. And if the Gospel account is even approximately correct, then it is perfectly clear that according to that teaching many men are irretrievably lost....It is less clear, I admit, that the fate of the lost according to that teaching is to be endless misery rather than ultimate destruction. But universalism is not a live option for a Christian.²³

This is one of the main reasons why Christians cannot easily abandoned the doctrine of hell. They cannot eliminate the doctrine from their faith and remain Christians. In view of

them all. In embracing Middle Knowledge Molina holds that we can maintain both human freedom and a strong view of foreknowledge.

Nevertheless, Molinism does not provide an immediate solution to the problem of evil and the problem of hell. It has been argued that generally the assumption that God has middle knowledge may complicate the theists efforts to deal with the problem of evil and consequently with the problem of hell. The main argument against this account is that it is plausible that God could have created a world with free creatures who would have always freely done right or a world in which fewer are damned. It has been argued that it assumes that the counterfactuals of freedom are true and that God knows them. Contemporary critics of Middle Knowledge such as Robert Adams doubt that any counterfactuals of freedom are true because he does not see who or what makes them true. Adams suggests a possible basis for the truth of counterfactuals of freedom when those are about actual persons. This suggestion is made in a discussion of one of Molina's favourite theological proof-texts, the story of David in the city of Keilah and Saul's plans to besiege the city to capture David. See Robert Merrihew Adams, 'Middle Knowledge and the Problem of Evil', in *American Philosophical Quarterly* 14, no. 2 (Apr., 1977), p.110. According to the story, David, knowing Saul's plans asked God whether in fact Saul would besiege the city and whether he would be taken to Saul if he did. God answered affirmatively to both questions and so David evacuated his men from Keilah and hid out in the hills. Molina took this passage to show that God knew propositions like the following to be true: '(2) if David stayed in Keilah and Saul besieged the city, the men of Keilah would surrender David to Saul'. See Adams (1977), p. 110. This action according to Molina, is not only counterfactually true and God knows is infallibly by middle knowledge but also it would have been free if it had occurred. Adams doubts that this proposition is true and holds that something like (2) might be true by virtue of correspondence with the character and desires of the men. See Adams (1977), p. 111. However, Adams holds that neither Saul's intentions or desires and the character of his men necessitated their actions or interfered with their freedom of will. An agent, he says, acts freely if he is able to act out of character or against his desires. This means that the proposition which is actually true is not (2) but the following: '(6) if David staying in Keilah and Saul besieged the city, the men of Keilah would probably surrender David to Saul'. See Adams (1977), p. 111. However, this attempt is not adequate, Adams says, because 'God knows infallibly what definitely would happen, and not just what would probably happen or what free creatures would be likely to do'. See Adams (1977), p. 111.

Molinism has received a lot of attention in particular through Plantinga's Free Will Defence. Plantinga in several publications on the problem of evil defends the assumption that God has middle knowledge. He assumes that some counterfactuals of human freedom are true and that God knows the truth of these counterfactuals even though God has no control over them. See for example, Alvin Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity* (Oxford Clarendon Press, 1974b).

²³ Peter Geach, *Providence and Evil* (Cambridge University Press, 1977), pp. 123–124.

the charge of the doctrine being morally indefensible, Christians face a dilemma: either accept that the doctrine of hell is morally indefensible or reject the teachings of Christ in the New Testament.

While during the 20th century the doctrine of hell was widely ignored, there have been some recent efforts to come into terms with it. Attempts to avoid undermining the Christian dogma itself led Christian philosophers to respond to the above dilemma in two main ways: on the one hand, some have argued that the doctrine is morally defensible, and on the other hand, others have argued that Christ did not in fact teach the doctrine of hell at least in its traditional form. In order to show that Christ did not teach eternal damnation defenders of this position must give a persuasive alternative interpretation of the texts in the New Testament; that is they have to explain why the relevant texts which speak of eternal damnation in hell do not in fact do so.

There are many different views on the doctrine of hell which are versions of the two approaches to the dilemma outlined above. There is a general agreement among Christian philosophers in favour of those more traditional interpretations that acknowledge that the New Testament and Christ teach that at least some people will experience unending misery in hell as a result of their rejection of salvation.²⁴ Philosophers holding this view can be called ‘particularists’. A minority of philosophers rejects particularism and affirms universalism, that is the view that all human beings will be saved in the end. These latter can be called ‘universalists’. My thesis focuses on universalists: those Christian philosophers who to defend universal salvation have attempted to show that Christ does not in fact teach eternal damnation, at least not as traditionally understood.

In the following section, I explain the structure of the thesis, outlining the theme of each chapter and set the goal of the thesis. This is followed by some definitions and distinctions which are important to the argument of the thesis and by means of which I will highlight the diversity of opinions about the doctrine.

²⁴ Jerry Walls makes this observation in his ‘Eternal Hell and the Christian Concept of God’ in Michael L. Peterson and Raymond J. VanArragon, eds., *Contemporary debates of Philosophy of Religion* (Blackwell Publishing, 2004), p. 270.

2. Goal of the thesis

In this thesis, I examine three contemporary universalist views, that of John Hick, Thomas Talbott and Marilyn McCord Adams and I argue that none of these three views succeeds in defending universalism effectively.

Chapter two begins by providing some historical background to the doctrine of hell. In order to understand why the doctrine has been so fiercely attacked it is necessary to begin by tracing the development of Christian eschatology. What will follow is a brief survey of contemporary defences of hell that will assist us in understanding the increasing popularity of universalism, as well as the consequent development of contemporary defences of universal salvation.

The core of the thesis is constituted by chapters three, four and five. There I present and criticize the universalistic views of Hick, Talbott and Adams respectively. We shall see that all three accounts share a common root: namely, each account develops out of an understanding of God's omnipotent love and of the nature of human freedom. All three philosophers argue that if God is omnipotent love then he necessarily desires the salvation of all His human creatures. Universalism, then, is a necessary consequence of their views on the nature of God.

Hick argues that God is a God of love and his ultimate purpose for humanity is to save it. God's relation to all His human creatures is such that He is able to fulfil His purpose. There are two central themes in Hick's theodicy: firstly, God's purpose for humanity is a 'soul-making' one, and, secondly, human salvation occurs when there is real transformation of the human being. Humanity's salvation depends upon its positive and voluntary response to God. All ultimately achieve salvation through a gradual, and at times painful, curative and purgatorial process continuing beyond this life in other lives and leading eventually to the transformation of the person into a child of God. Whether in this life or a future one, and with God's continuing salvific work, every human being will eventually achieve full consciousness of God and thus salvation. God will eventually succeed in His purpose of winning all humans to Himself in faith and love.

Talbott likewise rejects the doctrine of eternal hell in favour of Christian universalism. He argues that it is necessarily true that if God is the all-powerful and all-loving being which

Christianity affirms, then all human beings will be saved in the end.²⁵ Talbott not only thinks that the doctrine of universal salvation is necessarily true but also claims that any form of theism which includes a doctrine of unbearable and unending suffering in hell and denies God's love is logically inconsistent. His account of universal salvation hinges on three important ideas: (i) the identification of God's nature with love; (ii) an understanding of what constitutes a 'fully informed' and free choice in accepting or rejecting God; and (iii) the notion of post-mortem restorative punishment as 'forcibly imposed punishment'. Talbott holds that human creation is a process whereby God firstly, brings all His human beings into being as independent and rational agents, and secondly, brings them all to His glory. An essential part to the redemptive process whereby God transforms His human creatures into children of God is that humans exercise their moral freedom in the earthly environment in which they are set. It seems, Talbott argues, epistemically possible that all free persons would eventually turn to God in some finite amount of time after becoming fully informed about the source of their supreme happiness. Since God is the source of supreme human happiness, He will seek to promote of necessity this kind of happiness in every single person, and He will bring all human beings to the point where they voluntarily submit their wills to Him.

Adams also argues that unbearable and unending suffering in hell is inconsistent with God's love. Therefore, she holds that we should reject any views that hold that the reality of God and the reality of hell are logically compatible. She maintains that God loves human beings and His love expresses itself in His desire not only to enter into personal intimacy with them but also to unite with them. Following the eschatological conviction that God's love can be guaranteed to every person, she argues that every human being will eventually achieve union with God and thus salvation. Adams bases her account on two distinctive ideas: (i) the category of horrendous evils and (ii) a particular theory of the nature of God, the nature of human beings and the relationship between the two. She claims that all human beings are vulnerable to horrendous evils and these evils can be defeated only by God's love. Divine love can be guaranteed only if God defeats horrendous evils, not only within the context of the world as a whole but also within the framework of the individual participant's life.²⁶ Eternal hell would be a horror that would remain undefeated if God were to permit such a fate for the wicked. Since God loves humans, He would not create persons within whose lives horrendous evils remain

²⁵ Talbott's use of language suggests that he is about to offer us a logical problem of hell parallel to Mackie's logical problem of hell. However, it turns out that this is not in fact the case.

²⁶ Marilyn McCord Adams, 'The Problem of Hell: A Problem of Evil for Christians', in *Reasoned Faith*, Eleonore Stump, ed. (Cornell University Press, 1993a), p. 304.

undefeated, whether in the earthly life or the future life. Therefore, God will save all human beings in the end, there can be no hell as a place of eternal torment and thus a doctrine that defends such a view should be rejected.

By way of summarizing, all three philosophers maintain that God's love for His creation is inconsistent with the claim that God does not wish to save it. They argue that if God truly loves a human being then He desires to save it and if God truly loves all human beings then His desire will be to save them all. If God is by His nature love then God must love all humans and desire their salvation.²⁷ A second common aspect of all three accounts is that they affirm libertarian freedom.²⁸ They argue not only that God will succeed in saving all humans beings but that each person's salvation will come about freely. Finally, they hold that since the worst of the sinners are not ready to reconcile to God, they will receive post-mortem curative punishment with the goal of restoration. These positions, however, are not problem-free. Universalism in general, and these views in particular, raise questions about God's nature and human nature, human freedom and divine sovereignty, and the character of the post-mortem punishment as well as the understanding of God's victory over evil.

In this thesis, for the most part my concern will be with the question of whether omnipotent love can guarantee universal salvation without violating human freedom, and not directly with the question of whether God's love and/or justice are consistent with allowing some to be damned.²⁹ I argue that Hick, Talbott and Adams fail in their attempt to defend universalism efficiently. I argue that it is not clear from their accounts how it is possible for God to guarantee the salvation of all human beings. One of the main criticisms I consider is that the necessary correlation that their universalist accounts assume between God's love and the outcome of this love does not recognize the capacity of each individual to reject the offer of salvation. The problem for Hick, Talbott and Adams and universalism in general is that it is not clear whether a person with libertarian freedom would freely accept God if God does not determine their choices; this is a problem which leads many to reject universalism. It seems that universalism is successful only by robbing human persons of their freedom and consequently of their autonomy. Moreover, Hick, Talbott and Adams hold that all human beings and in particular sinners will freely embrace salvation

²⁷ These claims have been shared by many other Christians who are not universalists and they have *prima facie* biblical support. See A. Robin and Christopher H. Partridge, eds. *Universal Salvation? The Current Debate* (Paternoster Press, 2003).

²⁸ As I have said in a previous section, those philosophers who attempt to propose a solution to the problem of evil and consequently to the problem of hell defend a libertarian view of freedom.

²⁹ I would like to thank Dr. Mark Wynn and Dr. Chris Lindsay for advising me to make it clear that for the most part in the thesis my concern will be with the question of whether omnipotent love can guarantee universal salvation without violating human freedom.

once they come to understand God and His love. This understanding will emerge from restorative punishment. The problem with this claim is that if humans have libertarian freedom and the only way of correction available to God is curative punishment it is not obvious that all humans will accept God in faith and love instead of out of fear or coercion; moreover, there is no guarantee that all will choose to be saved. So the accounts they offer on human freedom and nature as well as restorative punishment do not rule out the fact that some people will never reconcile to God. Their accounts do not guarantee that all human beings will be saved in the end.

After a detailed examination of these three universalist accounts in chapter three, four and five, in the last chapter, I give a summary of what has been argued in the thesis. There I suggest some directions a universalist might take to avoid the problems reviewed in this thesis. I will not propose definitive answers to these problems but suggest that further research is needed for a better understanding of the importance of human freedom and the nature of restorative punishment.

3. Some important definitions

Particularism

Christian particularism holds that only some human beings will achieve salvation in God. A person's location either in hell or in heaven depends only upon their relationship with Christ.

Exclusivism and Inclusivism

Exclusivists tend to share two basic premises. According to the first premise, human beings do not have the power to save themselves despite their best efforts. Secondly, gratuitously God has disclosed Himself in the person of Christ and it is through Christ alone that a person can be reconciled to God. Inclusivists maintain that while Christ brings salvation into the world, God's grace is extended to all His creation. Most inclusivists

affirm the revelation which is to be found in the world religions, while still retaining the importance of mission and the unique role of Christ.³⁰

Hell

The following classification of the popular views of hell is not exhaustive but will assist us in drawing comparisons and contrasts, which will allow us to evaluate the theories which we shall examine in the following chapters. The traditional view of hell, which was defended by Augustine shaped western Christian thought; the other view is a variation on the main theme of the traditional view.³¹

Traditional view of hell: According to the traditional view of hell, hell is a place in which the wicked suffer pain as a punishment from God.³² Traditionally it is portrayed as the resting place of the devil and his followers. Hell is the fate of those who denied salvation in Christ during their earthly lives and who therefore died in a state of sin. The punishment and suffering which the damned will undergo in hell will be for eternity. Two kinds of punishment were traditionally believed to be reserved for the damned: *poena damni* (pain of loss) and *poena sensus* (pain of sense).³³ The former is the emptiness and frustration that results naturally from permanent loss of the vision of God and the latter is sensory pain from the fire. Moreover, hell was thought to be the fate of the vast majority of people.

Arminian view of hell: Another view is what Thomas Talbott calls the Arminian view of hell.³⁴ Arminians hold that a human being's eternal destiny is not sealed at death but God continues to offer grace even after death and so there is no end to the opportunity even for the damned to receive salvation. Nevertheless, since God has given human beings the freedom of choice, it is possible that some of them will reject God's grace forever and so be separated from Him for eternity. C. S. Lewis in his *The Great Divorce* and *The Problem of Pain*, for example, does not reject the traditional Christian claim that hell is a place of

³⁰ Alister E. McGrath, *The Blackwell encyclopedia of modern Christian thought* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), pp. 413–415.

³¹ See St Augustine (1950), (1943) and (1961).

³² Jonathan Kvanvig calls the traditional view of hell, the 'Strong View of Hell' and it breaks it into four components: '(H1) The Anti-Universalism Thesis: Some people are consigned to hell. (H2) The Existence Thesis: Hell is a place where people exist, if they are consigned there. (H3) The No Escape Thesis: There is no possibility of leaving hell and nothing one can do, change, or become in order to get out of hell, once one is consigned there. (H4) The Retribution Thesis: The justification for hell is retributive in nature, hell being constituted to mete out punishment to those whose earthly lives and behaviour warrant it'. See Kvanvig (1993), p. 19.

³³ Geoffrey Rowell, *Hell and the Victorians: A study of the nineteenth-century theological controversies concerning eternal punishment and the future life* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), p. 23.

³⁴ Thomas Talbott, *The Inescapable Love of God* (Universal Publishers, 1999). Jerry Walls calls this view the modified orthodox view in his *Hell: the Logic of Damnation* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1992), p. 13.

eternal torment and misery but he denies the claim that God is the tormentor in a direct or indirect way.³⁵ Hell is a positive retributive punishment and at the same time a self-chosen condition. Permanent residence in hell is the result of an individual's free choice to oppose God and so the doors of hell are 'locked from inside'. The punishment which the damned undergo is not inflicted by God but it is constituted by being who they are. Their misery in hell arises from the nature of their being, what Lewis calls 'remains'.

This view has been endorsed by two contemporary philosophers. Jerry Walls argues that human freedom is an essential component of human nature, which is the very nature which makes it possible for human beings to respond to God with love, trust and obedience or reject him. The damned can receive grace in the afterlife. God gives to all humans 'optimal grace', that is, the fullest opportunity to be saved. Even the damned can receive grace in the afterlife but persist in denying God's grace and are finally lost. Those who reject God's love have made a decisive choice for evil, that is, a settled choice to reject salvation.³⁶ Walls argues that 'the choice of damnation is a deliberate and persistent choice to embrace evil and to reject salvation'.³⁷ William Lane Craig argues that given the nature of the free will of human beings some of them are utterly irredeemable in the following sense: despite God's best efforts to save human beings some persons freely and irrevocably reject him. God wills all humans salvation, and 'by the Holy Spirit He supplies sufficient grace for their salvation'.³⁸ While humans are entirely free to embrace this salvation some reject God's every effort to save them. In addition to this claim, he argues that it is also possible that in order for God to bring many people to salvation he had to pay the price of seeing the vast majority of them in hell.³⁹

Universalism

There are many different forms of universalism but it comes in at least two main forms: Pluralistic universalism and Christian universalism. This classification is not exhaustive but will nonetheless enable us to draw a comparison within the scope of the thesis and to

³⁵ C. S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce* (London: HarperCollins Publishers, 1946) and C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (London: HarperCollins Publishers, 2002).

³⁶ See Walls, 1992.

³⁷ Walls in Peterson (2004), p. 274.

³⁸ William L. Craig, 'No Other Name: A Middle Knowledge Perspective on the Exclusivity of Salvation through Christ', *Faith and Philosophy* 6 (1989), p. 9. This article can be found on www.leaderu.com. The original pages are 172–188 but they are not obvious in the online version and so I numerate them in the following way pp. 1–14.

³⁹ Craig holds that those who are lost suffer from what he calls 'transworld damnation'. See Craig, 1989. Alvin Plantinga argues about what he calls 'transworld depravity'. See Plantinga, 1974a. Thomas Talbott argues about what he calls 'transworld reprobation'. See Thomas Talbott, 'Providence, Freedom, and Human Destiny', *Religious Studies* 26, no. 2 (Jun., 1990), p. 234.

evaluate the theories which concern us. These two forms of universalism are usually classified as ‘strong universalism’ and ‘weak universalism’.⁴⁰ According to the former, it is not only true but also necessarily true that every human being will end up in heaven: no person can be finally lost. Clearly, if particularism is replaced by some version of universalism then a way has to be found of justifying universalism. One strategy is to deny Christ any saving power, thereby softening the exclusivist’s claims and arguing that Christianity is one of the many paths to salvation. Another strategy is to give a different understanding of God’s nature and love. Pluralist universalists endorse the first view and Christian universalists endorse the second view.

Pluralistic Universalism: Pluralistic universalism is the view that all human beings are eventually saved by whatever religious path is open to them. The different major world religions such as Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam and Judaism, are but different paths to the same goal—salvation. Religious pluralism finds the traditional Christian doctrine of salvation through Christ alone as ‘unconscionable’.⁴¹ It argues that the existence of a God who is all-loving and omnipotent seems incompatible with the claim that those human beings who never hear Christ’s teachings or never accept the gospel of salvation through Christ will be damned. It is worth pointing out that universalism is not a necessary part of the pluralistic view. Trevor Hart writes that, ‘[c]learly a conviction that all *must* ultimately find salvation is helpfully bolstered by the view that their empirical refusal or failure to embrace faith in Jesus Christ makes no necessary difference to their eternal destiny’.⁴² Therefore, pluralism and universalism are often allied whether pluralism leads to universalism or vice versa.

The most well-known proponent of pluralistic universalism is John Hick. In his earlier writings, Hick’s universalism is closer to ‘a relatively orthodox Christian theology’.⁴³ His belief in universal salvation emerged from his belief in a ‘God of Love’, as we will see in the chapter on Hick’s account. However, the fact that many human beings do not recognize the God which he proclaimed led him to offer a clearer and definite pluralistic universalism. Hick considers various religions each with its own sacred scriptures, spiritual

⁴⁰ Kvanvig proposes two alternative main categories of universalism: ‘necessary’ and ‘contingent’ universalism. Contingent universalism holds that although an individual could end up in hell, ‘as a matter of contingent fact every human being will end up in heaven’. See Kvanvig (1993), p. 74. Different people give different meanings to what I have called strong universalism; see Parry (2003), p. xx; see Lindsey Hall, *Swinburne’s Hell and Hick’s Universalism* (Ashgate, 2003), pp. 21–23.

⁴¹ William Lane Craig, ‘Politically Incorrect Salvation’, in *Christian Apologetics in the Post-Modern World*, P. Phillips and D. Ockholm, eds. (Downer’s Grove Ill.: Inter-Varsity, 1995), pp. 75–97.

⁴² Trevor Hart, ‘Universalism: Two Distinct Types’, in *Universalism and the doctrine of Hell*, Nigel M. de S. Cameron, ed. (Paternoster Press, 1992), p. 7.

⁴³ Hart (1992), pp. 7–8.

practices, forms of religious experiences and so on to ‘constitute different human responses to the ultimate transcendent reality to which they all bear witness’ and to be equally valid paths for salvation.⁴⁴ Hick abandons the idea that Christianity is exclusively true in favour of pluralism and he argues for what he calls a ‘relative absoluteness’ for it instead.⁴⁵ He argues that our view of the religions of the world should be theocentric and not christocentric. Christianity is absolute only for Christians whereas other world faiths are likewise absolute for their own adherents.⁴⁶ Belief in Christ and acceptance of his teachings is but one of the many ways to salvation. This statement marks a definite moment in Hick’s universalism because it meant that Hick could no longer support the uniqueness of Jesus Christ and thus his universalism was no longer compatible with traditional Christian theology. Today, Hick regards the deity and incarnation of Christ as a myth or metaphor and he no longer speaks of the ultimate good of Christianity which is God but of the Real.⁴⁷ Nonetheless, Hick’s universalism is not easily classified. In this thesis, we examine Hick’s earlier writings in which his pluralistic approach is not yet fully developed.

Christian Universalism: Christian universalism is a position founded on an understanding of God’s nature as a God of love. If God is what, ultimately, he asserts Himself to be—love—then all persons will be saved. It claims that all human beings will eventually come to God through Christ. This position is expressed in various views which all share two features: (a) ‘the commitment to working within a Christian theological framework and (b) the claim that all individuals will be saved through the work of Christ’.⁴⁸

Hart points out that to support their case most Christian universalists would appeal to a list of factors which are claimed to be proper to the inner logic of the Christian gospel itself in

⁴⁴ John Hick, *The Fifth Dimension: An Exploration of the Spiritual Realm*, chap. 10 (Oxford: One World, 2004), p. 83.

⁴⁵ John Hick, *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness* (London : SCM Press, 1988), p. 16.

⁴⁶ Hart writes that Ernst Troeltsch in his *The Absolute Validity of Christianity* also argues for what Hick calls relative absoluteness. His research into the history of Christianity led him to hold that Christianity is linked to the particular social and cultural patterns within which it has developed over the centuries; it stands and falls with elements of the ancient and modern civilizations of Europe. Hart says that Troeltsch argues that ‘If Christianity is in any sense absolute, then it is so only for those belonging to the culture of Europe. For other races in other temporal and spatial contexts, other religious traditions will serve in a similar way’. See Hart (1992), pp. 5–6.

⁴⁷ For more on Hick’s pluralism see John Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion: Human Responses to the Transcendent* (Palgrave, 1989) and John Hick, *The Myth of God Incarnate* (London: SCM Press, 1993) and John Hick, 1988.

⁴⁸ Parry (2003), p. xxi.

order to support their case.⁴⁹ They generally then proceed to a specific philosophical consideration of what has been called ‘the omnipotence of divine love’.⁵⁰ Understanding God’s love is very important for Christian universalists. Normally their discussion about God’s omnipotent love takes place parallel to their discussion of the logical problem of evil. A similar parallelism may be identified in the philosophical case for universalism. If God were all-loving and omnipotent, He would have never permitted anyone to remain in hell for eternity. On the contrary, He would want all to be saved and He would be able to save all. The Christian universalist must, therefore, define God’s omnipotence and love in such a way that will permit him to conclude that God will save all eventually.

As I have explained, Christian universalists hold the central Christian conviction that God is love. Since love is thought to be the very nature of God, they conclude that the ultimate relationship between God and human beings must be one of love. Moreover, God must ultimately have the final good of all His creatures in view.⁵¹ That is that no one will remain unredeemed but all will be saved in the end through Christ. Salvation is not for some special group of elected people but it is for all. Universal salvation will inevitably spring from God’s nature.

It is important to understand that Christian universalism is not a single view. Christian universalists do not all share the same convictions on several matters such as the existence of hell, the experience of the horrors of hell, the exclusivism or inclusivism of Christianity, the nature of human freedom and the nature of punishment in the afterlife. Walls, for example, makes two further distinctions within Christian universalism which he calls ‘convinced’ universalism and ‘hopeful universalism’.⁵² According to ‘hopeful universalism’, universalism finds support in scriptures but it cannot be dogmatically defended. According to ‘convinced universalism’, the idea of eternal punishment is morally unacceptable and contrary to the teaching of Christ. The difference between ‘convinced universalism’ and ‘hopeful universalism’ lies in the former’s certainty that the universalist interpretation must be correct.⁵³ Moreover, some universalists hold that one must have conscious faith in Christ in order to be saved (exclusivists such as Talbott, for example) whereas others (inclusivists) hold that someone can be saved through Christ

⁴⁹ Some of these factors would be: God’s nature is love and so His relation to His human creatures should be one of love; the conviction that God must have the final good of all His creatures in view; the utter unconditionality of the salvation wrought by Christ etc. See Hart (1992), p. 15.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 16.

⁵¹ Ibid., pp. 15–16.

⁵² Walls (1992), pp. 13–14.

⁵³ Some philosophers and theologians would classify John Hick as a hopeful universalist whereas others would classify him as a convinced universalist.

without having heard of Christ. The important thing that should be emphasized here is that universalists such as Talbott, Adams and Hick affirm that God is bound to love and would save all human creatures because He is constrained by the nature of His being. Moreover, they affirm that there may be a temporary state after death (more or less like the catholic purgatory) which involves severe punishment. This kind of punishment is usually understood in restorative terms instead of retributive terms and is a punishment that the sinners will have to go through in order to accept Christ and thus achieve salvation.

Annihilation or Conditional Immortality

Conditionalism or conditional immortality emerged as one of the attempts to find a mediating position between the extremes of universalism and eternal punishment. According to the basic doctrine of conditionalists, God created human beings mortal but also with a capacity for immortality. At the fall of Adam God passed a sentence of death on human beings, but in His mercy did not put it into effect, so that, with the coming of Christ, immortality might once again be offered to human beings.⁵⁴ Those who lived virtuous lives but who were not Christians are going to be given a post-mortem opportunity to attain eternal life by responding in faith to Christ; whereas those who did not respond are unfit to receive immortality and so are annihilated.

Annihilation and conditional immortality are different concepts that are closely linked with whether or not a person believes in the immortality of the soul. We can discern two variations of conditionalists: firstly, those who emphasized the biblical language of the 'second death' and the value of retributive punishment as an ethical sanction, argued that annihilation occurred after the wicked had been punished. Secondly, those of the school who were strongly influenced by Darwinism believed in annihilation at death while the saved survived.⁵⁵ The most notable recent philosophers who argue in favour of conditional immortality are Jonathan Kvanvig and Richard Swinburne.⁵⁶ This view, although preferable to the view that the damned will suffer eternal torment in hell, has three problems: Firstly, it is accused of lacking evidence in New Testament. Secondly, its

⁵⁴ Rowell (1974), p. 181.

⁵⁵ These conditionalists objected to the label 'annihilationist' which, they considered, classified them with materialist non-believers in their understanding of death. See, Rowell (1974), p. 197. Early advocates of conditionalism denied annihilationism. They argued that the destruction of the earthly life may be effected in two different ways; there may be two 'deaths'. The first death occurs when a person dies and the second death occurs at the Second Coming of Christ at the Last Judgement. Rowell (1974), p. 197 and p. 181.

⁵⁶ Contemporary defenders of conditional immortality or annihilation are Jonathan Kvanvig and Richard Swinburne. See Kvanvig, 1993 and Richard Swinburne, 1998 and Richard Swinburne, *Responsibility and Atonement* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989).

eschatology creates some difficulties, particularly in respect of the doctrine of the intermediate state between death and the Last Judgement. Thirdly, it does not give an adequate response to the moral problem of hell.

Purgatory

It is important to mention purgatory since the intermediate states which Hick, Talbott and Adams talk about, are reminiscent of traditional catholic views of purgatory. We could say that the accounts which they offer of the afterlife have been influenced by the doctrine of purgatory.⁵⁷

The real change in the model of the afterlife came when Augustine, in order to establish hell, defined various categories of sinners and sins and grouped the dead into those who go to heaven, hell and purgatory.⁵⁸ Purgatory was proposed as the place where venial sins may be expurgated.⁵⁹ An important characteristic of purgatory is that the deliverance of the punishment in purgatory and the exact duration of it depend not only on God's mercy but also on the quantity and quality of sin remaining to be purged and the intensity of prayers and spiritual aid offered by the living.⁶⁰ Belief in purgatory not only offers a second chance to attain eternal life but is also associated with the idea of individual responsibility and free will.⁶¹ Human beings are judged for the sins they themselves are responsible for committing and the suffering which they will be subjected to may resemble the tortures to which the damned are subjected in hell.⁶²

⁵⁷ Jacques Le Goff traced the maturation from the 4th century of the doctrine relating to some kind of trial after death to the general acceptance of belief in purgatory in the late 12th century and beyond. See Jacques Le Goff, *The Birth of Purgatory*, Arthur Goldhammer trans. (London: Scholar Press, 1984).

⁵⁸ Le Goff (1984), p. 133 and pp. 221–222. Le Goff says that St Augustine is called the father of purgatory but those who have rightly been called the founders of the doctrine of purgatory were Greek theologians. The foundations of the doctrine were elaborated by Clement and Origen which drew 'in part on certain pagan Greek philosophical and religious traditions and in part on their own original reflection on the Bible and on Judeo-Christian Eschatology'. Le Goff (1984), pp. 52–53. However, the Greek Church never developed the notion of purgatory as such even if their idea were not without impact on Greek Christianity. The Greeks accept that there is an intermediate state and they speak of penalties. Le Goff (1984), p. 286.

⁵⁹ The term 'venial sins' came to common usage in the 12th century and it means 'worthy of venia', of pardon. The notion, says Le Goff, carried a 'legal-spiritual connotation'. Le Goff (1984), p. 217.

⁶⁰ Pain can be lessened thanks to the prayers of particular living people who are authorized to intercede with God, provided that the person lived generally a good life and had made continuous 'effort to improve, be the performer of good works, and by the practice of pertinence'. Le Goff 1984, p. 69. See also p. 76 and p. 292. See also D. P. Walker, *The Decline of Hell: Seventeenth-Century Discussions of Eternal Torment*. (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1964), p. 60; Bernstein (1993), p. 317.

⁶¹ Le Goff (1984), p. 5.

⁶² The theologian who gave the best account of purgatory was Dante. Modern catholic theology distinguishes between the fire of hell which is punitive, the fire of purgatory which is expiatory and purifying and the fire of judgment which is probative and takes purgatory to be 'state' rather than a place. See Le Goff (1984), p. 13 and pp. 43–44.

In the early 12th century, the belief of the Christian Church about the fate of the dead was that after the Last Judgement human beings will be permanently separated into two groups, the blessed and the damned. Those who lived good and virtuous lives go to heaven straight away and those who lived entirely bad lives go directly to hell. Jacques Le Goff states that the system of purgatory was inspired by the judicial procedures and legal ideas associated with the earthly world rather than with the next. The 12th century was a century of justice in two respects: justice, as an ideal, was one of the century's most important values, while at the same time judicial practice was undergoing considerable change'.⁶³ I will say more on these changes in the second chapter of the thesis where I explain how the doctrine of hell came under attack.

Before we continue with the presentation and the examination of the universalist accounts of Hick, Talbott and Adams I provide, in the next chapter, a brief historical survey of the doctrine of hell. This will help us to identify the main difficulties of the doctrine which gave rise to the various modern philosophical modifications of it that concern me in this thesis.

⁶³ Ibid., p. 211.

Chapter Two: Hell—a brief history

The preaching of the doctrine of hell was common for much of the 19th century as was a literal understanding of hell as a place of fire and torment. However, by the end of the century, the doctrine of hell was a major source of contention among Christians. The pattern of the 19th century debates about eschatology was determined by critical attacks on the doctrine of everlasting retributive punishment. So, before I begin the examination of the arguments which the universalists put forth against the doctrine of hell, a brief survey of the history of Christian eschatology will be helpful in order to trace its development and understand how it gave birth to contemporary positions on the doctrine of hell.⁶⁴

1. Judeo-Christian development

Christian eschatology emerged out of the faith of Judaism, and the writings of the New Testament on the Last Things (heaven, hell, death and judgement) reflected the tradition of Jewish eschatology. During the New Testament period, the main eschatological faith which dominated Judaism was the hoped for future of each individual and the community. The basis of the faith in God's future saving activity, not only for Israel but also for all humans through Israel, was centred on God's definite, saving acts in the past.⁶⁵ This hope led to the gradual development of two main beliefs in the Jewish world. Firstly, there was the development of 'a sense of the responsibility of the individual of his own actions', and secondly, 'a growing conviction that the relationship which has been established between God and the individual believer was such that God would maintain it even in the face of death'.⁶⁶ The belief that the future of each human being is founded in the continuance of the covenant between God and His human beings and moreover, the belief that those who have suffered and died for God would be compensated in a life beyond death, enforced the hope of a future life. To the extent that the future life was closely connected with the restoration of the moral balance, it led to the development of belief in the future life of the

⁶⁴ Eschatology means study of the end of human history or the end of things.

⁶⁵ Geoffrey Rowell, *Hell and the Victorians: A study of the nineteenth-century theological controversies concerning eternal punishment and the future life* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), p. 18. God has saved Israel before.

⁶⁶ Ibid, p. 18–19.

wicked.⁶⁷ Whereas, those who follow God's will would receive rewards for their faithfulness and obedience in the life to come, those who acted against God's will would receive their just deserts there as well.

At the time of Christ, in Judaism there were two dominant conceptions of the afterlife: the resurrection of the body and the immortality of the soul.⁶⁸ In one conception, after death the departed spirits reside in *sheol*. The Jewish *sheol* (Hebrew word for the infernal world or 'the unseen world') is a place of darkness, a shadowy place similar to the Greek *hades*. References to *sheol* occur often in the Old Testament and it is sometimes identified with a devouring monster or again it is sometimes described as a gloomy city but never as a place of torture.⁶⁹ Therefore, the hope for a future life consisted in the belief that God would raise the dead from *sheol*. The resurrected would be able to 'share in an eternal life bestowed by God, in a state in which their historical community would be maintained but in which their being would be transformed'.⁷⁰ On the other conception, Hellenistic Judaism conceived the future life in terms of the immortality of the soul. According to this tradition, once a person dies the appropriate rewards or deserts for his or her earthly actions take effect immediately.⁷¹ Early Christianity adopted both eschatologies and so the hope for the future life in communion with God came to be directed towards the Second Coming of Christ.

The division of good and evil people is evident in the Jewish apocalyptic texts, such as the Book of Enoch. The conception and representation of the destiny of the blessed and the wicked prefigures the traditional Christian conception of hell, nevertheless it does not entail it. For example, in the first part of the Book of Enoch, we read that Enoch wafted away to 'a place (a house) whose inhabitants are like a blazing fire'. He sees 'a deep pit near the heavenly columns of fire' and 'descending columns of fire, columns whose height and depth were immensurable'. He posits that 'a final judgment will come, after which some will be annihilated and others held to suffer at the bottom of another valley of fire before the eyes of the righteous forever'. Again in Psalm 14, verses 10–13 we see the future manifestation of God's justice with severe punishment for the wicked: 'Let burning

⁶⁷ Ibid, p. 19.

⁶⁸ Ibid, p. 19.

⁶⁹ Jacques Le Goff says that the idea of the devouring monster has been taken from the Egyptians. Moreover, the idea of *sheol* as a gloomy/dark city was an idea which prefigures Dante. See Jacques Le Goff, *The Birth of Purgatory*, Arthur Goldhammer, trans. (London: Scholar Press, 1984), p. 26.

⁷⁰ Rowell (1974), p. 20.

⁷¹ Ibid, p. 20.

coals fall upon [the wicked]! Let them be cast into pits, no more to rise!’.⁷² The Christian scriptures use many of the Jewish prophetic themes when they discuss the afterlife, and the early Christian fathers claimed that the fate of the unrighteous or very evil people would be *immediate, unending, physical* and *retributive*. This is what has been called the traditional Christian view of hell.⁷³

The traditional view of hell was elaborated by St Augustine of Hippo in his *Enchiridion on Faith, Hope and Love*, and *The City of God*, and by St Thomas Aquinas who was heavily influenced by Augustine’s writings.⁷⁴ Four elements of Augustine’s system are worth noting. Firstly, he takes the term ‘fire’ which is mentioned in the scriptures to denote a material fire which burns the bodies of the damned without destroying them.⁷⁵ Secondly, he argues that eternal damnation is likewise an exile which cuts humans off from that future city of God. Since the good—God—from which the wicked are excluded is eternal, so the punishment is eternal.⁷⁶ Augustine rejects the possibility of repentance or of alternative advance and regression over the ages. Part of the reason is that it would be an insult to the blessed.⁷⁷ Moreover, unlike in purgatory, in hell mitigations of pain cannot be obtained through the suffrages of the living. Thirdly, Augustine holds that the damned in hell will be miserable and their bodies will cause them intense pain. He holds that the death to which Adam subjected all human beings is a twofold one. The first death separates the body from the soul and happens when the individual dies. The second death occurs with the Resurrection and Last Judgement, after which no one’s fate can change. Both deaths share one common aspect of suffering: ‘in both deaths the soul suffers from its body

⁷² Alan E. Bernstein, *The Formation of Hell: Death and Retribution in the Ancient and Early Christian Worlds* (UCL Press, 1993), p. 170.

⁷³ There were other approaches and doctrines. According to one theory, the individual soul remained in a state of prolonged animation, ‘slept’, until the Last Judgement when the resurrection took place and it was reunited with its body. The alternative theory was that ‘the soul remained conscious in the intermediate state’, during which it was considered to experience a ‘foretaste of its future destiny’. See Rowell (1974), p. 21.

⁷⁴ See, St Augustine, *The Enchiridion on Faith, Hope and Love*, Thomas Hibbs, ed. (Regnery Publishing, 1961), St Augustine, *The City of God*, Demetrius B. Zema and Gerald G. Walsh, trans. (Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1950). Anton C. Pegis, ed., *Basic writings of Saint Thomas Aquinas*, vol. 1 and vol. 2 (New York: Random House, c1945). A. M Fairweather, ed. and trans., *Nature and grace: selections from the Summa Theologica of Thomas Aquinas* (London: SCM Press, 1954). Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, *Beatitude: a commentary on St. Thomas' Theological Summa, Ia IIae, qq.1-54* (London : Herder, 1955).

⁷⁵ Fire signifies salvation through purification. Augustine argued that there are two kinds of fire, an everlasting fire in which the damned burn forever and a purgatorial fire. The hellish fire is opposed to the purgatorial fire which is extremely painful but not eternal and it acts not at the time of the Last Judgement but between the time of death and the time of resurrection. For detailed discussion on Augustine’s view on fire, see Le Goff, 1984.

⁷⁶ Bernstein (1993), p. 319.

⁷⁷ D. P. Walker, *The Decline of Hell: Seventeenth-Century Discussions of Eternal Torment* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1964), p. 29.

against its will'.⁷⁸ Finally, Augustine holds that after the Last Judgement there will only be two groups the damned and the blessed. One of the justifications he gives to support his claim is that part of the happiness of the blessed will be enhanced by knowing the condition of the damned. He argues that the blessed can never be entirely free of evil because they would lose sight of the liberation from which they benefit. Only through some knowledge of evil can the blessed appropriately thank God. However, this does not suggest that the blessed will experience evil directly; intellectually 'neither their own past misery, not even the eternal misery of the damned will be concealed from them'.⁷⁹ The blessed can fully appreciate God's actions firstly, by knowing their own past pains and sufferings and secondly, by knowing the condition of the damned.

Aquinas argues along similar lines in favour of both the punishment for damnation and the punishment of the senses. The harshness of punishment comes not from the quantity of sin punished but from the situation of the person being punished. The sinners are punished for sins which they have committed during their earthly lives.⁸⁰ Aquinas explains that the damned continue to commit evil acts by way of blasphemy but these acts are 'due to the obstinate perversity of their will which is part of their punishment and do not therefore constitute demerit'.⁸¹

Final stages in the evolution of the accepted eschatology of Western Christendom established that after death human souls immediately undergo the particular judgement they deserve and are assigned to heaven, hell or purgatory and remain there experiencing pain or happiness until Christ's Second Coming. At the Second Coming, the resurrection of the bodies would take place and humans would be assigned either to heaven to enjoy eternal happiness with God or to hell to suffer punishment which consisted both in the deprivation of God and in positive torment.⁸²

⁷⁸ Bernstein (1993), p. 317. Augustine holds that whereas the first death forces an individual from the body against his will, the second holds him in the body against his will.

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 331.

⁸⁰ Walker (1964), p. 24. Walker calls this the moral static view of hell.

⁸¹ See St Aquinas *Summa Theologiae*, Part III, Q. 97, Art. 1 and *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Part IV, ch. 95.

⁸² Rowell (1974), p. 23.

2. The strengths of the doctrine of hell

The doctrine of hell remained unchallenged for many centuries and it was not until the 19th century that it began to lose its hold. There are four main theological and philosophical reasons why the doctrine remained unchallenged for so long.⁸³

Firstly, the scriptural authority of the doctrine of hell was extremely strong. There are two crucial texts affirming, firstly, the eternity of hell (in Matthew) and secondly, the lake of fire and brimstone (in Revelation).⁸⁴ The fact that the doctrine was supported in the New Testament, where it was put into the mouth of Christ, prevented those who had doubts about it from explicitly denying or modifying it. The New Testament writings present hell as a place of unending suffering, ‘fire and brimstone’, and separation from God:⁸⁵

Mathew 8:12

[W]hile the sons of the kingdom shall be thrown into the outer darkness;
there men will weep and gnash their teeth.

Matthew 25:41

Then he will say to those at his left hand, ‘Depart from me, you cursed,
into eternal fire, prepared for the devil and his angels...’.

Matthew 25:46

And they will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into
eternal life.

Revelation 14:9–11

If any one worships the beast and its image, and receives a mark on his
forehead or in his hand, he also shall drink the wine of God’s wrath ...and
he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy

⁸³ I would like to say here that the reasons are mainly theological. People accepted the doctrine and believed in it mainly because it was strongly supported by the scriptures. We can say, however, that some of these reasons are philosophical as well. We will see that the concepts of ‘deterrence’ and ‘fairness’ played a role in supporting the doctrine of hell.

⁸⁴ With regard to the former it can be argued that the ‘everlasting fire’ and ‘everlasting punishment’ did not necessarily mean that the torments of the damned would be eternal, since the Greek word αἰώνιος is often used elsewhere not to mean infinite period of time. However, some have argued that this interpretation is not probable since Christ draws a parallel between eternal bliss awaiting the blessed and the eternity of misery and pain awaiting the damned. ‘It can only stand if someone denies eternal life to the saved’. See Walker (1964), pp. 19–20.

⁸⁵ All quotations from the scripture throughout the thesis are given from *The New Testament in Four Versions*, King James, Revised Standard, Phillips Modern English, New English Bible (London and New York: Collins’ Clear-Type Press, 1967) unless otherwise stated. Also see Luke 3:9 and Revelation 12:9

angels and in the presence of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment goes up for ever and ever; and they have no rest, day or night, these worshipers of the beast and its image, and whosoever receives the mark of its name.

Revelation 20:12–15

[A]nd the dead were judged by what was written in the books, by what they have done. And the sea gave up the dead in it; Death and Hades gave up the dead in them; and all were judged by what they have done. Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire; and if any one's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

Secondly, the doctrine of hell worked as a deterrent in the earthly life. The idea was that without a doctrine of hell people would behave without any moral constraints whatsoever and society would collapse into chaos and anarchy. The threat of eternal punishment was 'the implicit sanction of both social morality and missions to the heathen'.⁸⁶ The view that there is a complete moral freezing at death and so neither the damned nor the saved can acquire merit or demerit would serve as a deterrent.⁸⁷ A traditional justification for preaching a doctrine of hell is that in holding over human beings the threat of hell God must have had a moral purpose for them in the earthly life.

Thirdly, the doctrine of hell is closely connected with other doctrines of Christianity, especially the doctrine of atonement. By removing the doctrine of hell, inevitably other doctrines in the Christian tradition would have had to be modified or rejected. The doctrines and ideas of Redemption, the Fall, retributive justice and expiation by suffering rest on the moral assumption that the bad consequences of an action can be compensated for by the suffering of the wrongdoer. Anyone who would attack the doctrine of hell could justifiably be accused of also attacking other important Christian doctrines and ideas.⁸⁸

⁸⁶ Rowell (1974), p. 1.

⁸⁷ The moral freezing at death came from the parable of Lazarus and Dives. One of the main problems that the parable faces is the question of translation. The authorized version of the New Testament translates that Greek word *hades* as hell whereas the emphasis changes if it is understood that both Dives and Lazarus go to Hades and remain there until the Second Coming of Christ. Wheeler says that the word *hell* is used to translate three different words in the New Testament. Firstly, the Greek version of *Tartarus* which refers to an intermediate state previous to the Last Judgement. Secondly, the word *hades* which is equivalent to the Hebrew *sheol* as a place both for the bad and the good, and which refers to an intermediate state of the souls previous to judgement. Thirdly, the word *gehenna*, which refers to the common sewer of the city where the bodies of the worst criminals were dumped, and which came to mean temporary punishment beyond the grave. See Michael Wheeler, *Heaven, Hell and the Victorians* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 194–195.

⁸⁸ Walker (1964), p. 27.

Finally, there was strong support for the view that part of the happiness of the blessed in heaven consists in knowing that the damned are tormented. This view had the support of both St Augustine and St Thomas Aquinas. It is argued that the torments of the damned in hell give the blessed joy because they manifest God's justice and hatred of sin and these torments provide 'a contrast which heightens their awareness of their own bliss'.⁸⁹

3. The eschatology of the 19th century

The doctrine of hell was not openly questioned until the 17th century. Those who had doubts about hell were cautious about publishing their thoughts on the doctrine because by doing so they would challenge the moral principles on which society was founded and thereby risk its collapse if their doubts became widespread. In the 17th century, a growing minority began to question the justice of eternal punishment in hell, but it was not until the 19th century that the doctrine is seriously challenged. At this time significant changes in the Christian understanding of eschatology took place.⁹⁰ The idea that hell and heaven were fixed states and the vast majority of humankind is doomed to go to hell was incompatible with a just and all-loving God and the doctrine was challenged on ethical grounds. Whereas hell was traditionally explained as an expression of God's justice, it came to be seen more as an injustice.

In the 19th century the doctrine of hell was becoming less and less favoured on account of the dominant philosophical concern with the value of the individual, the expectation of progress, as well as developments in the realm of penal theory or practice.⁹¹ Much of the opposition to the doctrine of hell was focused on the supposed duration, quality, finality and purpose of the punishment.

The doctrine of hell was framed in terms of a retributive theory of punishment. The wicked in hell receive their just deserts, with no possibility of reformation. Hell as a future possibility used to guarantee virtuous living in the present earthly life according to Christian dogma. The doctrine was attacked on the ground that after the Last Judgement, hell could no longer be said to serve any deterrent purpose, since human beings would

⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 29. Walker calls this the 'abominable fancy'.

⁹⁰ Walker points out that probably the reprinting works of Origin in the late 15th and early 16th centuries on restoration was one of the contributory factors in the criticism of the doctrine of hell. See Walker (1964), p. 13.

⁹¹ Nigel M. de S. Cameron, *Universalism and the Doctrine of Hell* (Paternoster Press, 1992), p. 100.

already have been judged and assigned to heaven or hell. Moreover, the idea that the purpose of retributive punishment in hell was to give pleasure to the blessed in heaven through their knowledge that sinners suffer for their evil acts was becoming 'distasteful and hence obsolescent'.⁹² In an age when people's understanding of punishment was influenced by the deterrent and reformatory theories of punishment of Jeremy Bentham (1748–1832), the doctrine of post-mortem punishment was challenged. On the one hand, the insistence of the need of altering the intensity and duration of punishment became pressing, and, on the other hand, Bentham's principle that the punishment should correspond exactly in kind to the crime committed put the traditional doctrine of hell under intense pressure.⁹³ Thus, penal theories and practices that became popular in the 19th century were in tension with the traditional Christian view of hell and the view of God's nature that supported it.

There were two main reasons given to support the doctrine of hell in light of these criticisms. The first was to claim that eternal punishment in hell was a just retribution for the enormity of the offence. The main idea was that all human sin is infinite in seriousness because it is an offence against an Infinite Being—it therefore merits infinite punishment.⁹⁴ However, this reply created an even more difficult situation for the defenders of the doctrine, one that is still an issue even now. It was argued that not even the worst villains have done an infinite amount of wrong in their earthly lives and so cannot deserve an infinite punishment.⁹⁵ There are two main arguments for this view.

Firstly, opponents of the doctrine of hell claim that if all sins deserve and receive infinite punishment, it is impossible to assert gradation of punishments in proportion to the gravity of evil acts. The defender of the doctrine of hell needs to show that eternal punishment is a just punishment for the wicked; that is, the punishment is proportionate to the wickedness of their acts. Secondly, if every sin deserves infinite punishment in intensity and duration, then it is obvious that it is impossible for each sin to be properly punished, since any one

⁹² Walker (1964), p. 43.

⁹³ Rowell (1974), p. 14.

⁹⁴ Augustine and Anselm support this kind of argument. Anselm thinks that it is 'not fitting for God to allow anything in his kingdom to slip unregulated' and so not to receive punishment. Without punishment, non-sinners and sinners will be in the same position and it would seem that human sin is subject to no law. Since only God is subject to no law that would make God resemble sinfulness. It will be a sign of failure on God's side if he does not adhere to the principles of justice on which he built all creation and condemn the sinners. See Anselm of Canterbury, *St Anselm: The Major Works*, Brian Davies and Gillian Rosemary Evans, eds. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 284.

⁹⁵ Recent philosophers have dealt with this problem such as Jonathan Kvanvig in his book *The Problem of Hell* (Oxford University Press, 1993) and Marilyn McCord Adams in her 'Hell and the God of Justice', *Religious Studies* 11, no. 4 (Dec., 1974), pp. 433–447.

sin of a wicked person ‘will fill his eternal life with intense suffering and leave no room for any more punishment for his other sins’.⁹⁶

The second main reason given in support of the doctrine of hell was the so-called ‘morally dynamic’ view of hell according to which the damned continue sinning in hell and therefore they continue to be justly punished. Leibniz in his *Theodicy* initially supported this view.⁹⁷ Leibniz’s approach, however, was widely perceived to have two main disadvantages. Firstly, his approach diminished the moral weight of the earthly life as a unique period of trial and, secondly, it opened the door to universal salvation.⁹⁸ The ability to perform evil acts presupposes some free will and if the damned have the freedom to continue acting in evil ways this permits them to repent and be saved. It could be argued that conditions in hell would encourage the wicked to repent, and God would have to save those who truly repent.

A further weakness of the doctrine was the fact that it seemed to entail that a very high proportion of human beings will be damned in hell. Christians became increasingly aware of the huge number of people who would be consigned to hell, especially if an exclusivist Christian theology was to be maintained, and some have attempted to defend this claim. One of the better known responses in the current philosophical debate is that of William Lane Craig who argues that God, in order to bring as many people as He can to salvation, had to pay the price of seeing the vast majority of them lost. The damned suffer from what he calls *transworld damnation*.⁹⁹ However, as we will see in later sections, universalists will argue that God’s love by definition would not permit any human being to be lost.

Among the moderns, the most popular arguments in defending the doctrine of hell appeal to human freedom. Since the 19th century one notices systematic efforts to discharge God from the responsibility of punishment, and it has been argued that God does not condemn the wicked in hell but they condemn themselves.¹⁰⁰ The appeal to freedom has been a main response to the problem of evil for as long as the issue has been addressed, and it has been the main reply to the charge of the moral indefensibility of the doctrine of hell. The nature of human freedom and its importance for answering the problem of evil and, consequently,

⁹⁶ Walker (1964), p. 43.

⁹⁷ Q. W. Leibniz, *Theodicy: Essays on the Goodness of God, the Freedom of Man, and the Origin of Evil* (London Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd, 1951).

⁹⁸ Walker (1964), p. 25.

⁹⁹ For more see, William L. Craig, ‘No Other Name: A Middle Knowledge Perspective on the Exclusivity of Salvation through Christ’, *Faith and Philosophy* 6 (1989), pp. 172–188.

¹⁰⁰ Some of the most notable proponents of this view are C. S. Lewis, Eleonore Stump and Jerry Walls.

the problem of hell have received a considerable amount of attention and detailed explanation in analytic philosophy in the past few decades. However, the most influential work in this regard came from Alvin Plantinga's 'Free Will Defence'.¹⁰¹ Given the fact that this argument has been widely discussed, and a detailed presentation of the debate is beyond the scope of this thesis, I will provide a brief summary of it here. The kind of freedom that Plantinga suggests that human beings have has not only been used in arguing in favour of a doctrine of hell but also it has been used by many universalists to argue against a doctrine of hell.

One of the most important aspects of Plantinga's argument is that he assumes a libertarian view of freedom: that is, freedom which is not compatible with determinism. According to libertarianism, if a person P was free with respect to a given action A, he/she has the power to choose to do A or refrain from it.¹⁰² A choice is truly free in the libertarian sense if it is not determined by preceding conditions or causes and in which it is finally up to each individual how he/she chooses on the matter. Libertarian freedom is important not only for morally significant choices but also for genuine personal relationship. Those who affirm this sort of freedom argue that without it humans cannot engage in real acts of love, trust, loyalty and so on. God, according to Plantinga, values a world containing creatures that are significantly free in this way. If God decides to create a world in which human beings can exercise their libertarian freedom then he may not have the option of creating a world free of evil. If human beings are significantly free in regard to morally significant actions, then it is possible that they will go wrong with respect to at least some of these actions. Therefore, even if God is omnipotent He may not be able to create a world which has creatures who have this kind of freedom but does not contain evil. Returning to the doctrine of hell, Plantinga argues that those who end up in hell are those who suffer from what he calls *transworld depravity*. If a human being suffers from *transworld depravity* then it was not within God's power to create a world such that this person has libertarian freedom and always does the right thing. Therefore, it was not within God's power to create a world in which this person is significantly free but does no wrong. Those who end up in hell suffer from *transworld depravity*.

Having briefly presented the historical background of the doctrine of hell and outlined its development and the problems which it encounters, I now turn to a very brief history of the

¹⁰¹ See Alvin Plantinga, *God, Freedom and Evil* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd, 1974a); Alvin Plantinga, 'God, Possible Worlds and the Problem of Evil', in *Philosophy as it is*, Ted Honderich and Myles Burnyeat, eds. (Penguin Books, 1979).

¹⁰² Plantinga (1974), p. 29.

origins of universalism. In the following section, I give a brief survey of the development of universalism and the main concepts which its contemporary proponents employ to defend their accounts. This will make clearer on what grounds universalism has been challenged by some and defended by others.

4. Rejecting the doctrine of hell in favour of universal salvation

We now take a brief look at the very early history of the denial of the doctrine of hell. As the doctrine came increasingly under attack, more and more people began to question the validity of the image of hell preached in the Bible. It was argued that there were passages in the New Testament which favour the doctrine of universal salvation; and so these were quoted against those which appeared to suggest eternal torment.¹⁰³ Although universalism gained ground in the late 19th century and during the 20th century, it is not a new position. I will focus in particular on the work of one individual who, according to many, is the father of universalism in Christian thought. This particular figure laid the foundations on which contemporary versions of universalism are built.

4.1 Origen and restoration

In the early 3rd century, Origen was the first to develop the theme of universal salvation in his *De Principiis*.¹⁰⁴ He defended the belief that all creation would eventually be restored to God. Influenced by the teachings and ideas of Plato, the Orphics and the Pythagoreans, that the end should resemble the beginning, Origen argued that all human souls would need to return to their original state before their fall. Origen holds that the human soul gradually improves after death and, no matter how sinful it may have been during its earthly life, ‘eventually makes sufficient progress to be allowed to return to the eternal contemplation of God’, which Origen called *apokatastasis* or restoration.¹⁰⁵ One of the most important aspects of Origen’s system is that it offers Christianity a philosophy of punishment

¹⁰³ See, for example, the Apocalypse of Paul; Romans XI, 32; I Corinthians XV, 22 and 28.

¹⁰⁴ See Origen, *On first principles*, G.W. Butterworth, ed. (Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1973).

¹⁰⁵ Le Goff (1984), p. 55. Some have argued that the doctrine of *apokatastasis* understood as universal salvation including the devil and the limited nature of hell, is not clearly and consistently taught by Origen as his only view of eschatology. Origen insisted in some of his writings that the devil and his angels are subject to eternal punishment perhaps even annihilation. See Cameron (1992), p. 42, p. 49 and p. 39.

different from the one found in the tradition of the New Testament. Origen's theory of punishment is 'reflexive without being retributive', is 'corrective'.¹⁰⁶ Origen argues that chastisement inflicted is not punishment but rather 'means of education' and salvation, it is part of the process of purification. From this, Origen deduced the idea that 'to punish' is synonymous with 'to educate' and that any chastisement by God contributes to a person's salvation.¹⁰⁷ On this basis, Origen denied eternal damnation.

Origen's eschatology is based on two principles. Firstly, the justice and goodness of an omnipotent Creator and secondly, 'the absolute free will of every rational being'.¹⁰⁸ He argues the humans are made in the image of God, but the likeness of God is granted to them only by their own efforts to imitate God.¹⁰⁹ Each human soul will return to its original state through a 'pedagogical process of purification'.¹¹⁰ Using the Christian principle that God's actions are always good and His power is always and everywhere effective, he argues that it is also effective in hell. Suffering can never be undeserved or be contrary to the goodness and efficacy of God. Thus if punishment after death accords with God's actions and His power, and if God gave freedom to all rational creatures, then the suffering which sinners will undergo 'must contribute to the final goal, which is the restoration of the end to conformity with the beginning'.¹¹¹ In this view the degeneration of the soul through neglect is a choice and simultaneously a punishment. In due course this punishment—since it is inflicted by God and His power never ceases to be effective—will correct the fallen soul, and it will freely move from neglect to reconciliation with God. Once sinners have been corrected through punishment, there would be no further need to punish them. Accordingly, all human beings who are punished are cured and restored to divine favour.

This process of pedagogical purification will, according to Origen, happen over the course of a limitless period of time and the changes will be realized at different times in different people.¹¹² For Origen punishment may be horribly painful but the more severe the punishment is, the more certain the salvation.¹¹³ The freedom which Origen ascribes to rational creatures to choose to turn away from God or to turn to God, ascribes

¹⁰⁶ Bernstein (1993), p. 310.

¹⁰⁷ Le Goff (1984), pp. 52–53.

¹⁰⁸ Walker (1964), p. 12. The expression 'rational creatures' includes the human soul which Origen places in an intermediate position between holy and wicked powers. See Bernstein (1993), p. 309.

¹⁰⁹ Cameron (1992), p. 53. By appealing to the free will of rational human beings, Origen attempts to solve the problem of the existence of evil and uphold the justice and goodness of God.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

¹¹¹ Bernstein (1993), p. 312.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 307–313.

¹¹³ Le Goff (1984), p. 55.

responsibility to each individual soul for its own fate. Each human being plays a crucial role in its own punishment. God punishes to chasten not to destroy, so punishment then must heal; it must correct. Spiritual progress that comes from increased punishment eventually leads to a greater perfection and to restoration.¹¹⁴ The sinner will be gradually educated by means of his own free will. *Apokatastasis* will come through penitence.

Origen's doctrine was officially condemned as heretical by the Council of Constantinople in 543.¹¹⁵ It was briefly revived in the 9th century by Scotus Erigena but it was not, as I have said above, until the mid 17th century that we can find explicit attacks on the orthodox doctrine of hell and conversely defences of the belief in universal salvation.

4.2 Contemporary universalist positions

Origen's view on human free will and punishment as remedial, as well as his wish to keep God clear of injustice and cruelty, find their modern expression in the universalism of John Hick, Thomas Talbott and Marilyn McCord Adams as well as a number of other thinkers. So, the debate on the doctrine of hell and its problems shifted from being a debate about the nature of God's justice and the purpose of retributive punishment to become a debate on the nature of human freedom and God's omnipotent love.

Recent universalists, including Hick, Talbott and Adams, suppose that the wicked suffer torments for a period of time instead of being saved immediately after death.¹¹⁶ The duration of punishment and suffering depends on each individual and often it is implied that it will be for several thousand years. As we have seen, it is common for universalists to understand God's justice as restorative justice and His punishments as corrective.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁴ Bernstein (1993), p. 310.

¹¹⁵ The first condemnation of Origen's doctrine of universal salvation was by a Council held in Alexandria in 400 and the official condemnation was by the Council of Constantinople in 543. The peculiar notion that made a heretic of Origen was that there is no sinner so essentially incorrigible that he cannot ultimately purified and allowed to enter into Paradise. The Council of Constantinople was probably, says Walker, the author of fifteen anathemata, in which Origen's Restoration of All Things is condemned. These official condemnations settled the question for the Catholics of our period. See Walker (1964), p. 21.

¹¹⁶ For a short historical survey on universalism see Richard J. Bauckham, 'Universalism: a historical survey', *Themelios* 4, no. 2 (Sept., 1978), pp. 47–54.

¹¹⁷ In defence of this interpretation they hold that if God is love and loves all His human creatures then His actions are loving and this includes sending people to hell for a time. Walls, Lewis and Stump argue that hell is a manifestation of God's love. Lewis and Walls argue that the doors of hell are closed from inside. The damned would be saved if they wished but 'they are so much in hatred of God that they are never (rarely?) would choose to accept God'. See Robin A. Parry and Christopher H. Partridge, eds., *Universal Salvation? The Current Debate* (Paternoster Press, 2003), p. xxviii.

Universalist positions differ with regard to what they say about the effects of the torment and its nature (which may be both physical and mental). Some hold that the torments in temporary hell will be at least severe as being burnt alive.¹¹⁸ By holding that punishment is corrective rather than retributive in nature, they avoid the challenge as to why any finite sin requires eternal punishment. What is important and, at the same time, curious is that most universalists affirm a libertarian view of freedom. The universalist's claim that God will save everyone without compromising their freedom gives rise to one of the major problems which universalism faces. Namely, that a clear commitment to a libertarian view of freedom demands that the possibility that not all will be saved is left open. I will explain this point in the following chapters.

Universalism raises questions about the nature of human freedom and God's love and sovereignty. Is God able to achieve his purposes? Does God love everyone? Can humans *freely* resist God's love forever?¹¹⁹ It is because of the difficulty these questions raise for universalism that many philosophers reject it.¹²⁰ In the following chapters, I argue that the universalism of Hick, Talbott and Adams runs aground on these questions. To these accounts I now turn.

¹¹⁸ Walker (1964), p. 68.

¹¹⁹ Among the most serious objections to universalism are that it is accused of trivialising or minimizing the seriousness of sin, of denigrating the doctrine of justification in faith, of impugning the righteousness or justice of God, of undermining Christian morality, of denying final judgement and the reality of hell and lacking foundation on Christian teaching. See Cameron (1992), pp. 22–27. Universalists point to a final unity of love, which is the ultimate expression of God's nature and purposes for His human creatures. As such, it can never be removed from the Christian hope. Nevertheless, Christians cannot refrain from taking seriously the consequences of evil actions because the doctrines of atonement and redemption are essential to the Christian faith.

¹²⁰ Among the most notable ones are Jonathan Kvanvig, C. S. Lewis, Eleonore Stump, Jerry Walls and Richard Swinburne. See, Jonathan Kvanvig, *The Problem of Hell* (Oxford University Press, 1993) and 'Heaven and Hell', Chap. 71 in *A Companion to Philosophy of Religion* (Philip L. Quinn and Charles Taliaferro, eds., Oxford: Blackwell, 1997). C. S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce* (London: HarperCollins Publishers, 1946) and *The Problem of Pain* (London: HarperCollins Publishers, 2002). Eleonore Stump, 'Dante's Hell, Aquinas's Moral Theory and the Love of God', *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 16, no. 2 (June, 1986), pp. 181–198; 'Being and Goodness', Chap. 4 in *Being and Goodness* (Scott MacDonald, ed., Cornell University Press, 1991); 'Love, by All Accounts', *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association* 80, no. 2 (Nov., 2006), pp. 25–43. Richard Swinburne, *Responsibility and Atonement* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), *Providence and the Problem of Evil* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998).

Chapter Three: John Hick's Universalism

Introduction

John Hick rejects the doctrine of hell in favour of universalism.¹²¹ He holds that God is a loving God, a 'God of love', and His ultimate purpose for humanity is to save it. God's relation to all created things is such that He is able to fulfil His purpose. It is morally and practically certain that in unlimited time God will draw all human creatures to Himself and thus will achieve universal salvation.¹²² Hick defends his universalist view by appealing to a theodicy which is eschatological in character. The earthly suffering and pain can only be justified if God is going to bring to a good end every individual personal life. Hick holds this to be true, whether the good end is achieved in this life or a future one and, because he considers human life in an eschatological context, every human being will eventually achieve full consciousness of God and thus salvation. Therefore, there can be no hell as a place of unending punishment and thus a doctrine of unending punishment should be rejected.

There are two central themes in Hick's theodicy: (i) 'Soul-making' is the purpose of God in making finite, immature persons endowed with a degree of genuine freedom and independence over and against God and who are therefore capable of entering into personal relationship with Him and who are fashioned through their own free insights and responses into 'children of God'.¹²³ And (ii) salvation occurs when there is real transformation of the human being.¹²⁴ Humanity's salvation depends upon its positive and voluntary response to God. God's all-loving purpose cannot be fulfilled without the voluntary co-operation of human creatures.¹²⁵ Hick holds that it is evident that this transformation does not occur for each individual in the earthly life. God's purpose will never be fulfilled if evil still occurs so the realization of God's purpose will take place in

¹²¹ In the introduction of the thesis, we see that Hick is classified as a Christian universalist in his early writings but he was classified as a pluralist universalist on account of his later writings. It is difficult to isolate his exact point in one work but for the purpose of this thesis, the main writings I look into are *Evil and the God of Love* (Palgrave Macmillan and Co Ltd., 1966a) and *Death and Eternal Life* (William Collins Sons, 1976) in which his views about the afterlife and specifically hell and universalism are evident.

¹²² John Hick, 'The Problem of Evil in the First and Last Things', *Journal of Theological Studies* XIX (1968b), pp. 600. <http://jts.oxfordjournals.org/>.

¹²³ See Hick (1966a), p. 293, p. 313 and p. 317. See also Douglas R. Geivett, *Evil and the Evidence for God: the Challenge of John Hick's Theodicy* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993), p. 34 and p. 160.

¹²⁴ For Hick the idea of salvation is something which transforms people rather than which saves their souls.

¹²⁵ Hick (1976), p. 243.

an afterlife if it is ever to be realized. He introduces the notion of intermediate state or states beyond death which provide possibilities of reform and continuing transformation for all those who have not yet attained God.¹²⁶ Hick holds that if there is continued life after death, and if God will never cease working in bringing his human creatures into His glory, it follows that God will eventually succeed in His purpose of winning all humans to Himself in faith and love without having to override His human creatures' freedom.

In this chapter, I argue that Hick's account fails to convince us that all will be saved in the end by focusing on his claim that God will achieve universal salvation through the free response of His human creatures. The chapter has two parts. In the first, I explain Hick's main concepts of 'soul-making', human freedom, 'epistemic distance' and his view of a series of progressive lives after death. The explanation of these concepts will assist us in unfolding Hick's theodicy and understanding its importance in rejecting the doctrine of hell. This prepares the ground for the second part of the chapter where I give four arguments to defend my claim that Hick's universalism is not defended adequately. My conclusion is that Hick's arguments in favour of universalism do not convince us that God can guarantee the salvation of all human beings, and as a result he gives us no good reason to accept his universalist thesis.

¹²⁶ Hick holds that the perfecting of each individual comes partly through suffering in the earthly life. The sanctifying process begins on earth and continues towards its completion in future lives to come in future intermediate states which are similar to the state which the Catholic doctrine of purgatory preaches. In the earthly life, human sanctification is still radically incomplete. If salvation in its fullness involves the actual transformation of human character, according to Hick, it is an observable fact that, even if this transformation can take place in this world, it does not usually.

Part I

1. Human freedom and soul-making

Hick holds that God has made human beings in such a way that their nature necessarily gravitates towards God. There is an inner *telos* (ultimate goal) in human nature, a quest of human beings' whole being for their own proper good; and the basis for a human being's own ultimate good is a relationship with God.¹²⁷ Human perfection or full humanization is the *telos* to which human existence is directed.¹²⁸ Hick's theodicy requires that there will be a final resolution to life, an enjoyment of a common infinite good which will be seen by human beings as justifying any finite suffering.¹²⁹

According to Hick, the divine purpose for humanity is that of 'soul-making'.¹³⁰ The goal of 'soul-making' requires God to make finite persons who have 'a degree of genuine freedom and autonomy in relation to God' and who are therefore capable of freely entering into personal relationship with God in trust and love.¹³¹ Freedom of choice is expressed in actions which influence the course of events in the world. However, it is not enough to have the choice of freedom but it is important that the choices which a person makes result in significant changes in the environment he lives in; this second feature of human freedom is, according to Hick, human autonomy. God's intention is to lead human beings 'from human *Bios*, or the biological life of man, to that quality of *Zoe*, or the personal life of eternal worth, which we see in Christ'.¹³² God's purpose is to create persons and in order to achieve this He did not bring human beings into existence as perfect beings, but as imperfect and immature creatures that are only at the beginning of a long process of development which will culminate in them becoming the perfect beings whom God

¹²⁷ Hick (1976), p. 251.

¹²⁸ Ibid., p. 407.

¹²⁹ Hick's theodicy attempts to give a justification of the evil in the world. This chapter does not focus on the problem of evil so I will not comment on it any further. We will see later on, that evil is required in the process of 'soul-making'. The quality of human soul which God seeks to create could not be achieved apart from the existence of evil. All evil will be justified if what we find in the process of 'soul-making' is an infinite good. It is clear that Hick rejects the Augustinian approach on evil and hell. See Hick (1966a), p. 377. John Hick, 'An Irenaean Theodicy', in *Encountering Evil: Live Options in Theodicy* (Stephen T. Davis ed., London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), pp. 50–51.

¹³⁰ Hick (1966a), p. 295.

¹³¹ We will see later in this section that genuine human freedom requires a degree of genuine autonomy. In order for humans to have significant autonomy over and against God they have to be placed in an 'epistemic distance' from God.

¹³² Hick (1966a), p. 293.

intended to create.¹³³ The process of ‘soul-making’ is not an infinite good but the end of it yields an infinite good which is the perfection and endless joy of all finite personal life.¹³⁴ This is what Hick calls salvation.

Two key features of Hick’s theodicy are his biological conception of a two-stage human creation and the concept of ‘epistemic distance’ which renders the use of human freedom possible. According to Hick’s ‘soul-making’ theodicy, the human developmental process involves two stages.¹³⁵ The first stage is the evolutionary emergence of *Homo sapiens* from the forms of organic life and as a result in a state of moral imperfection. The second stage is the gradual moral perfection and spiritualization of human beings as ‘children of God’ through personal travail in a hostile environment.

The first stage in which humans are created through an evolutionary process into intelligent, social animals is, according to Hick, the way God establishes the conditions necessary for the realization of His divine purpose. Hick holds that whereas the first stage was easy for divine omnipotence, the second stage of the creative process cannot be performed directly by an omnipotent God ‘for personal life is essentially free and self-directing’.¹³⁶ Hick sees two aspects of the human self: as an ego and as a person. As an empirical ego, the self is formed by living within its historico-cultural setting.¹³⁷ It is an enclosed entity, self-centred and finite in nature, which protects itself and its autonomy by making cognitive choices in its awareness of the environment.¹³⁸ As the individual self becomes more perfect it becomes more and more a person and less and less an ego. Hick suggests that whereas the self as an empirical ego forms boundaries limiting thus a true personal life, the self as a person looks outward for a relationship with other persons. Only by becoming perfected does an individual become more a person and less an ego and thus

¹³³ Ibid., p. 292. See also Geivett (1993), p. 152. Hick’s view that God’s purpose is to create persons is different to the Augustinian view that God’s purpose is to allow human beings freely to choose God.

¹³⁴ Ibid., p. 293; See also Geivett (1993), p. 206.

¹³⁵ Hick re-expresses St Irenaeus’ concept of the two stage human creation in modern terms. See Hick (1966a), p. 217 and pp. 290–291 and Hick (1976), p. 38 and p. 45. For a detailed presentation of St Irenaeus theodicy see John Lawson, *The biblical theology of Saint Irenaeus* (London: Epworth Press, 1948); Eric Osborn, *Irenaeus of Lyons*, Part IV, chapter 10 and 11 (Cambridge University Press, 2001).

¹³⁶ Hick (1966a), p. 291.

¹³⁷ Hick (1976), pp. 407–414. Hick rejects the traditional Christian view of the human ego as immortal.

¹³⁸ Ibid., p. 51. Faith, in Hick’s view, is an act of interpretation. Since human interpretation is finite and open to error, it does not have an absolute knowledge of the world. Hick holds that the world around us is open to various interpretations and choices and it is this openness to various interpretations and choices that characterize what Hick calls ‘cognitive freedom’. Hick by ‘cognitive freedom’ or ‘epistemic distance’ means that human beings’ recognition of something important in a particular situation is not compelled by the force of conception but it is a voluntary act of interpretation. For more on Hick’s view on faith see John Hick, *Faith and Knowledge* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1966b, 2nd edition).

able to live in full communion with God.¹³⁹ Humans are regarded as moral personalities in relationship with God. Natural evolution is the way for God to bring humans into existence but freedom is required for them to act as personal beings with respect to God.

Hick offers his own version of the traditional free-will defence.¹⁴⁰ He commits himself to two central themes of the traditional free-will defence. The first one concerns the concept of divine omnipotence. Hick accepts the claim that God's omnipotence does not suggest that God can do anything, if 'anything' includes the logically absurd or self-contradictory e.g. a married man being a bachelor, or saying that X and not X are true. The second one concerns the necessary relationship/connection between moral freedom and human personality. If human beings are to be capable of entering into a relationship with God freely then they must have free will. Freedom and specifically moral freedom is an essential element of what we know as personal life and in order to be a person a human being must be free to choose right or wrong.¹⁴¹ An omnipotent God cannot make a person without freedom, because God's purpose was to create persons so it was necessary that they be created with moral freedom.¹⁴²

¹³⁹ Hick (1976), p. 460.

¹⁴⁰ Sometimes Hick's free will version is referred to as 'Hybrid free will' or 'Quasi-free-will defence'. See 'John Hick: All's Well That Ends Well', in *God, Power and Evil*, David Ray Griffin, ed. (Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), pp. 174–204 (p. 174).

¹⁴¹ Hick (1966a), p. 302.

¹⁴² Hick follows Plantinga's free will defence but in a modified way. Philosophers such as L. Hall, J. Walls, W. Holten etc point out that Hick does not seem to endorse libertarianism or compatibilism fully but follows a middle ground. He finds accounts of libertarian free will more defensible than compatibilist accounts of free will. He holds that a human being's free actions are not equivalent to randomness and unpredictability, but that someone's actions 'are determined by his own inner nature'. See Hick (1966a), p. 74. The account of freedom which he suggest includes the rejection of external determinism and acts must not be detached from the agent because, he says, that 'would be to equate freedom with randomness of behaviour'. See Hick (1966a), p. 311. So Hick argues, on the one hand, that freedom is not totally determined by one's character which is liable to change during the process of decision making; and, on the other hand, he argues that freedom does not entail entirely random actions completely detached from the agent who acts. He furthermore adds that 'we are free beings cannot mean that we are unconditioned, but that within the limits set by all conditioning circumstances of our pedigree and environment we are nevertheless able self-creatively to exercise a certain energy of our own'. See John Hick, 'Freedom and the Irenaean Theodicy Again', *Theological Studies* XXI, no. 2 (1970b), pp. 420–421. Humans are restricted and limited by the nature of their beings and the environments. In elaborating his claim, he gives the example of the human gender and the time and place in which someone is born. He holds that humans do not normally object that these factors hinder on their freedom, so although their freedom is genuine it is, however, limited by the fact that they are created. Although human actions are not externally caused, they can be internally caused although Hick holds that 'internal influences are not fully sufficient causes because character itself can be transformed by the process of decision'. See Lindsey (2003), p. 147. These reasons led some philosophers, such as Lindsey, to say that Hick's account of freedom is not strong libertarian freedom but can be categorized as a type of compatibilist freedom as it recognizes internal influences. Nevertheless, Hick as we have seen recognizes a third influence on action—the process of action or decision itself—which will categorize his account as a type of libertarian freedom.

Hick agrees with J. L. Mackie and Antony Flew that God being omnipotent could have created human beings in such as way as to always freely act in a moral way. Hick says that even if it is logically possible that God could create humans so that they would always freely act rightly in relation to one another, it is not logically

He proposes that human freedom should be conceived as ‘limited creativity’.¹⁴³ He wishes to hold that human beings must have a determined nature as existents in a natural world order but if their nature includes moral freedom then there must be something undetermined about their moral character. Human beings are genuinely free with the restricted freedom of created beings. Their freedom involves choices about how to respond to the environment that they are given with the abilities that they have. They are never absolutely free in an unrestricted sense because they have been created with some determined nature. Even if actions ensue from the nature of human beings, there is an element of unpredictability because the nature from which the action proceeds is that of the actual self alive in the moment of decision.¹⁴⁴ Humans have cognitive freedom—that is, they have the freedom to be aware or not aware of God; to turn from moral imperfection to moral perfection in virtue of choosing God.¹⁴⁵ Hick holds that ‘the concept of freedom as creativity would make it possible to speak of God as endowing His creatures with genuine though limited autonomy’.¹⁴⁶

However, according to Hick, this freedom is guaranteed only if human beings are at a distance from God and his commitment to this claim is another key feature of his theodicy. Hick claims that there would be no point in creating finite persons ‘unless they could be endowed with a degree of genuine freedom and independence over against their Maker. For only then could they be capable of authentic personal relationship with him’.¹⁴⁷ This kind of distance which would make room for a degree of human autonomy is what Hick calls epistemic distance.¹⁴⁸ Free response to God’s love can be achieved only when humans are created initially in a state which is not that of knowing and loving God.¹⁴⁹ God’s reality and presence on His human creatures must not be coerced but He must be knowable only by a mode of knowledge which involves a free personal response from human beings.¹⁵⁰ It

possible that God could constitute humans in such a way that they freely responded to Himself in faith and love. Hick thinks that it is logically possible for God to create humans with perfect moral freedom; however, it is not logically possible for God to create humans with perfect religious freedom. See Hick (1966a), p. 311–313. Moreover, Hick rejects views which hold that God could have created human creatures in a paradisaal world on the ground that God’s purpose is that human personality should be formed towards the pattern of Christ. See Hick (1966a), p. 294. In addition, he argues that the view that there might be instantaneous transition of imperfect human beings into perfect beings should be abandoned because it would render the earthly travail of faith and moral effort needless. See Geivett (1993), p. 210 and p. 383.

¹⁴³ Hick (1966a), p. 312.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 312.

¹⁴⁵ Hick (1968b), p. 595.

¹⁴⁶ Hick (1966), p. 313.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 311.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 317. Hick holds that only by being placed in an ‘epistemic distance’, humans can have significant autonomy in relation to their Creator.

¹⁴⁹ Davis (2001), p. 43. Also see John Hick, ‘God, Evil and Mystery’, *Religious Studies* 3, no. 2 (1968a), p. 540.

¹⁵⁰ See Hick (1966a), p. 317 and Hick (1968b), p. 596.

is more profitable and valuable for a human being to be able to make his own choices and avoid temptations and build up his goodness through personal experiences of moral effort. Humans experience divine presence through faith and only this kind of faith-response can secure the kind of freedom which is possible for humans in relation to God. The notion of 'epistemic distance' is proposed to show that human beings are religiously free to come to God but are not compelled to know God. It is by growing perfect in response to God that they are morally free agents.¹⁵¹

Because of 'epistemic distance' *Homo sapiens* evolved as self-centred creatures making it inevitable that some human creatures would distance themselves from God. The human beings' self-centred alienation from God is necessary for the 'soul-making' which God has in mind.¹⁵² However, God will ensure that His purpose is brought to full realization and He will succeed in His purpose because 'it is a true deduction from God's power and goodness that in the end man will somehow be drawn freely to open himself to his Maker'.¹⁵³ Hick sees that the process of 'soul-making' makes sense 'only if we see this life as part of a much larger existence in which that creative process continues to completion beyond this world'.¹⁵⁴

Before I continue to explain Hick's view of intermediate states after death there are a number of worries which I wish to point out, worries which I will address in the second part of the chapter. Hick's notion of 'epistemic distance' is essential in order to maintain the human beings have genuine freedom of choice. In the second part of the chapter, I argue that he fails to preserve this notion in his account of intermediate states. Moreover, I accept his claim that the process of 'soul-making' would not be possible without the individual's free and responsible choice. However, I do not think that by proposing that there might be a life after death in which human beings can be perfected, Hick shows that the kind of genuine freedom he proposes is preserved and is essential for salvation. This point will become clearer once we examine his view on the afterlife.

¹⁵¹ See Hick (1966a), p. 308. See also Geivett (1993), p. 192.

¹⁵² God is ontologically responsible for evil in that his decision to create human beings 'was the primary and necessary precondition for the occurrence of evil'. Evil is a necessary element for 'soul-making'. Hick cannot attribute the existence of evil to human beings because he thinks that this would amount to postulating the self-creation of evil ex-nihilo. See Hick (1966a), p. 238 and p. 326.

¹⁵³ Geivett (1993), p. 209.

¹⁵⁴ John Hick, 'Remarks', in *Reason and Religion*, Stuart C. Brown, ed. (Cornell University Press, 1977), p. 127.

2. Soul-making does not cease at death

Hick holds that the given freedom of human beings entails that some free agents will become self-centred rather than God-centred. These are people who, by the time of their death, are not prepared to join God. Those who have not yet come into faith cannot experience the fulfilment of the divine purpose. It is clear then that, if God's purpose is a 'soul-making' one, He must ensure that it holds beyond the present life and that it is fulfilled for those who are not prepared to join God in this life. If salvation in its fullness involves the actual transformation of human character, according to Hick, it is an observable fact that it does not usually take place in this world. Actual transformation can take place in this world, but usually does not. He concludes from this that there must be further time beyond death in which the process of perfecting can continue.¹⁵⁵

Hick distances himself from the traditional views of afterlife in hell, purgatory and heaven and holds that a human being's eternal destiny should not be decided on the state of one's nature/character at death. In the following sections, I explain the reasons why Hick thinks that hell and annihilation as the fates of the wicked are not acceptable for a Christian theodicy and why salvation is necessarily the fate of all human beings.

2.1 The fate of damned can be neither eternal hell nor annihilation

The theodicy to which Hick turns is one that seeks to justify the existence of all evil by appealing to an infinite good. Justification of the existence of evil can only be found if the end to which a human being's soul-making is directed is an infinite good, 'namely the perfection and endless joy of all finite personal life'.¹⁵⁶ Hick holds that 'if the justification of evil within the creative process lies in the limitless and eternal good of the end-state to which it leads, then the completeness of the justification must depend upon the completeness, or universality, of the salvation achieved'.¹⁵⁷ The fulfilment of God's purpose must extend to all human beings.

This leads Hick to reject the doctrine of hell. A theodicy, he says, which is eschatological in character can be affirmed only by faith and hope in the fulfilment of God's purpose for

¹⁵⁵ Hick (1976), p. 455.

¹⁵⁶ Hick (1977), p. 128.

¹⁵⁷ Davis (2001), p. 52.

His human creatures; in an infinite good that renders worthwhile all finite evils which preceded it.¹⁵⁸ God's divine purpose must be universally fulfilled because an evil that persists for eternity would signify a definitive failure on God's part; God's divine sovereignty would be shown to be limited. The doctrine of hell assumes the eternal existence of the damned's evil nature and the existence of evil in the eternal suffering of the damned, thus it cannot be accepted. Hick holds that eternal misery and torment without any positive or reformatory purpose excludes the possibility of any active development of human character and this renders the misery and anguish of the damned pointless.¹⁵⁹ Sometimes Hick says that the images of hell should be taken seriously and its sufferings should be given the importance they deserve. Real suffering and misery should be feared as a consequence of rejecting God. But he uses the term 'hell' to name a temporary state, or one of the stages in the afterlives, and he understands it as consisting of purgatorial experiences which are necessary to remedy imperfection and compensate for sins committed in the earthly life.¹⁶⁰

Moreover, Hick holds that annihilation, according to which the wicked 'come by the disintegrating effect of their own evil to embody less and less being until they cease to exist', cannot be permitted by God either.¹⁶¹ Even if the view escapes the criticism of the eternal punishment view and thus also of the eternal evil view, it does not escape another problem, 'namely the eternal evil of God's failure to bring to a good end the finite personal life he has created'.¹⁶² God's divine purpose for His human creatures will fail in the case of those whose fate is annihilation because the evil which brought them to this end 'remains eternally, unredeemed, not made to serve any eventual good, and thus constitutes a perpetual marring of the universe'.¹⁶³

Hick concludes that the only real alternative to a doctrine of hell and annihilation is a doctrine of universal salvation. Remember that Hick wishes to defend human moral freedom so he holds that the possibility of universal salvation does not entail that the choices which humans perform are unreal or without eternal significance. He argues that it is not the case that people cannot damn themselves, but rather that the possibility of hell will not be realized. He holds that it is 'a true deduction from God's power and goodness that in the end that man will somehow be drawn freely to open himself to his Maker' and

¹⁵⁸ Hick (1966a), p. 377 and Hick (1968b), p. 598.

¹⁵⁹ Hick (1966a), p. 377.

¹⁶⁰ Hick (1976), p. 385.

¹⁶¹ Hick (1968b), p. 599.

¹⁶² Ibid., p. 599. For more on the arguments against the eternal punishment view see chapter two.

¹⁶³ Ibid., p. 599.

that in the end none are to be finally lost.¹⁶⁴ Those who have not attained their perfection by the time of their death are drawn towards their perfection in an existence which lies far beyond our present life.¹⁶⁵

2.2 Further lives/intermediate states

Hick proposes that for those who by the time of their death have not attained full transformation there might be some kind of continual existence in an environment specially formed for humans in order to achieve their further moral and spiritual development. Influenced by the paraeschatology of religions such as Buddhism and Hinduism, Hick proposes an alternative fate after death, that of a series of progressive afterlives, each bounded by something analogous to birth and death, lived in other worlds in spaces other than that in which human beings now are.¹⁶⁶ The ‘soul-making’ process continues in another post-mortem intermediate state, or states, until it ‘reaches its completion in the infinite good of the common life of humanity within the life of God’.¹⁶⁷

Perfection of human beings consists in a self-transcending state beyond separate ego existence.¹⁶⁸ Those who die and have not yet attained perfection continue further in time as

¹⁶⁴ See Hick (1976), p. 22 and p. 408.

¹⁶⁵ Hick holds that in most cases human beings shall not attain immediately to the final heavenly state. Only those who various religious traditions call ‘saints or buddhas or arhats or *jivan-muktas* have fulfilled the purpose of the temporal existence which is the gradual creation of perfect persons’. See Hick (1976), p. 399.

¹⁶⁶ Hick suggests something similar to that described in the *Bardo Thödol*. *Bardo Thödol* or Tibetan Book of Dead in English language comes from the tantric branch of *Mahayana* Buddhism in Tibet. It describes the *Bardo* state between death and rebirth and it outlines the sequence of experiences undergone by the soul or conscious mind during the forty-nine days between death and its return to the new body. At the moment of death, when the ego ceases to be organically related to this world, its final transcending perfection is possible and it might enter to its ultimate nature. Individuals go through three distinct stages after death. In the first stage, the individual encounters the ultimate reality and the individual will have to decide if he wants to abandon his ego-existence. If he abandons his ego-existence then, according to Hindu thought, it attains to a realization of its identity with the one infinite and eternal Spirit or, according to Buddhism, until it attains to the perfect state of Nirvana. However, there are many cases in which the individual does not wish to abandon itself and it regains consciousness in a post-mortem stage which is subjective or dream-like. This is a stage of self-discovery. The experiences in the individual’s mind are subjective. There is a series of karmic illusions which are formed by the individual’s past actions. Benevolent deities offer to the individual salvation but if the good which the individual has within him does not correspond to them then he encounters evil deities who represent the evil within him. These experiences then make him realise that he must live again and select an appropriate birth. The third stage is when the individual is drawn to its next rebirth. See Hick (1976), pp. 400–404 and pp. 414–415.

¹⁶⁷ John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2007 Reissue), p. 374. Hick rejects the traditional view of the Christian heaven, hell and purgatory but also the repeated reincarnation of the individual in the earthy life. See Hick (1976), p. 456.

¹⁶⁸ Hick (1976), p. 399. Hick’s approach can be criticised on the ground that if all human beings go beyond their separate ego existence then there is the question of whether or not they will still be them, would they still be persons or human beings. Hick’s reply to this is that the final state which he proposes will include all

distinct self-conscious egos.¹⁶⁹ The right and wrong actions performed during the earthly life lead to appropriately different experiences beyond this world which provide infinite possibilities for further spiritual growth and development.¹⁷⁰

Hick assumes that ‘the immediately post-mortem phase is subjective and dream-like and that it can take either a sharply defined form, reflecting an imagination effectively conditioned by a powerful religious culture, or be experienced as a kind of continuation of earthly life’.¹⁷¹ Two striking features, which Hick uses in formulating his view, are that the mind of each individual creates its own post-mortem world in accordance with its beliefs and that this, the *Bardo* state, is ‘solipsistic’.¹⁷² Since most human beings in modern societies are not as influenced by the teachings of Christianity as they were in the past, this leads Hick to hold that these individuals in the absence of vivid and compelling religious or other expectations would find the future world to be more or less similar to the earthly world. Their subjective post-mortem environment would be based upon their memories of the earthly world.¹⁷³

The *Bardo* state, however, is a transitional phase, says Hick, which sooner or later will change through factors such as experience of higher or positive realms or of boredom and emptiness. It is going to be an experience of self-discovery and of realization of what one has become through the bad and good choices, which they have acquired for themselves during their earthly lives. When this experience is over for the individual, Hick assumes that there will be a ‘transition to a further embodiment in another world in another space’.¹⁷⁴ The next world will be a real spatial-temporal environment functioning in accordance with its own laws, within which there will be real personal life and character with pain and suffering to overcome, sacrifices and achievements. The present conscious-self does not end but continues with some memory of the immediately past life, probably

of human beings in a perfected state of unity with each other and with the Transcendent Reality. Hick rejects the notion of the immortal ego of traditional Western religions but also he rejects the idea of complete personal extinction or absorption of traditional Eastern religions. He holds that ‘since personality is essentially outward-looking as a relationship to other persons...the perfected individual will have become an entity without egoity, a living consciousness which is transparent to the other consciousness in relation to which it lives in full community of love’. See Hick (1976), p. 460. At the end of ‘soul-making’ the individual will maintain its individual identity, having left behind its ‘ego-aspect’ and having been filled with “the unselfish love which the New Testament calls *agape*”. See Hick (1976), p. 464.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 399.

¹⁷⁰ Hick (1966a), p. 385.

¹⁷¹ Hick (1976), p. 416.

¹⁷² Ibid., p. 416.

¹⁷³ Ibid., p. 416.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 417.

fading as the individual becomes a part of the succeeding life.¹⁷⁵ Hick holds that if the future lives are few then they may all be remembered but if they are many then they should not be expected to be all clearly or fully remembered. When that life comes to an end humans shall presumably again ‘die’ and undergo another transition, via another *Bardo* type experience, into another life or world.¹⁷⁶ The progressive worlds are going to have environments of more morally and spiritually perfect modes of existence.¹⁷⁷ The duration and extent of the soul-making process will be determined by each individual’s character and the degree of *unsanctification* (or imperfection) remaining to be overcome at the time of death.¹⁷⁸

Hick holds that human beings can never escape God’s love because God has determined the nature of the environments in which human beings exercise their freedom, both in this world and in other worlds to come.¹⁷⁹ From this, he assumes that God’s love will never cease until all human beings respond to His love and goodness freely. However, the process in which human beings come into realization of the infinite good will not be infinite in duration. Human beings will arrive at their own self-fulfilment in a right relation to God, since this process depends upon the fact that human beings have been created from God for Himself.¹⁸⁰ Hick concludes that the outcome of ‘the soul-making’ process will be that of all human beings brought into the glory of God.

Even if Hick’s view is conceptually coherent at first sight, he does not show that salvation is guaranteed to all human beings. The main problem which I will go on to examine in the next part of the chapter, is that there is a significant tension between what Hick says here and the idea that ‘soul-making’ and salvation requires genuine free will. God can only save *all* human creatures if he violates or ignores the freely-willed choices of some of them.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 418; See also p. 42 and p. 421.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 419.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 463.

¹⁷⁸ Hick (1966a), p. 383.

¹⁷⁹ Hick (1968b), p. 600.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 600.

Part II

Hick holds that God wants to save all human creatures and that He will succeed in doing so. Salvation will be attained through the free response of each human being to God's love. It is obvious that Hick wants to hold that human freedom is necessary for salvation, for if eternal happiness were the only good that God was concerned to actualize one could ask Hick why God did not create everyone in heaven without forcing them to undergo the painful process of soul making.¹⁸¹ If God were to create perfect beings in a twinkling of an eye He, on the one hand, would be erasing the consequences of human freedom, which would lessen the value of any achievement on their part, and on the other hand, human beings would not really be perfect unless they achieved this through free choices. Attainment of the ultimate good should be through the individual's free response. Universal salvation will be the ultimate outcome because (i) human nature is created in a way such that it always tends towards the ultimate good and the ultimate good is God and (ii) the process of salvation does not cease at the moment of death but will continue in other spheres or worlds. Since human nature is drawn towards God then there will be a time where all human beings will be united with God.

I argue that his account fails to adequately show that everyone will be saved in the end. In defending this claim I will maintain that:

1. The idea of intermediate lives as opportunities for salvation diminishes the importance of human autonomy. Although humans have free will, they are not genuinely free, as Hick claims.
2. The existence of the intermediate states does not exclude the possibility that some individuals might never attain perfection/salvation.

¹⁸¹ As I have said in a previous footnote, Hick maintains that God would not create human beings in a way that they would always freely choose the good. Even if it is logically possible for God to do so, it is impossible to expect human beings to join God in faith and love if they do not have genuine freedom. Let us also remember that this is the question which J. L. Mackie and A. Flew ask theists when considering the problem of evil. See chapter one, section 1.

3. It is not obvious that the afterlives are progressive in character. If the afterlives are not progressive then there is no guarantee that some human creatures will ever choose God.
4. Hick's notion of 'epistemic distance' in relation with human freedom of choice presents some problems. If epistemic distance is necessary for genuine autonomy and freedom then the existence of the *Bardo* state and the existence of the afterlives undermines Hick's notion of 'epistemic distance' and human freedom.

My arguments against Hick are grounded in the following analogy.

Imagine that you find yourself in an enormous labyrinth. Either you can choose to remain in the labyrinth or you can choose to take the path which leads to the exit and to a good which is beyond your imagination. The exit leads to a good you have never imagined—eternal life, bliss and happiness—whereas if you decide to remain in the labyrinth you will be subjected to different kinds of evils, deception and finally death. However, the journey to the exit is not an easy one and the residence in the labyrinth is not a pleasurable one. The labyrinth has a security system (LSS from now on) which attempts with various warnings or/and obstacles to persuade you to pursue the path which leads to the exit. Moreover, it attempts to make your journey to the exit as challenging as possible in order to make sure that you are ready for the exit. The LSS wills your escape and so it decides to give you several opportunities to escape the labyrinth. Whether you decide to remain in the labyrinth or you cannot reach the exit for whatever reasons e.g. injuries, death etc., the LSS gives you the opportunity to choose the exit by bringing you back to life; so every time you fail to reach the exit you wake up and you find yourself in a different place in the labyrinth. The same rules and outcomes apply. Whether you choose to remain in the labyrinth for a second time or you choose the exit and you die before you are free the LSS gives you another chance and then another and then another until you choose the exit. Depending on your progress in your previous attempts, the LSS re-creates you in a different place and assigns you appropriate challenges and obstacles to overcome.

The point of this hypothetical scenario is that we can take it to be analogous to Hick's view of earthly life and the intermediate afterlives. As we have seen, Hick thinks that human beings, through the exercise of their given freedom, can choose good or evil. (In terms of the labyrinth, there are two choices either remain in the labyrinth or choose the exit). God's purpose is a 'soul-making' one and this purpose can be achieved only if human beings are

placed in environments in which there are obstacles and challenges to overcome. In the labyrinth, you can choose using your given freedom. The warnings and obstacles that are presented in the labyrinth are analogous to the moral and natural evil that we encounter in our earthly lives which, according to Hick, help our moral and spiritual development. The exit of the labyrinth is analogous to reconciliation with God—the ultimate good and eternal life—whereas the residence in the labyrinth is analogous to the earthly corruption, deceit, a place in which vices triumph and death is the ultimate fate. Moreover, the chances which the LSS gives you to reach the exit in re-creating you again and again is analogous to the re-appearance of humans in intermediate states after their earthly life until they develop a perfect character and come into union with God. With this analogy in mind, I now turn to my arguments against Hick's theory.

1. Human beings are not genuinely free in the future lives

The importance of freedom and autonomy is evident in Hick's view. Freedom of choice and autonomy are valuable to a person because they are necessary in order for the transformation to perfection to occur and for union with God to be realized. The genuine freedom that Hick has in mind is expressed in actions which influence the course of events in the world. It is not enough to have the freedom; of choice; it is important that the choices which a person makes result in significant changes in the environment he lives. This second feature of human freedom is what Hick calls human autonomy. As a theodist, Hick attempts to justify the evil in the world and its effects on each human being and the environment they live in. This can only be justified if he holds that each person has the autonomy and freedom to change the course of things by choosing one way or another. So a world with autonomous human beings is a world where they are, firstly, allowed to make evil choices, and secondly, are allowed to make choices which issue in evil acts and have evil consequences which have an impact in the environment in which they live. I argue that if Hick claims that everyone will be saved in the end by appealing to the notion of the intermediate afterlives then he has to abandon the view that human beings have the kind of freedom and autonomy which is significant for their 'soul-making' and the attainment of the infinite good.

Let us consider the analogy I have offered to illustrate my criticism against Hick. Imagine that it is now your 20th time in the labyrinth. That would suggest that in all your previous

attempts either you have chosen to remain in the labyrinth or you have failed to reach the exit. Now you decide to reach to the exit but by the time you do so you die. The LSS once more re-creates you to give you another chance. In all your reappearances in the labyrinth, you were free to choose between the two options. However, did you choose to reappear in the labyrinth for a second time, or for a 20th or even 21st time? I am inclined to say that you did not. Your reappearances in the labyrinth as a result of your failure to choose or reach the exit, is not something that you have chosen for yourself. Can you choose not to reappear in the labyrinth? No, because you cannot make that choice. The LSS does. The LSS chooses for you because it is the LSS which thinks that it would be better for you to finally reach the exit and succeed in escaping from the labyrinth. The LSS does not permit you to retain the character which you have developed during your residence in the labyrinth, especially if that character is a vicious one. It does not give you that choice.

While the above analogy allows freedom of choice, it denies autonomy because your ultimate fate does not vary with the choices which you have made in the labyrinth. Hick allows human beings to make free choices during their existence in the earthly life and the post-mortem lives because union with God can only be achieved voluntarily. It is up to humans whether or not they want to act in evil or good ways and so, we can argue that freedom of choice is still significant in this sense. However, the notion of intermediate lives denies human autonomy because each individual's eternal fate is entirely independent of the choices he/she makes and the beliefs and character which he/she adopts in his/her earthly existence and post-mortem existence later on.

While Hick's notion of intermediate states allows each agent to choose one thing over another upon recognizing the value of the respective choices, including the choices appropriate for soul-making, it does not allow outcomes to vary accordingly. It allows each agent to act in such a way as to acquire an evil character or a lesser good character but in the end one cannot be what one has chosen to be. This is evident since those who choose to acquire vices and act upon them rather than upon virtues are nevertheless going to be placed in another environment meant for transformation. Humans are allowed to do whatever they like but with God, you have it this way.¹⁸² Human beings do not choose to progress from one future intermediate life to another. So while the choosing of one act over another may continue it is, nevertheless, a free choosing which lacks autonomy since one

¹⁸² Michael Murray proposes a similar argument to the one I offer in this section. However, his argument is directed to a specific form of universalism—naïve universalism—and not explicitly to Hick's account. See Michael Murray, 'Three Versions of Universalism', *Faith and Philosophy* 16 (1999), pp. 55–68. <http://philpapers.org/>

transforms into a child of God whether one chooses to be or not. In the end, if a person chooses to cultivate a character which does not accord with God's plans he will not be allowed to become that sort of person. Hick's view of intermediate states, therefore, presents the following difficulties for him:

Firstly, Hick's universalism is an attempt, as we have seen, to justify all evil in the world, natural and moral. The justification is based on his view of human freedom of choice and autonomy. People can change the course of events by using their given freedom which is important for their soul-making. If the eternal fate of each individual is independent of the choices he has made in his earthly and/or intermediate lives then Hick's universalism seems to suggest that the earthly life and intermediate worlds and the evils and challenges they contain are not significant, at least for the purposes of 'soul-making'. This would suggest that all the challenges that human beings have to face and overcome by using their given freedom and all the suffering and evil they have to undergo in order to become children of God were completely pointless.

Secondly, if an individual's reappearance in the intermediate worlds and consequently his eternal fate is completely independent of the choices he has made, then God blocks the consequences of the free choices of evil individuals and so He blocks their autonomy. If human autonomy entails the freedom to act in evil ways which result in evil consequences which in turn affect the course of things and the life of the individual who makes them (and others), by blocking the consequences, God blocks human autonomy. If autonomy is an essential feature of having genuine creaturely freedom then God ignores and diminishes the value of the freedom which human beings are worth having. Therefore, universal salvation is not the result of genuine freedom that Hick wants to maintain.

If Hick wishes to save the genuine freedom which he ascribes to human beings, that is the ability to choose freely and be autonomous beings he will have to permit their eternal fate to be based on the choices and the character which they cultivate for themselves. If he does so then he will have to accept that there is no guarantee that all will achieve salvation since in having genuine freedom humans will be allowed to carry the character that they have chosen for themselves in the lives to come; or be permitted to retain that character and not been re-created in another world. In addition, if the individuals decide that they do not wish to continue their existence in other worlds then I think it is reasonable to expect them to ask their Creator to annihilate them. If freedom is genuine then Hick has to accept that the above scenarios are possible.

Nevertheless Hick could reply to my criticism in the following way: he could argue that those who offer this argument in attempting to show that salvation is not the product of free response to God's will overlook the fact that the Christian doctrine of salvation offers 'an alternative route to the universalist conclusion'.¹⁸³ Firstly, Hick, as we have seen, holds that God has created human beings in a way that their nature has an inherently gravitation towards God. There is an inner *telos* in human beings for relationship with God. Since human beings have been created by God and they are oriented towards God there 'is no final opposition between God's saving will and our human nature acting in freedom'.¹⁸⁴ He holds that if human ordinary notion of freedom is compatible with humans having been brought into existence by forces outside their selves, then it must be compatible with them having brought into existence by the will of God.¹⁸⁵ Secondly, Hick has often argued that God cannot be an infinitely powerful being who sometimes intervenes miraculously on earth in response to human prayers. If there were an all-powerful intervening being, Hick argues, we would not think of him worthy of worship. To strengthen his point he gives the following example: Suppose, he says, there is a car crash and three of the people in it are killed but one survives more or less unhurt. 'If that one, believing in a miraculously intervening deity, then thanks God for saving her life, she's forgetting that if God decided to save her, he must have decided at the same time not to save the other three. But if he could if he wanted equally easily save everyone from all harm, why is there so much pain and suffering in the world? This would be a cruelly arbitrary God, and the only people who could reasonably worship him would be the chosen few whom he protects'.¹⁸⁶ God cannot arbitrarily intervene in the world; events which happen that we take to be unexplainable or miraculous may in fact be laws of nature which we were not familiar with before. So for these reasons Hick could maintain that the laws of nature can be seen as the actions of God, so the difference between such laws and God's actions is not as striking as might first appear. The fact that human beings have to go through a series of progressive lives through the process of rebirth and death might not undermine the free nature of the agent's choice and in particular autonomy if this process is part of the plan God had for human creation and their salvation.

To this reply we can say that Hick's account of human freedom is still vulnerable to criticism. One could argue that Hick's account of universalism seems to suggest that the

¹⁸³ Hick (1976), p. 250. I would like to thank, again, Dr Wynn and Dr Lindsay for pointing out that Hick could have replied to my argument in this way.

¹⁸⁴ Hick (1976), p. 254.

¹⁸⁵ Hick (1976), p. 254.

¹⁸⁶ See John Hick's personal website for his article on religion, science and miracles. <http://www.johnhick.org.uk/article5.html>.

fate of human beings is predetermined from the moment of creation for salvation.¹⁸⁷ If this is the case then it is not obvious how his account is compatible with the freedom of choice and genuine autonomy he wishes to defend. If predetermined nature diminishes genuine freedom of choice and genuine autonomy then Hick cannot speak of libertarian free will. It would seem that Hick would have to defend a compatibilist account of freedom if he wants to hold, on the one hand, that human nature is predetermined to attain God and, on the other hand, to show that humans can make genuine free choices. One way in which Hick could strengthen his argument is by offering an account of God's knowledge something which surprisingly he does not do. Hick, in order to affirm that universal salvation will be the fate of all human beings, must at least assert that God has foreknowledge.¹⁸⁸ Without this kind of foreknowledge not even God can know the outcome of each individual's salvation. The omission of an account of God's knowledge makes Hick's account of genuine freedom of choice and autonomy vulnerable to criticism.

Moreover, Hick's reply is vulnerable to a further criticism: if God has the power and knowledge to predetermine all human beings' nature for salvation why should God postpone this fate to future environments instead of employing them in the present earthly life? Why does the process of human soul-making take as long as it does? Hick himself admits that these are questions which we cannot answer, we 'do not know why the time scale of God's dealings with us as it is'.¹⁸⁹ If Hick wishes to show that human beings have compatibilist freedom of choice and offer an account of God's knowledge which will permit genuine freedom of choice, on the one hand, and predetermined nature for salvation, on the other hand, then Hick will have to explain why the process of soul-making has to be as long or why human beings have not been created perfect in the first place if God had the power and knowledge to do so.

2. Intermediate states and the possibility of choosing to do wrong

When Hick discusses the character of the afterlife he holds that the next world will be a real spatial-temporal environment functioning in accordance with its own laws, within which there will be real personal life and character with pain and suffering to overcome,

¹⁸⁷ A few philosophers have argued in favour of this claim. See, for example, Lindsey (2003), chapter 4 and 5.

¹⁸⁸ As I have said in the introduction of the thesis, for the purposes of the thesis I set aside accounts of Divine providence. For more details on different accounts on God's knowledge see chapter 1, footnote 22.

¹⁸⁹ Hick (1976), p. 259.

sacrifices and achievements.¹⁹⁰ In answering questions regarding the personal identity and memory of each individual in the lives to come he holds that the present conscious-self continues existing in other new environments even with some fading memories. He assumes that the fewer future lives someone has the more he will be able to remember from his previous lives; whereas if they are many then it should not be expected that they will all be clearly or fully remembered. The individual might have some memory of the immediately past life but not of all past lives because of the limits of human memory and self-apprehension. Hick could say that when the earthly life of a human being comes to an end and the ascent to another world and yet another life occurs and so on, the individual might remember the events which have occurred in his earthly life or his immediate past life. If this is the case, he will be able to evaluate situations and act in better ways in the lives to come than he has in the past. In this sense, he might also be able to avoid the criticism that God blocks human autonomy.

I think that Hick's claim that there might be memory of previous events in the lives to come which would help each individual to make right choices and wish in the end the infinite good, presents some serious problems to his theory. In particular,

- a) Some individuals might choose salvation for the wrong reasons.
- b) Some individuals might use the afterlives to prolong their residence in the after world.

Let us return to the labyrinth scenario and add that every time you fail to choose the exit and the LSS gives you another chance to do so you have memories of the immediately past choice or choices and also you have some faint memories of previous attempts in previous lives. Also let us suppose, as Hick seems to claim, that if you are in your 20th attempt, for example, you do not need to recall the first fifteen times to know what it is best for you to do since the last two or three attempts will suffice for that. As long as you have some memory of the past then you are free to choose good or evil or, in the case of the labyrinth, the exit or to remain in the labyrinth, because you will be able to compare and evaluate previous attempts. Freedom of choice still plays a significant role for salvation. I accept that if you have memories of previous events, or in Hick's view, of previous lives, then you can realise what is a better and more valuable choice and be able to overcome challenges in ways which you have never thought of before. Someone could choose the

¹⁹⁰ Hick (1976), p. 418.

right path because, ultimately, he realizes that it is the right path. I am free, for example, when I refrain from putting my hand on the stove on the basis of my memory that it hurts to do so. The fact that human beings are taught lessons through their life experiences does not suggest that their choices thereafter are not free.

The problem here is not about whether or not human beings will be free in deciding to choose God. Instead, it concerns whether or not they will choose God for the right reasons and whether or not, knowing that they will never really cease to exist, they will ever be sufficiently motivated to accept God.

Recall again the labyrinth analogy. Let us say that in my 100th reappearance in the labyrinth I choose the path which leads to the exit. This decision was made on the basis of recalling previous experiences. I know that every time I fail to reach the exit I return to the labyrinth. Since I know that every time I return to the labyrinth it is because I have to choose the path which leads to the exit, I decide to choose the path which leads to the exit. It is a better choice to follow the path which leads to the exit than remain in the labyrinth. It is a good thing to reach the exit but at the same time it will be something I have to do. It is not the right reason to choose the exit. How does this present a problem for Hick?

The analogy implies that if human beings act in accordance with God's plan out of self-interest, it contradicts Hick's view according to which human beings can be perfected only through their faith and trust in God. If in every afterlife I have memories of my past afterlives and I know that if I do not choose the ultimate good, and if I do not act in accordance with God's plan, I will have to move to another world or state, it is quite possible that I will choose God's plan since the alternative will be me inhabiting another world. The reasons behind my decision to choose the exit will not be the right ones. People do not always choose to do one thing rather than another for the right reasons. For example, the reasons behind my decision to help my little brother finish his homework or tidy up his room might be that I cannot stand his constant moaning or my mother telling him off all the time. Someone might say that the right reasons for helping my brother would be out of duty to help him or out of sisterly love and compassion. In the afterlives, it might be the case that some human beings will choose salvation out of self-interest e.g., they might be tired from dying repeatedly and being resurrected in the intermediate worlds. My choice will not be made for the right reasons but out of self-interest and this is something that Hick would want to avoid.

In the labyrinth analogy, if I choose the exit for the wrong reasons that would suggest that I am not ready to attain salvation. If reconciliation with God, according to Hick, can be achieved only through faith and trust in God, those who have chosen the exit out of self-interest will have to necessarily reappear in another afterlife. This would be because they are not ready for salvation. It may be the case that some people will never choose salvation (or the exit) for the right reasons. They might always see salvation or the labyrinth's exit as something that they have to do in order to stop the reappearances and if this is so then some of them might never be saved.

The above point can be strengthened if we take into consideration Hick's account of human nature. Hick as we have seen endorses the Irenaeus approach of human creation. He holds that human beings are created immature and finite. They begin the painful process of soul-making and restoration in ignorance, living in a hostile environment. Through their own interpretation of the world they come to trust and love God. Their vulnerability to evil and suffering makes their journey to reconciliation all the more difficult so by the end of their earthly lives most of humans are not transformed into the beings God desires. Salvation in its fullness involves the actual transformation of human character and Hick himself holds that 'it is an observable fact that this does not usually take place in the course of our present earthly life'.¹⁹¹ The problem with Hick's view here is that the only time human beings are saved is when they have transformed into children of God. If they are not saved that would suggest that they are not perfected yet and consequently this suggests that they are still vulnerable to suffering and evil. If they are still vulnerable to suffering and evil then it is not obvious that they will choose God out of faith and trust. It seems that they will have more or less the same nature which they had in their earthly lives. If the kind of character they had in their earthly lives did not permit them recognizing God or acting in ways which are praised by God then if they have the same character and nature in the lives to come then it is not obvious why or/and how they would be capable in choosing salvation for the right reasons.

Moreover, if human beings have freedom of choice and if they are aware of the reasons (either worked out the reasons or God informed them) as to why they reappear in new worlds and they have memories of their previous lives, another objection can be raised. The objection I have in mind goes along these lines: Suppose certain individuals, knowing that they will have as many opportunities in the future as they require, decide to wait

¹⁹¹ Hick (1976), p. 455.

indefinitely.¹⁹² It may be the case that some individuals would decide that reappearing in other worlds is what they want to do for eternity. If the worlds to come are similar to the earthly one then it is acceptable to hold that there will be pleasures to experience, different things to choose from and so on. Moreover, if you know that death is not the final stage of your existence and God will always give you opportunities to repent and become better, you might find it beneficial not to act morally in every single world since whatever you do you will eventually be saved. Who would not want more chances to achieve things he has not succeeded in achieving, or wanting to know more or experiencing more? It seems logically possible that some individuals will continue to make the wrong choices for eternity and thus never attain perfection.

Hick could reply to this by holding that since God has created human beings for himself and since human nature gravitates towards God then over a potentially infinite number of lives all humans will freely achieve their natural end state. Nevertheless, Hick cannot argue that universalism is a certainty. It is probable that all human beings will be saved but because of the vulnerable nature he ascribes to people and the account of libertarian freedom of choice he proposes, universal salvation cannot be certain.

The fact that some people may continue to perform evil acts in knowing that no matter what they do they will nevertheless be saved leads to another problem. The choices that humans will have in each intermediate life can lead to the development of a bad character, and so the successive lives can make a person worse. I will say more on this in the next section where I examine Hick's claim that the next lives will be progressive in character.

To summarize my argument so far: Firstly, I argued that Hick's account of progressive lives renders human freedom not as significant for salvation as Hick would like it to be. I argued that even if human beings can make significant choices during their intermediate lives nevertheless, their autonomy is crushed since their eternal fate does not depend on those free choices. So they are not genuinely free. Since autonomy is essential for the genuine freedom that Hick talks about, human beings do not have that freedom and salvation is not the product of that freedom. Secondly, I argued that the possibility of

¹⁹² R. D. Geivett stresses this point in arguing for another problem in Hick's view (not about free will as I do). He argues that the message of Christianity is that of urgency and finality. He worries that if progressive lives are what await human beings after their earthly life then two problems come up. Firstly, there is the possibility that some of the human beings will extend their reappearances as long as they want. There will be no definite point where they will want reconciliation with God and we will have an infinite series of lives. Secondly, it is against the message of the scriptures and the saints who speak of urgency to accept God and finality. See Geivett (1993), p. 222.

having memories of previous lives in the lives to come presents the following problem for Hick: human beings might choose salvation for the wrong reasons or might deliberately prolong their residence in the intermediate states. I am inclined to hold that both reasons (in sections 1.1. and 1.2.) that I offered so far against Hick's account of intermediate states should lead us to hold that there is no guarantee that salvation will be the fate all human beings.

3. Can we speak of progressive lives?

God, according to Hick, gives the opportunity to human beings to grow in morality and spirituality and attain perfection by inhabiting a series of progressive lives lived in other worlds. An essential factor for moral and spiritual development is the occurrence of pain and suffering and the opportunity to choose between good and evil actions. A world which contains challenges to be overcome and significant choices to be made is a better world than one which does not. There are situations in which the experience of some traumatic event frees people and helps them to get in touch with reality.¹⁹³ Since the afterlives exist with the express purpose of giving the opportunity for transformation, their environments may be more challenging in order to ensure human beings' salvation. Hick holds that afterlives may be lived in environments that are similar in structure and nature to the earthly environment. However, if the afterlives exist for moral and spiritual growth and their environments' structure and nature is similar to the earthly one, I argue that it may be the case that some people might never become better people; they might always choose wrong and always deny God's love.¹⁹⁴ Hick does not say if in the next lives there will be opportunities of refusal and diminishment. If pain and suffering are important for moral and spiritual development then they must occur in the intermediate afterlives. If freedom of choice is important for human beings' moral and spiritual development then there must be good and bad things to choose from, there must be pain and suffering to overcome. If humans are free to exercise their freedom of choice, then in an environment which there will be pain and suffering to overcome, there is always the possibility that some human

¹⁹³ Hick holds that divine grace operates in the earthly world in some way or another e.g. traumatic experience makes people see things differently. See Hick (1976), pp. 250–259.

¹⁹⁴ Davis points out this weakness of Hick's theory but he does not discuss it in length, something which I do here. He asks if human beings are going to be as free as they are in the earthly life, from evidence of how human beings behave now, surely we cannot have much hope that they will change in the after lives. See Davis (2001), p. 59. Moreover, he holds that even if an agent reaches the age of moral and spiritual responsibility (whatever this might be) he will not remain morally innocent for long. See Davis (2001), p. 86.

beings will not choose to be reconciled to God in any intermediate life; and if this is the case then Hick's afterlives are not necessarily progressive.

Let us look at a further modified version of the labyrinth scenario to illustrate my point. Imagine that you find yourself in the labyrinth and you have the choice either to remain there or look for the exit. This is your first appearance in the labyrinth and you choose to remain there. However, after a while, you change your mind and you follow the path which leads to the exit. Let us also suppose that before you make it to the exit you die due to old age. The LSS brings you back to life and you wake up in a different part of the labyrinth having again to choose between the two fates. During your time in the labyrinth, you encounter different difficulties and different challenges to the previous time you were in the labyrinth. The same pattern continues for the next fourteen reappearances in the labyrinth. Most of your attempts so far to reach the exit were unsuccessful. However, every time that you reappear in the labyrinth you get better and better at dealing with the different challenges and obstacles. Let us also suppose that on your 15th attempt to reach the exit, and having been extremely good in recognising and evaluating good and bad situations, something happens and you change your mind. A few meters before the exit you are presented with a challenge that you have not encountered before and your choice results in your failure to reach the exit.

If human beings are free to choose between different situations then there is always the possibility that at some point on their way to the exit, or in Hick's case on their attainment of salvation, they might change their mind or they might act in a way which might not reflect the quality of the lives which they have attained. In the case of the labyrinth, I think it is quite possible that you will choose something else over escaping the labyrinth. Experience shows that different situations and events can lead a human being to act in bad/immoral ways and to rebel and to refuse God. If this is possible in the earthly life, why can it not be possible in the afterlives? If the environment in the progressive lives is like the earthly one, or similar to it, a person who has reached a level close to moral and spiritual perfection could choose bad over good. There will be opportunities of refusal and diminishment in an environment which would help the humans' moral and spiritual growth. If it is important that the environment provides opportunities for human beings to exercise their significant freedom, then there is the possibility that some of them will not wish the ultimate good and will not be saved. But why would they choose something different to the exit if they are so close to perfection? What reason would there be for this?

I have said in section 1.2 that those people who have learnt to evaluate good and bad situations might come to a point where they will decide to attain perfection/salvation or the exit for the wrong reasons. Moreover, I have argued that some would continue to act badly if they know that they will reappear in future lives. The choices that humans will have in each intermediate life can lead to the development of a bad character, and so the successive lives can make a person worse. Consider the following analogy: The first time someone has an affair might be difficult for him, he may feel guilty and stressed. However, it makes it easier for him to have more affairs in the future. Once he has had an affair—has done something bad—at once it becomes easier to do it again. In the intermediate lives if an individual believes that it is not really that bad acting contrary to what it is good, it is possible that next time he faces a similar challenge he would find it hard to resist the temptation. Therefore, in this way successive opportunities to do bad things might lead to a person becoming worse.

This last point is closely connected with the fact that a main characteristic of human beings is that they are prone to temptation. It might be the case that they want the ultimate good but there is something else which they prefer. For example, returning to the labyrinthine situation, it might be the case that the challenge which you have to overcome is to refrain from eating from a dining table which is right in front of you. By refraining from doing so you show, firstly, that you obey and respect the LSS's (or God's) warnings and commands, and secondly, that you possess self-discipline (abstinence) which, in the case of Christian tradition, is a virtue. If however, after days and days of overcoming challenges and obstacles you are hungry, you will find that the dinner table with all its goods is quite an attractive choice. In addition, if you know that there is really nothing to lose in eating from that dinner table since you know that you will come back to the labyrinth (see criticism 1.2.), there will be nothing really to keep you from eating it. If a person is free to exercise his freedom of choice, then in an environment in which there will be pain and suffering to overcome, there is no guarantee that he will choose to be reconciled to God in any intermediate life. Successive lives which include pain and suffering do not guarantee that the choices which each individual makes will be towards the good.

Knowing that something is good and knowing that there are good reasons to choose something good over something bad does not necessarily entail that our choices will be influenced by such knowledge and thus that we will always act in the right way. In the case of the dinner table, my desire for food overrides the LSS's or God's will. I do not claim that knowledge of God's plan or for what is a good or a valuable choice for us will have no

impact on our behaviour and character, but I think that even then it is still possible for human beings to rebel and refuse God's love. Moreover, it is a common feature in every day life that people do not always do the right thing even if they have enough good reasons to do so. It is evident that people defy authority; there will always be those who do not agree or who think that they know better. In the case of the afterlives what would be intriguing to those who find themselves in these lives is that they know that they can live another life after this one. It may be the case that they like the fact that they will live another life; this leads them to think that it is fine to fail to be reconciled to God (or reach for the exit).

Recall that in section 2, I have argued that the description which Hick gives to human beings' nature is one which does not guarantee that humans will act well or according to God's plan in each and every situation in which they find themselves. Since their salvation can only be guaranteed once they are transformed into 'children of God' it is not obvious that while in the process of transformation or soul-making they will not choose something less than what is best for them; especially if they are still vulnerable to the temptations of their imperfect environment and they carry an imperfect nature.

If Hick is not convinced so far, we can think of examples from the Judaeo-Christian tradition which show that people, even if they were in God's presence and knew what the right thing to do was, exercised their free will and disobeyed nevertheless.¹⁹⁵ An example to support my claim can be found in the Old Testament in the story of Moses and the water from the rock.¹⁹⁶ Moses was in the presence of God. As far as the scriptures hold, the people in the Old Testament could talk to God, and God was present to those who believed in him. This is the story: The people of Israel became thirsty while wandering in the desert after their flight from Egypt. The people began fighting and grumbling with Moses, who asked for help from God. God listened to his call and told him to touch with his hand a rock so that water would come out. But, as the story goes, Moses disobeyed God. He did not touch the rock with his hand but with his stick, and after that we are informed that his punishment was not to see the Promised Land. This example shows that even if human beings have knowledge of God and know what the right thing to do is, it is still possible that some will disobey or act in bad ways because human beings exercise their freedom of choice.

¹⁹⁵ Hick holds that figures such as Mother Teresa or/and saints even if closer to moral and spiritual perfection are still vulnerable to temptations despite their closeness to God.

¹⁹⁶ Old Testament, Exodus 17:1–7

This brings us to my second point of criticism. If in the lives to come there is the possibility of refusing God then it seems that not all lives will be progressive in character.¹⁹⁷ The afterlives will not necessarily be progressive. If some human beings do not grow in morality and spirituality during one progressive life but become worse then I do not think that there is any good reason to hold that their next life will be a progressive one.

Let us return to the labyrinth scenario and suppose that on your 15th time in the labyrinth you refused to find the exit and you have woken up for the 16th time in the labyrinth. According to Hick, the experiences which you will go through this time will be different than last time. This is because he believes that each (future) life is different than previous lives because its content depends on your level of moral and spiritual progress which entail that you require different experiences in each after life. If during your 15th reappearance in the labyrinth you not only chose something else over the exit but also made that choice on reasons which were different than the reasons you acted on during your 14th reappearance, then I will assume that the life you will have in your 16th appearance in the labyrinth will be a step back from the one which you have had in the 15th time. This is because the good character which you developed up to a point in the 15th visit to the labyrinth was ‘destroyed’ when you refused to exit the labyrinth. The 16th time might be a life in which you still have to progress into a child of God, but the life you will live will not have the character which your 15th reappearance had. It will be a step back for you.

Extrapolating from the labyrinthine scenario, I want to hold that if some human beings do not grow in morality and spirituality in one progressive life but become ‘worse’ or stay the same because they make the wrong choices, then their next afterlife will not be a progressive one. Reappearing in the labyrinth for the 16th time with a character which represents a level of moral development which is not as great as the one in the 15th time would suggest that it is not a progressive life. There will be no progress made by you during your 15th reappearance, so it is not obvious how your 16th reappearance would be progressive. If human beings have genuine freedom to choose to perform different acts then it is not obvious that they will choose God. If they choose not to act according to God’s will, then their next intermediate life would not be at a level of moral development as high as in their previous life so it cannot be a progressive one. If it is not a progressive one then there is no guarantee that there will be a point when all will achieve salvation.

¹⁹⁷ Hick says that progressively ‘higher’ worlds are worlds which are the environment of ever more morally and spiritually perfect modes of existence. See Hick (1976), p. 463.

4. Epistemic distance and genuine freedom

Hick holds that the ‘epistemic distance’ caused by God’s hiddenness is a required measure for genuine human freedom. ‘Epistemic distance’ is not distance in space but in knowledge. In order for human beings to live as free finite persons in God’s presence, God must not be evident to them.¹⁹⁸ In order to have significant autonomy in relation to God, humans must be in epistemic distance from God. Hick says that God has made the world to look ‘as if there were no God’. He maintains that ‘the world must be to man, to some extent at least, *etsi deus non daretur*, “as if there were no God”. God must be a hidden God, veiled by His creation’.¹⁹⁹ God can make room for human freedom only if he is hidden and at the same time ‘readily found by those who are willing to exist in the divine presence’.²⁰⁰ The ‘soul-making’ process can only be realized in this setting. The freedom to choose to love God is guaranteed by the creation of human creatures which are prone to suffering and pain but which also assures that the choice to love God will not be coerced in any way. In a similar way, the freedom to make a voluntary cognitive choice to believe that God exists is assured by the fact that the world can be interpreted without reference to God.

Given Hick’s ‘soul-making theodicy’, in which suffering and pain are essential elements for the transformation of human beings and their salvation, and given Hick’s notion of ‘epistemic distance’ as a required element for genuine freedom and autonomy I propose the following criticisms:

1. If God remains hidden in the lives to come, then there is no guarantee that people will believe in His existence and consequently, no guarantee that they will love Him.
2. The *Bardo* state, which Hick presents, is one way for God to reveal himself to human beings. That is, human beings can understand through their experience of the *Bardo* state that God, or something analogous i.e. a being with supreme power and knowledge, exists. It seems that God does not remain hidden in the lives to come.

¹⁹⁸ John Hick, *The Fifth Dimension: An Exploration of the Spiritual Realm* (Oxford: One World, 2004), p. 43.

¹⁹⁹ John Hick, *Arguments for the Existence of God* (London & Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1970), p. 318.

²⁰⁰ Hick (2004), pp. 43–44.

Firstly, according to Hick, God is hidden in the earthly life. Humans come to believe in God's existence and consequently come to love Him only by willing to believe in God. However, it is evident that humans have been created in an environment with real pain and suffering but this is not fact enough evidence on its own to justify belief in God. Most human beings have not believed in God's existence and have not acted according to God's will by the time of their death. The purpose of the afterlives, in Hick's account, is to provide this opportunity; to believe in God and come to love Him. I argue that if freedom of choice is important and can be genuine only if God remains hidden then God has to remain hidden in their afterlives as well. Hick holds that it is the environment around us and our cognitive freedom which help us interpret the world as a place of soul-making and acknowledge that God exists and so believe in Him and love Him. If awareness of God's existence comes only through faith that He exists and this is the case in the afterlives then there is no guarantee that anyone will come to God in faith and love. If there is no more evidence for God's existence in the afterlives than there is in the earthly world, and if the environment in the afterlives is similar to the earthly environment, then it is not obvious that the process of restoration which Hick has in mind will ever be fulfilled or even begin in the case of the worst of sinners. The afterlives will not guarantee more success in salvation for all than the earthly life. With no guidance in the afterlife then it would seem that the process that Hick has in mind will be endless and does not guarantee that all will come to God in faith.

A person has genuine freedom, in Hick's view, when he is able to understand, to choose and decide between alternative courses of action. I argued that to believe in God's existence presupposes that the individual knows what the alternatives are and makes a free choice to act. So how can people in the afterlives know what is morally appropriate and how can they achieve salvation if God is hidden from them? An important aspect of Hick's account is that religious experience comes to those who believe. Faith is required in order to realize that you live a virtuous life in the presence of God. Oddly, as a person cannot have a religious experience unless he already believes in the existence of God. It would seem that the people in the afterlives would have to believe in the existence of God and then the evidence will become obvious.²⁰¹ In the case of the worst sinners who have never

²⁰¹ Robert Mesle makes a similar observation when examining Hick's argument on God's hiddenness. He argues that '[t]o say that we must first make the deeper moral commitment to love God and then the evidence will become obvious is simply to beg the question...A genuinely free choice about faith must presuppose that we know what we are choosing for or against'. See Robert Mesle, 'Does God Hide from Us?: John Hick and Process Theology on Faith, Freedom and Theodicy', *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 24, No. 1/2, The Problem of Evil (Jul. - Sep., 1988), p. 103.

looked for God, the process of restoration may not even start.²⁰² Moreover, in the case of those who are in some sense virtuous but non-religious, it is not obvious that the process of restoration will ever come to an end even for them. If the process of restoration begins once humans believe in God's existence it is not clear that restoration will come to completion. Those human beings who will be reappearing in other lives would be in the same state as they were in their earthly lives. They would be ignorant of God's existence in an environment in which they have to find God themselves.

Moreover, if the environments that the people will find themselves in are of pain and suffering, and with no evidence of God's presence, I do not see how they can learn to love a God who not only does not give them any signs of His existence but also lets them suffer in order to achieve reconciliation. If from the beginning the individual does not believe in God's existence then the pain and suffering which he will have to suffer in order to begin the process of restoration will not be experienced as something which will lead to a greater good—reconciliation with God. The pain and suffering will not be experienced differently than the way it was experienced in the earthly life and the question will remain, why is there so much evil in the world?

Secondly, Hick holds that every time human beings die, before they reappear in the next world, they would go through the *Bardo* state in which they are challenged in various ways. The purpose of this state is mainly for self-discovery. Depending on their response to these challenges, God relocates them in appropriate worlds. We might say that the *Bardo* state is one way for God to reveal Himself to human beings. That is, human beings can understand, through their experience of the *Bardo* state that God, or something similar i.e. a being with supreme power and knowledge, exists.

If human beings can recognize some, let us say, of God's characteristics during their experiences in the *Bardo* state and thus acknowledge God's existence then it seems that God is not hidden in the sense that Hick wants to hold. If they know that God exists in some way or another then it would seem that the genuine freedom which Hick talks about is not available anymore. The existence of the *Bardo* state and the existence of the afterlives undermine Hick's notion of 'epistemic distance'. If there is no 'epistemic

²⁰² Paul Helm asks Hick to explain how God cannot be known by human beings while, on the one hand, believing that all religious positions are partial insights into one infinite whole, and on the other hand, claiming that God cannot be definitely known by anyone. Paul Helm, 'Are they That Be Saved?' in *Universalism and the Doctrine of Hell*, Nigel M. de S. Cameron, ed. (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1992), p. 262.

distance' then, and if we also have in mind that Hick argues that 'epistemic distance' is a necessary element for genuine human freedom, we have to conclude that God does not leave any room for genuine human autonomy. If God reveals himself to His human creatures, making clear that He exists it seems that He violates the same autonomy and freedom which He gave them in the first place. Moreover, we may say that only in the first life, which is according to Hick the earthly life, God is hidden, and so only in that initial life do human beings have genuine freedom of choice. Once they begin to reappear in other environments and worlds, the importance of the 'epistemic distance' is undermined and Hick's notion of human freedom is at risk.²⁰³

Furthermore, even if people would have knowledge that God exists this, nevertheless, is not enough to achieve salvation. Hick argues that humans not only have to believe in God's existence but they also have to love Him. I argued in section three, that human beings can act against God's will and are free to choose something bad even if they have good reasons not to. Even if God reveals Himself to human beings in order to assist them, let us say, in searching for Him it is not obvious that they will come to love Him. Even if humans have an awareness of God from the *Bardo* state and have freedom of choice this does not entail that it is impossible that some will refuse God in every single life.

To summarize my arguments: Firstly, Hick's notion of 'epistemic distance' and his account of God's hiddenness present some intractable problems for his account. God's hiddenness and 'epistemic distance' are important for genuine human freedom. God is hidden in the earthly life and it is up to humans to choose whether or not to believe in Him and love Him. Most humans die without ever knowing God and His love and so God gives more opportunities to make this happen in future lives. If humans are to have genuine freedom in the lives to come then God has to remain hidden. However, if in the afterlives God remains hidden and the environment in which humans are set is an environment of real and apparent suffering and pain similar to the earthly environment then there is no guarantee that people will believe in God's existence and love Him. Secondly, the

²⁰³ I am aware that William Rowe has an objection which uses the same argument as me in 'Paradox and Promise—Hick's solution to the Problem of Evil'. His argument, contrary to mine, focuses on God's goodness. He argues against the possibility of having genuine freedom and that a notion of 'epistemic distance' seems useless. He holds that God creating human beings in an 'epistemic distance' from Him does not seem like the action of a good God. He agrees that if God were present to His human beings then they would be compelled to respond to Him. However, even if human beings will have a very good reason to respond to God, it would not compel them to do so. Therefore, 'epistemic distance' is not necessary for genuine freedom and it is questionable what good is served by the human beings' state of 'epistemic distance' from God. See William Rowe, 'Paradox and Promise: Hick's Solution to the Problem of Evil', in *Problems in the Philosophy of Religion: Critical Studies of the Work of John Hick*, H. Hewitt Jr., ed. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991), p. 115.

existence of the *Bardo* state and the existence of the afterlives, I argue, undermine Hick's notion of freedom. The existence of the *Bardo* state puts pressure on Hick's notion of 'epistemic distance' and the importance of the notion of God's hiddenness. If humans know that God exists then the 'epistemic distance' is compromised and so the genuine human freedom which God has supposedly given them.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I argued that Hick fails to show that salvation is guaranteed for each individual life. Firstly, if Hick wishes to maintain that human beings have genuine freedom, he will have to permit their eternal fate to be based on the choices they make and the character which they cultivate for themselves. If he does so, then he must concede that there is no guarantee that some people will come to God in faith and trust. Secondly, I argued that the possibility of having memories of previous lives in the lives to come presents the following problem for Hick: human beings might choose salvation for the wrong reasons or might deliberately choose to prolong their residence in the intermediate states. Both of these reasons suggest that there is no guarantee that all will be saved. Thirdly, since the intermediate afterlives occur in environments similar to the earthly one there should be opportunities of dismissal and refusal similar to these available in the earthly life. If an individual can exercise his freedom of choice in such an environment then clearly there is no guarantee that he will choose not to be reconciled to God in any life, so Hick's afterlives are not necessarily progressive. Finally, I argued that reconciliation with God cannot be achieved if humans do not exercise freedom which is warranted by God's hiddenness. On the other hand, salvation is not guaranteed if humans have no awareness of God. I conclude that Hick's account of progressive afterlives makes his universalism weak and leads us to reject it.

In the next chapter, I examine Thomas Talbott's account. Talbott, like Hick, argues that God's love demands that all will be reconciled to Him in the end. His rejection of the doctrine of hell differs from Hick's account in that he argues that no one could make a free and responsible choice to reject God's love in light of the eternal misery of hell. To this account I now turn.

Chapter Four: Thomas Talbott's Universalism

Introduction

Thomas Talbott rejects the doctrine of eternal hell in favour of Christian necessary universalism.²⁰⁴ He argues that it is necessarily true that if God is the all-powerful and all-loving being which Christianity affirms, then all human beings will be saved in the end. It is logically impossible that some people will, despite God's best efforts to save them, freely and irrevocably reject God and thus separate themselves from God forever.²⁰⁵

Talbott's account of universal salvation hinges on three important concepts: (i) his concept of God's loving nature, (ii) his concept of free and responsible choice and (iii) his concept of post-mortem punishment as 'forcibly imposed punishment'. Talbott holds that human creation is a process whereby God, firstly, brings all His human beings into being as independent and rational agents, and secondly, reconciles all both to Himself and to each other.²⁰⁶ An essential part to the whole redemptive process whereby God transforms His human creatures into children of God is that those humans exercise their moral freedom—that they choose freely one way or the other in the environment in which they are placed. All free persons will eventually turn to God in some finite amount of time after becoming fully informed about the source of their supreme happiness. God is love and the source of human happiness. In loving humans God wills for them exactly what, at the most fundamental level, they want for themselves.²⁰⁷ And what they want is to experience supreme happiness. Since God is the source of supreme human happiness, He will seek to promote of necessity this kind of happiness in every single person and so will save all in the end. Even the worst sinners will be reconciled to God through post-mortem curative

²⁰⁴ Jerry Walls calls Talbott a 'necessary universalist'. See Jerry Walls, 'A hell of a choice: reply to Talbott', *Religious Studies* 40, no. 2 (Jun., 2004), pp. 203–204. Talbott accepts the term in later papers such as Thomas Talbott, 'Misery and Freedom: Reply to Walls', *Religious Studies* 40, no. 2 (Jun., 2004), p. 217.

²⁰⁵ Thomas Talbott, *The Inescapable Love of God* (Universal Publishers, 1999), p. 183; Talbott Thomas 'Providence, Freedom, and Human Destiny' *Religious Studies* 26, no. 2 (Jun., 1990), p. 227; William L. Craig, 'Talbott's Universalism Once More', *Religious Studies* 29, no. 4 (Dec., 1993), p. 500.

²⁰⁶ Thomas Talbott, 'Universalism and the Supposed Oddity of our Earthly Life: Reply to Michael Murray', *Faith and Philosophy* 18, no. 1 (2001b), p. 6.

²⁰⁷ Thomas Talbott, 'Craig on the Possibility of Eternal Damnation', *Religious Studies* 28, no. 4 (Dec., 1992), p. 500.

punishment. God will bring all human beings to the point where they ‘*voluntarily, wholeheartedly, and joyfully submit [their] wills to him*’.²⁰⁸

In this chapter, I argue that Talbott’s universalism fails to convince us that all human beings will be saved in the end by focusing on two of his claims: that God will achieve universal salvation through inflicting unbearable suffering as a forcibly imposed punishment, and that no one can freely reject God’s love. The chapter has two parts. In the first one, I explain Talbott’s main views of God’s loving nature and his relationship with His human beings, his concept of free and responsible choice and his concept of ‘forcibly imposed punishment’. This prepares the ground for the second part of the chapter where I give three arguments to show that Talbott’s accounts of curative punishment and freedom of choice are inadequate to show how salvation is guaranteed to each and every individual being and so give us no good reason to accept the universalist thesis.

²⁰⁸ Talbott (2001b), p. 6.

Part I

1. God's relationship with His human creatures and human disobedience

The argument that Talbott proposes as to why it is impossible not to choose God arises from his view of what makes a choice or decision coherent, and his view of God's nature and His relationship with His human creatures. To explain why a decision freely to reject God is incoherent and hence impossible, Talbott offers an account of what it might mean to embrace an eternal destiny. According to Talbott, one freely chooses an eternal destiny only under the following three necessary conditions:

- (i) the choice must be 'fully informed'
- (ii) the agent has to have 'a minimal degree of rationality'
- (iii) a person 'never comes to regret the choice' once the person making the choice gets what he wants.²⁰⁹

A fully informed decision is defined as a decision which does not rest upon 'ignorance', 'misinformation' or 'deception' of any kind and which is not influenced by bondage to unhealthy desires. A person freely chooses an eternal destiny only if he has full understanding of exactly what he chooses.

The second necessary condition of free choice is 'a minimal degree of rationality on the part of the one who acts freely'.²¹⁰ Talbott oddly enough does not give a clear account of what it means for someone to have a minimal degree of rationality. This creates a problem for his account which I examine in the second part of the chapter.

One freely chooses an eternal destiny if he never comes to regret the choice he has made at some later time.²¹¹ If someone comes to regret a choice—that is wishing that he had never made it in the first place—that would prove either that he 'incorrectly assessed some aspect

²⁰⁹ Thomas Talbott, 'Freedom, Damnation, and the Power to Sin with Impunity', *Religious Studies* 37, no. 4 (Dec., 2001a), p. 419.

²¹⁰ Talbott (1999), p. 184; Also see Thomas Talbott, 'God, Freedom and Human Agency', *Faith and Philosophy* 26, no. 4 (Oct., 2009), pp. 390–391

²¹¹ Talbott (2001a), p. 419.

of the choice when making it, in which case it was not fully informed' or the choice was determined by some kind of compulsion in which case it was not truly free.²¹² In the case where human free choices have unintended or unforeseen consequences, and these consequences are such that if they were foreseen someone would have chosen otherwise, then those consequences have not been freely embraced.²¹³ So Talbott holds that someone freely embraces an eternal destiny and never comes to regret the chosen destiny if he pursues that destiny both in his original choice as well as later, he attains it at the end, and possesses 'full disclosure of truth about the nature of that destiny'.²¹⁴

After presenting the conditions for freely embracing an eternal destiny, Talbott turns to investigate what it would mean for someone to make a free and fully informed decision to reject God forever. Talbott distinguishes two senses in which a person might reject God. He holds that

[i]f a person refuses to be reconciled to God and the person's refusal does not rest upon ignorance, or misinformation, or deception of any kind then, let us say that the person has made *a fully informed* decision to reject God; but if the person refuses to be reconciled to God and the person's refusal *does* rest upon ignorance or deception of some kind, then let us say that the person has made *a less than fully informed* decision to reject God.²¹⁵

Regarding the second sense of someone rejecting God, Talbott argues that any decision to reject God that arises from ignorance, misinformation, deception and bondage to unhealthy desires is by definition not fully informed. Hence the destiny apart from God is not freely embraced.²¹⁶ These conditions are obstacles to free choice on his conception. If someone is ignorant or deceived about the true consequences of his choices then he cannot embrace those consequences freely. If someone suffers from a deception which does not permit him to see God's true nature then he cannot reject the true God freely.²¹⁷ A person who rejects a caricature of a god, instead of the true God and chooses an eternal destiny without full appreciation of what this destiny entails, does not freely embrace that destiny.²¹⁸ Finally, if

²¹² Ibid., p. 419.

²¹³ Talbott distinguishes between free choices and their unintended outcomes, the latter of which by definition, Talbott says, are not freely embraced and may even occur against one's will. Moreover, in the case of someone who foresees the bad consequences of his actions as a 'potential danger' or a 'practical certainty', but are nevertheless unintended, then 'punishment...is not freely chosen but it is forcibly imposed against a person's will'. See Talbott (2001a), pp. 418–419.

²¹⁴ Ibid., p. 420.

²¹⁵ Talbott (1999), p. 186. See also Talbott (1992), p. 500.

²¹⁶ Talbott (2001a), p. 420.

²¹⁷ Talbott (1999), p. 187.

²¹⁸ Talbott (2001a), p. 419. This is what happens when one is deceived about the true nature of God.

someone is in bondage to unhealthy desires this means that he is overwhelmed by these desires so that they causally necessitate his choice of the object of desire and so he cannot desire anything apart from those objects. Talbott argues that as long as human beings are subject to these conditions—ignorance, misinformation, deception and bondage to unhealthy desires—they will ‘undoubtedly misjudge their real wants and yearnings repeatedly and especially the means of satisfying them’.²¹⁹ Ignorance, deception, misinformation and bondage to unhealthy desires render a less than fully informed decision to reject God intelligible, but also render it less than fully free.²²⁰

Regarding the first sense of someone rejecting God, Talbott argues that if a person *is* fully informed, then there will be no coherent motive for a decision to reject God. The impossibility of someone having a coherent motive for rejecting God forever gains its force from Talbott’s particular view of God’s metaphysical nature and His relationship with His human creatures.

God is love and the ultimate source of human happiness. As a loving creator, He seeks to promote each human being’s best interest. In loving human beings, God wills for them only what they, at the most fundamental level, will for themselves. He wills for them that they should experience ‘supreme happiness’, that their ‘deepest yearnings should be satisfied’ and that all their ‘needs should be met’.²²¹ Since what is best for human beings is supreme happiness, and since God is the ultimate source of all human happiness it follows that separation from God will only lead to misery and suffering. A person, says Talbott, cannot reject the ultimate source of happiness without rejecting his ‘deepest desires and yearnings and without choosing perpetual misery ... as well’.²²² Given that God is the ultimate source of human happiness, it follows not only that nothing seems to qualify as a motive for rejecting God, but also that anyone in a position to make a fully informed decision would have the strongest conceivable motive not to reject God.²²³ Once someone sees clearly that God is the ultimate source of human happiness and that separation from God can bring only greater and greater misery into his life and into the lives of others, ‘an intelligible motive for such rebellion no longer seems possible’.²²⁴

²¹⁹ Ibid., p. 421.

²²⁰ Talbott (1999), p. 187.

²²¹ Talbott (2001a), p. 421.

²²² Ibid., pp. 423–424.

²²³ Talbott (1992), p. 501; Craig 1993, p. 501.

²²⁴ Talbott (1999), p. 186.

Talbott argues that experience shows that human beings may jeopardize some future good in order to satisfy some present desire, especially if they only have an abstract knowledge of some possible danger lurking in the distant future. As long as misery lies in the distant future, someone can discount it or not assign it the appropriate weight. However, Talbott holds that once intense misery ‘thrusters itself into immediate consciousness, it becomes harder and harder and finally impossible to ignore’.²²⁵ So a person in a state of prolonged misery, such as the state the damned will experience in hell, would know all the relevant facts about the source of human happiness and would suffer from no more illusions about his misery or its source. Knowing these things, he would have no possible motive for freely embracing a destiny apart from God.²²⁶ A decision to embrace a destiny apart from God cannot survive without regret once there has been a full disclosure of truth about that chosen destiny.²²⁷

It is important to have in mind that Talbott, like most universalists, affirms libertarian freedom.²²⁸ A necessary condition to this kind of freedom, he says, is absolute clarity of vision. Let me explain this notion. His view that each person will come to embrace God freely in the libertarian sense centres on a particular view which he has on first-person accounts of dramatic conversions. In order to hold that the choice for reconciliation to God is free in a non-deterministic way he argues for the possibility of the right kind of compulsion by which God would elicit from a sinner an act of submission full of love. He describes the right kind of compulsion as:

[a] stunning revelation...one that provides clear vision and *compelling evidence*, thereby altering one’s belief’s in a perfectly rational way [and which] does not compel behavior in the same way that threatening someone with a sword might. A sword...provides no evidence for the belief its wielder seeks to influence and therefore has no power to alter such a belief in some rational way.²²⁹

Clarity of vision and understanding, or even a stunning revelation of truth, removes every reason for rejecting God and provides compelling reasons to accept God’s love. If someone is fully informed, then he has clarity of vision about what is in his best interest—that God

²²⁵ Talbott (2001a), p. 423. Talbott uses the term misery for pain

²²⁶ Ibid., p. 423.

²²⁷ Ibid., p. 420.

²²⁸ Like John Hick, Talbott endorses a modified libertarian view of freedom. Firstly, he argues against the standard libertarian analysis of freedom and that this analysis involves two crucial claims: (i) a person S performs an action A freely at some time t only if it should also be within S’s power at t to refrain from A at t. And (ii) it is within S’s power at t to refrain from A at t only if refraining from A at t is psychologically possible for S at t. Secondly, he argues against any other analysis implying that we do the right thing freely only when acting wrongly remains a psychological possibility. See Talbott (2001a), p. 426.

²²⁹ Ibid., p. 427.

is the source of supreme happiness. One cannot then make a fully informed decision to reject God. If, however, while knowing what is best for him, he continually rejects his own deepest desires and yearnings and chooses perpetual misery for himself, he exhibits a kind of irrationality which is incompatible with free choice.²³⁰ If a fully informed person would have the strongest conceivable motive not to reject God and the strongest conceivable motive to be reconciled to God then a fully informed decision to reject God would have to be irrational in a very strong sense, but also impossible.²³¹ It is not possible that an individual would make a fully informed but free decision to reject God.

Talbott concludes that there is no coherent motive to reject God. If a person is not fully informed then he is no position to justifiably reject the true God, and if he is fully informed then he is incapable of rejecting God. In neither case is a person free to reject the true God. The idea of a person rejecting God forever 'is deeply incoherent'.²³² Whereas a freely embraced destiny in fellowship with God is quite possible, a freely embraced destiny apart from God seems not to be possible at all.²³³

Talbott's argument that fully informed choice can never lead us to reject God, if correct, is sufficient to defend the impossibility to someone rejecting God forever. Talbott also has another argument in defending the logical impossibility of someone rejecting God forever that I present in the following section.

2. No one can reject freely and irrevocably God forever

The logical impossibility of someone rejecting God forever is defended by Talbott with a two-fold thesis:

first, God loves all created persons only if it is his intention to secure blessedness—that is supreme worthwhile happiness—for each of them, and

²³⁰ Talbott (1992), pp. 501–502. See also Talbott (1999), p. 184 and p. 186.

²³¹ Talbott illustrates this point with the example of the stove. He holds that if 'those freely choosing to burn themselves have a normal nervous system, experience normal sensations of pain, and are rational enough to qualify as free agents, then such a statement makes no coherent sense at all'. See Talbott (2001a), p. 429 and Talbott (1992), p. 501.

²³² Talbott (1999), p. 189.

²³³ Talbott (2001a), p. 421.

second, that the eternal misery of a single person would undermine the blessedness of all others.²³⁴

According to Talbott, blessedness or supremely worthwhile happiness is the kind of happiness that could survive a complete disclosure of truth about the universe. It is the kind of happiness which cannot rest upon deception or false beliefs. It is also the kind of happiness that one possesses only when one is filled with love for others.

Given the above conditions, Talbott argues that it is logically impossible that God could produce such happiness in some created persons without also producing it in all others.²³⁵ A loving creator would, of necessity, seek to promote this kind of happiness in his loved ones.²³⁶ Talbott holds that God's love is inclusive. That is, it binds people's interests together. Blessedness in one person requires blessedness in others and one person's ruin implies the ruin of others.²³⁷ The choice of rejecting God forever would undermine the very possibility of supreme worthwhile happiness both in the one making the choice and in everyone else.²³⁸ The misery of those in hell would inevitably undermine that blessedness of those in heaven. The more one is filled with love for others, the unhappier one becomes in knowing the unhappiness of his loved ones. If the blessed know that their loved ones are in hell afflicted with unbearable suffering, and know that God could have saved them but did not, they can never be happy.²³⁹ To love God, says Talbott, would entail the blessed respecting God, but also approving of his actions, and being grateful for what he has done for them and bringing their will into conformity with his.²⁴⁰ If the blessed know that God could have saved their loved ones but did not, then the redeemed cannot be truly happy in the presence of God and so cannot truly love him. Thus, necessarily, God would not create a world in which some persons are damned and in which they freely reject God forever.²⁴¹

²³⁴ Talbott (1992), p. 507.

²³⁵ Ibid., p. 507.

²³⁶ Talbott (1999), p. 136. Talbott here agrees with Swinburne in 'Heaven and Hell' that happiness is not something that leads to boredom or is the absence of unpleasant sensation and it cannot arise from false beliefs.

²³⁷ Ibid., p. 134.

²³⁸ Ibid., pp. 198–199. What Talbott has in mind here is the 'irreparable harm' done to the redeemed who must suffer the agony of seeing their loved ones who have rejected God's grace eternally damned. An all-powerful and all-loving God would not permit His human creatures to suffer irreparable harm, that is, harm that not even Omnipotence could ever repair or cancel out at some later time.

²³⁹ Some philosophers, such as W. Craig and S. Kershnar argue that it is not obvious that an individual (in this case the blessed in heaven) ought to suffer infinitely at the thought of others receiving their infinite but deserved suffering. I do not examine this argument in this thesis. For more see S. Kershnar, 'The Injustice of Hell', *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 58 (2005), p. 104. William L. Craig, 'Talbott's Universalism', *Religious Studies* 27, no. 3 (Sep., 1991), p. 305.

²⁴⁰ Talbott (1999), p. 140.

²⁴¹ See Talbott (1992), p. 504. See also, Craig (1993), p. 500 and Craig (1991), p. 305.

Given the Christian understanding of God—that of a being who is all-wise, all powerful and all-loving—Talbot maintains that ‘the very idea of someone making a free and fully informed decision to reject God forever, or of someone freely embracing an eternal destiny apart from God, is deeply incoherent and therefore logically impossible’.²⁴² But a universalist account is incomplete without an account of how the sinners will come to repent for their evil actions and request reconciliation. Talbot, just like Hick, gives us an account of what the next life holds for the sinners, to which I turn now.

3. Punishment and the life to come

In the introduction of the thesis, we saw that most universalists do not reject the idea of unbearable suffering in the life to come. On the contrary, they argue that most people will go through temporary punishment in order to achieve salvation. Suffering from punishment is important for redemption since it educates and restores the sinner’s moral character. Talbot argues that hell might be a place of unbearable suffering; however, it would be a merely temporary state.²⁴³ His universalism gains force from a particular view he endorses of hell as ‘forcibly imposed punishment’ for sin, rather than as a freely embraced condition.²⁴⁴ Hell, he argues, will be *compelling evidence* to change the sinners’ hearts. He does not understand ‘unbearable suffering’ and ‘forcibly imposed punishment’ in the same way that they are understood in traditional accounts of hell. He holds that the ‘good in even the worst of sinners—the indestructible image of God if you will—can itself become a source of “unbearable suffering”’.²⁴⁵ That is, a sinner’s sorrow, remorse and guilt would become a source of unbearable torment for the sinner; and as long as these unforeseen and unintended consequences of his evil actions ‘fall under God’s providential control and occur entirely against’ the sinner’s will, they are in this sense, ‘forcibly imposed’.²⁴⁶ Talbot maintains that insofar God ‘uses a [person’s] suffering as a means of correction, or as a means of encouraging repentance’ we can say that the person has endured a ‘forcibly imposed punishment’ for his evil actions.²⁴⁷

²⁴² Talbot (2001a), p. 421.

²⁴³ Talbot follows Hick when he says that hell is but the continuation of the purgatorial sufferings of this life and so we have no reason to reject the language of unbearable suffering. See Talbot (1999), p. 197.

²⁴⁴ Talbot (2001a), p. 417. Talbot offers this argument against those who hold that hell is freely chosen such as C.S. Lewis, Eleonore Stumps and Jerry Walls.

²⁴⁵ Talbot (2004), p. 218.

²⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 218

²⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 218.

Talbott follows John Hick's account and holds that the purpose of the earthly realm is that of 'soul-making'. It is evident then that the process of 'soul-making' has not come to a completion for some persons by the time of their death and so they are not in a position to accept God's love and thus salvation. This leads Talbott to argue that since God is omnipotent love, He will permit to those who have refused Him to continue to exist in other environments and/or spiritual realms where they can start over and develop a new and better character, and in which God can progressively remove their false beliefs. God would place people in environments similar to the earthly one where they are subject to illusion, deception, real harm and suffering of a temporary kind, and where they are required to take some responsibility for their actions.²⁴⁸

Damnation, according to Talbott, is a process whereby the damned gradually learn from experience the true meaning of separation from God. God can change the sinners into children of God by progressively making clear to them that making evil choices and having a vicious character is ultimately not in their true self-interest. In order for this progressive change in character to be guaranteed, God must allow the damned to experience the full reality of what they have chosen, 'however clear a revelation and however irresistible a means of correction such experience might be'.²⁴⁹ A well chosen punishment, he holds, may be the best means of communicating the implications of such rebellion insofar as punishment expresses God's continuing love and forgiving attitude.²⁵⁰ Punishment and forgiveness have the same object and goal—that is, reconciliation. Once the damned clearly understand, i.e. once they are, as Talbott puts it, 'fully informed' that their suffering is the result of their evil actions, and hence all ignorance, deception and bondage to unhealthy desires is removed, there can be no possible motive for continuing to do evil and for rejecting God. Since motiveless choices are impossible, according to Talbott, the damned can thus no longer continue to reject God. If separation from God is a horror that no one rational enough to qualify as a free agent could possibly prefer to the bliss of union

²⁴⁸ Talbott argues that God 'can think in terms of a billion lifetimes, a billion different realms and universes and sets of appearances, a billion ways (including a billion different forms of deception) to prevent the choices that other persons make from having the wrong kind of influence upon a given choice that [the sinner] makes'. God could engage in deception as a means of correction and redemption if he had a morally sufficient reason. Talbott holds there might be 'spiritual realms which have no physical connection with our universe and which could be especially tailored for those whose cure requires a period of systematic deception'. See Talbott (1992), pp. 506–507.

²⁴⁹ Talbott (2001a), p. 432.

²⁵⁰ Talbott (1999), p. 163. See also Thomas Talbott, 'Punishment, Forgiveness, and Divine Justice', *Religious Studies* 29, no. 2 (Jun., 1993), p. 165.

with God, ‘then the very idea of someone freely embracing forever a life apart from God expresses a logical impossibility’.²⁵¹

It is important to point out that Talbott claims that the more the damned cling to their illusions the more severe will be the means and the more painful the processes whereby God shatters their illusions and frees them from sin.²⁵² The intense misery and unhappiness that their bad actions bring into their lives can serve as a redemptive purpose because they can provide in the end a compelling motive to repent. I argue in a following section, i.e. Part II, sec. 1, that Talbott in fact seems to endorse the kind of compulsion which he earlier tried to avoid—that is compulsion ‘with a sword’. This leads to a serious problem.

²⁵¹ Talbott (2004), p. 220.

²⁵² Talbott (2001b), p. 7.

Part II

As we have seen, Talbott holds that God of necessity will save all human creatures and that reconciliation with God will be gained through the free response of human beings to God's love. It is logically impossible that despite God's best efforts to save all human beings, there will be some that will freely and irrevocably reject him. Talbott argues that there is no coherent motive for rejecting the ultimate source of supreme happiness and, given the relationship between God and His creatures, God in His love and wisdom ensures that in no possible world does a person reject him freely forever. In this part of the chapter, I argue that even if there is a plausible case for universalism, it is still possible that not all will be saved based on the accounts Talbott offers on human freedom of choice and curative punishment. Talbott's account fails to show how all human beings will achieve salvation universalism fails and I give three arguments to defend my claim:

1. Unbearable suffering as forcibly imposed punishment does not guarantee that all sinners will eventually repent and be reconciled to God.
2. Talbott's argument is unsuccessful in showing that the damned cannot freely reject God. He mistakenly takes for granted that free actions exclude irrational acts.
3. Salvation is not the result of human freedom since human autonomy is thwarted.

1. Forcibly imposed punishment and the possibility of universal salvation

While Talbott rejects the idea of hell as eternal, he gives punishment a role in God's salvific dealings with human beings. He seems to have in mind a version of what is more commonly called the therapeutic view of punishment, according to which 'involuntary suffering or coercing treatment is designed and administrated for the purpose of restoring or rehabilitating the wrong doer'.²⁵³ What is interesting here is that Talbott holds that the right kind of punishment—intense misery—can cure the worst sinner given the right amount of time and lead him to accept God's love. I agree that punishment can correct

²⁵³ Robert Holyer, 'Justice and Mercy, A Reply to Thomas Talbott', *Religious Studies* 30, no. 3 (Sep., 1994), p. 292. This kind of punishment is also commonly known as remedial or restorative punishment.

rebellion, but the main problem with Talbott's account is that it is not obvious that the forcibly imposed punishment of unbearable torment will bring about the damned's repentance and acceptance of God. I propose three arguments in support of this claim:

- a. It is not obvious that the 'unbearable suffering' of the sinners in hell which Talbott talks about will lead even the worst of the sinners to accept God's love.²⁵⁴ The description of the source of unbearable suffering as 'the good—the indestructible image of God—within each person' is not enough to guarantee that the damned in hell would not continue to reject God forever. Talbott has to hold that the punishment is such as to make someone completely miserable and completely in pain.
- b. If Talbott modifies his account and takes 'forcibly imposed punishment' to be the kind of punishment that makes someone completely miserable and completely in pain, then Talbott would be endorsing the sort of compulsion he has rejected as inappropriate in the first place.²⁵⁵ This in turn will undermine his claim that repentance and attainment of reconciliation under forcibly imposed punishment are free in a non-determined way.
- c. Whether or not the punishment is truly unbearable, it can induce genuine repentance and reconciliation to God only if punishment is seen as an act of a loving God. Talbott's system does not guarantee that the damned will realize that their punishment is an act of God's love.

Talbott has to show that the kind of punishment he has in mind, firstly, is guaranteed to work so that the sinners will embrace God in faith and love, and secondly, that this kind of punishment does not invalidate human freedom. If we can show this, he faces a dilemma: one which makes his case for necessary universalism much less plausible. He would either have to modify his account of unbearable suffering and forcibly imposed punishment or give up his claim that there will be a point where all sinners will reconcile to God.²⁵⁶

²⁵⁴ Jerry Walls makes this reply to Talbott. See Jerry L. Walls, 'A Hell of a Dilemma: Rejoinder to Talbott', *Religious Studies* 40, no. 2 (Jun., 2004b), p. 226. See also Talbott (2004), p. 218.

²⁵⁵ Walls expresses this worry as well, and adds that if Talbott modifies his account he will undermine his claim that God allows human beings the freedom to move ever farther away from Him. I do not go into the latter claim. See Walls (2004b), p. 227.

²⁵⁶ Walls notices this dilemma as well. See Walls (2004b), p. 226.

a. If suffering is bearable then it is possible that some will resist God

In section three, we have seen that Talbott argues that the good in even the worst of sinners—the indestructible image of God if you will—can itself become a source of ‘unbearable suffering’. So, for example, great suffering such as sorrow, guilt and remorse which results from bad actions can be a source of ‘unbearable torment’.²⁵⁷ The unbearable suffering will be experienced as forcibly imposed punishment for someone as long as it occurs under God’s providential control as a means of correction or as a means of encouraging repentance and is against someone’s will. Talbott illustrates his point by presenting the following case: suppose that a foolish married man has a frivolous affair with a woman who, unbeknownst to him, has an unstable personality. The woman’s fatal attraction to the man drives her to murder his wife and baby. The man’s ensuing sorrow, guilt and remorse, or in Talbott’s view the good / the indestructible image of God can become a source of unbearable suffering to him.²⁵⁸ Since the unintended consequences were not freely chosen, the man’s suffering as a means of correction is forcibly imposed against his will. And this kind of suffering will serve to correct or to encourage repentance. However, the illustration that Talbott offers to explain how this kind of punishment would lead the sinners to repent presents a serious problem for this account. I argue that it does not guarantee that the wicked will be corrected or repent. I offer two reasons in support of my claim.

Firstly, it might be possible in the cases of the worst sinners that the good within them—the indestructible image of God—would not serve as ‘unbearable suffering’. The case which Talbott presents is not a worst case scenario of a sinner. The unfaithful husband who still cares for his family and so feels sorrow and guilt when he finds out what his lover has done to them—killed them—is not the same as the case of murderers, rapists, paedophiles and so on who may not have this kind of relationship with their victims, friends or family. Someone can act in evil ways and feel no remorse about what he has done, whether or not the bad result was foreseen or intended. For example, the man who kills his wife and children because he finds out that his wife has an affair might feel no remorse or guilt if this is indeed what he wants to do. A paedophile, for example, may love his children, in a sick kind of way, but still feels no remorse or guilt for abusing them and messing up their lives for years. These cases show that the sinners do not feel remorse, guilt or sorrow in committing evil acts. I argue that the good / the indestructible image of God is insufficient

²⁵⁷ Talbott (2004), p. 218.

²⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 218.

for these people to be caused unbearable guilty misery. Talbott surprisingly maintains that ‘if the man in our example cared nothing for his wife and baby and had no worthwhile desires at all, then neither would the murders have been a source of torment for him’.²⁵⁹ I find this claim quite strange because he admits that someone who does not have these kinds of feelings or the image of the good cannot suffer unbearable misery. So it seems to me that Talbott might have something else in mind when it comes to the kind of punishment the sinners will have to suffer in order to repent and be reconciled to God. It seems that suffering which comes from the indestructible image of God would not suffice in bringing sinners (at least the worst kind) to repent for their sins and so to be reconciled to God. What he might have in mind is a kind of punishment which would inevitably lead all sinners to repent and accept God’s love. I will say more on this in the following section, when I will suggest that Talbott would have to modify his account of unbearable suffering in order to guarantee that all will be saved.

Secondly, it is possible that the person who commits an evil act feels remorse, guilt and sorrow, nevertheless, is able to switch off these feelings. If the suffering is not truly unbearable but is the kind which results from feelings of remorse, guilt and so on, then it is possible that the wicked will find a way to suppress them and ignore them.²⁶⁰ Consider the following case: a cannibal might feel bad about killing people in order to eat. But at the same time he can rationalize his actions or even stop caring about the pain his actions cause to others by convincing himself that there is nothing else he can do about his condition. He can convince himself that there are no alternative options for him, that he is doing nothing wrong and so it will be best if he just accepts his condition no matter the consequences. Hence feelings of remorse and guilt would cease to affect him.

Of course, Talbott could say that this person is self-deceived and self-deluded in thinking that he does nothing wrong, and that there are no other alternatives to his condition and so his choice is not really free. Based on what Talbott says about what makes an action free this would be true. However, the point I want to make here is not about the nature of the action but about the nature of the punishment which Talbott argues that all sinners will experience—painful emotions stemming from the indestructible image of God. I argue that it is possible that if the ‘forcibly imposed punishment’ is not punishment which makes

²⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 218.

²⁶⁰ Marilyn McCord Adams, as we will see in the following chapter, argues that the feelings of remorse, sympathy etc. will lead even the worst sinners to repent and ask for reconciliation. These feelings, however, contrary to what Talbott argues, will be the result of the direct experience of suffering and pain. See chapter five, Part I, section 1.

someone completely miserable and completely in pain then it is not obvious that the result of such punishment would be repentance. If the suffering, which the sinners will undergo, results from feelings of remorse, guilt, despair and so on, we can hold that some of the wicked, if not all, will become numb to the evilness of their actions and their consequences. They could deal with the torment by suppressing the good that causes the torment.²⁶¹ If the feelings the image of God produces are not a strong enough punishment to break through one's evil nature then Talbott's account cannot guarantee that all sinners will come to God. I will say more, in section three, on the reasons and the possible motives of why one would rather remain in hell forever than accept God. There I will be rejecting Talbott's position that the damned cannot make a free decision to prefer hell to heaven.

In the next section, I argue that Talbott's claim that all sinners will reach a point where they cannot but give in to God's love is convincing if God will indeed inflict forcibly imposed punishment that is more than just the suffering which would result from the indestructible image of God. However, even if Talbott modifies his account in this way it still is vulnerable to criticisms.

b. Unbearable suffering as forcibly imposed punishment

What follows from the above is that Talbott will have to modify his account of unbearable suffering or claim that not all sinners will reach a point where they will accept God's love. Talbott in his paper 'Misery and Freedom: reply to Walls' explains that the expression 'unbearable suffering' in his account is the kind of suffering which 'signifies intense misery of a kind that undermines altogether any capacity for joy or happiness'.²⁶² If the sinner totally misunderstands the source of his misery and moreover the source of supreme happiness, and clings to his illusions despite the suffering they produce, his suffering will become increasingly unbearable. This kind of unbearable suffering will lead the sinners to request reconciliation from God in trust and love. Talbott's approach, however, is still vulnerable to criticism even with this clarification of what is involved in unbearable

²⁶¹ Here I agree with Walls when he argues that there are various ways in dealing with the torment and suppressing the good that causes the torment: one, for example, may rationalize one's actions or cease to care about the issues that are causing the pain. He says that 'this involves a certain degree of dishonesty, self-deception and suppression of one's God given nature but it is a well known observation that one can desensitize his conscience by repeatedly performing precisely those acts that caused one to feel guilt or regret in the first place'. See Walls (2004b), p. 226.

²⁶² Talbott (2004), p. 219.

suffering. He has to give good reasons for thinking that the punishment being increasing misery, firstly, guarantees that the sinners will embrace God in faith and love, and secondly, that this kind of punishment does not invalidate human freedom. I argue that if he holds that misery in hell will be such as to make someone completely miserable and completely in pain then:

- (i) Talbott will have to endorse the sort of compulsion he has rejected as inappropriate
- (ii) This in turn will undermine his claim that repentance and attainment of reconciliation under ‘forcibly imposed punishment’ are free in a non-determined way

Talbott distinguishes two kinds of compulsion that God can use to ensure that all human beings will eventually be reconciled to Him. There is the kind of compulsion caused by stunning revelation which provides ‘clear vision’ and ‘compelling evidence’ thus helping someone to change his beliefs in a perfectly rational way and on the other hand, there is the way of compelling someone’s behaviour with ‘the threat of a sword’ which does not alter someone’s belief in any rational way.²⁶³ He defends the first kind as the right kind of compulsion and argues that the unbearable suffering which the damned will undergo in hell serves as compelling evidence to help them recognize what their best interest is, and the truth about their actions and themselves. It is important here to point out that for someone to have a clear vision is to have knowledge not only of the truths of the universe but also knowledge of God. The damned must gain a meaningful understanding of God as the source of supreme happiness, and an understanding of the relationship between God and them. Human beings must be reconciled to God in love, faith and trust. This is the appropriate loving relationship for God and human beings to have. Without entering and growing in this kind of relationship, there can be no revelation of the truth. Once they come to see what is best for them then they will genuinely want to change themselves and be reconciled to God.

From the above it is obvious that such understanding and knowledge of God can only be attained willingly. It cannot be coerced or ‘implanted’ by any kind of punishment if the damned are to understand God as the source of supreme happiness. However, the kind of punishment that Talbott argues in favour of involves intense and unbearable suffering. If the damned continue to sin and remain unrepentant for their evil actions and their

²⁶³ Talbott (2001a), p. 427.

consequences, then it seems that their misery would become utterly and truly unbearable. If this is the case then it seems that Talbott endorses the second kind of compulsion. If the compelling evidence which God uses to change the damned's beliefs is excruciating pain which becomes more and more unbearable, we can say that God does not use as a way of compulsion the kind of revelation which Talbott defends. God uses 'the force of the sword' to change people's beliefs. If Talbott endorses the sort of compulsion he has rejected as inappropriate, then his claim that repentance and attainment of reconciliation to God under forcibly imposed punishment are free in a non-determined way is false.

It is evident that human beings cannot physically and psychologically bear intense misery and suffering for a long time. They do not have the power or psychological ability to endure constant misery and so under great pressure and pain they 'crack'.²⁶⁴ For example, consider cases of people who are captive to the enemy and who suffer intense suffering, eventually revealing their government's military secrets. These people are no longer able to handle the pain, they give in to their enemy's demands; they conform to the will of their torturer or, in other cases, become mad.

Returning to the case of the damned, if the damned undergo punishment which is experienced as utter misery and suffering it is possible that they will reach a point where they would request salvation instead of damnation. However, this kind of request or choice will not be the appropriate kind of free choice, the kind that Talbott has in mind.²⁶⁵ Talbott holds that those who will choose God will do so in faith, love, and trust. Reconciliation and repentance comes about willingly and so Talbott cannot hold that the choice of accepting God would be determined in any way. If, however, the damned undergo increasing misery, it is possible that their choice will be the result of coercion. If God would inflict greater and greater misery and physical pain on the damned in order to change their beliefs this will either coerce the damned to submit, or will drive them mad and even further away from God. The damned will be coerced in accepting God and so choose salvation for the wrong reasons. The sinner, being incapable of enduring intense misery and excruciating psychological and physical suffering for a long period of time would at some point crack, wish for this to end, and so request salvation. His decision will be solely based on his wish

²⁶⁴ I find that Walls uses the same explanation in order to point out that intense misery will be something which human beings due to their nature will not be able to bear for a long time. See Walls (2004a), p. 226.

²⁶⁵ This problem is similar to the one we examined in Hick's account, that humans unable to handle their reappearances in the afterlives would ask for reconciliation to God but their request would be forced for the wrong reasons.

to avoid further misery and pain. But this kind of coercion would be something that Talbott would want to avoid.

Talbott holds that human beings love God when they respect and approve his actions, are grateful for what he has done for them, and their will conforms to his will.²⁶⁶ If the damned repent so they can escape hell it is obvious that the relationship between God and His human creatures that Talbott has in mind is not achieved. Firstly, it would suggest that they did not approve God's actions. Secondly, it would suggest that they are not grateful for the intense misery they suffered. Thirdly, it would suggest that their will is not in conformity with God's will. From these we can say that the damned do not love God appropriately. If the damned do not love God appropriately and choose salvation in order to avoid more misery and suffering then it is obvious that they do not choose God for the right reasons. If they choose God for the wrong reasons, firstly, we can hold that they do not make a fully informed and thus free and responsible choice to reconcile to God, and secondly, they are not ready to be reconciled to God. Of a sinner who would accept salvation for the wrong reasons we can say that he accepts a caricature of a god, instead of the true God. He hence chooses an eternal destiny without full appreciation of what this destiny entails, and so does not freely embrace this destiny. What follows is that if the sinner does not accept the true God, and so his request for salvation is the result of a less than fully informed decision, then he does not choose God freely.²⁶⁷ Therefore, it is not obvious that the 'forcibly imposed punishment' that Talbott talks about will necessarily elicit a free choice to accept God which is morally significant. If the sinner does not make a free choice to be reconciled to God, obviously he is not ready for salvation and God would not save him. God would have to wait until the damned chooses Him for the right reasons—something that cannot be guaranteed if 'forcibly imposed punishment' can lead someone to request salvation for the wrong reasons. If, however, Talbott holds that God would reconcile to Him even those who have chosen salvation for the wrong reasons, then we will be inclined to say that Talbott goes contrary to his own claim that reconciliation is achieved through love, faith and trust in God.

From these above criticisms we can say that Talbott can either abandon his claim that 'forcibly imposed punishment' guarantees that all will be saved in the end or his claim that salvation will be the result of a freely embraced destiny. In the next section, I focus on

²⁶⁶ Talbott (1999), p. 140.

²⁶⁷ Talbott as we have seen holds that if a person refuses to be reconciled to God and the person's refusal *does* rest upon ignorance, or deception of some kind, then that person has made a *less than fully informed decision* to reject God. See Part I, section 1 in this chapter.

Talbott's claim that 'forcibly imposed punishment' can induce genuine repentance on behalf of the damned. I argue that this genuine repentance can be guaranteed if punishment is experienced as an act of a loving God, but that Talbott's system cannot guarantee that punishment will be experienced as an act of a loving God.

c. It is not obvious that the wicked will accept God's love

Talbott holds that restoration and reconciliation of sinners can be achieved not only through punishment but also through the sinner making amends for his wrong actions in a way that would cancel out the bad consequences of those actions. He holds that a well-chosen punishment may be the best means of communicating an individual's rebellion against God insofar as the punishment expresses God's continuing love. Only when the sinners recognize God as the ultimate being, and their only source of ultimate happiness, through their suffering, will they begin to appreciate the meaning of their punishment and the true nature of their evil deeds. They will then 'be on the road to redemption'.²⁶⁸

What is of importance here is Talbott's claim that only when the damned recognize God as the ultimate being and the source of their happiness will they appreciate their punishment and change their hearts. I argue that punishment can induce genuine repentance and requests for reconciliation to God providing that punishment is seen as an act of a loving God, and also that the sinners are led to recognize their wrong actions and make amends for them. However, Talbott's system, as we have argued, does not guarantee that the damned will accept God's love. It is possible that God would not be recognized as the ultimate loving being by the damned, and, as such, his actions will not be seen as acts of a loving God. So the punishment which the damned undergo would be experienced as a hateful thing. Consequently there may be some sinners who would not accept God.

Talbott holds that the damned in hell will not have direct experience of God. At least not in the same way that the blessed will have. Absolute clarity can be achieved only through a progressive response to God's will in faith, trust and love. Absolute clarity comes when human beings have responded to God's will.²⁶⁹ When humans have this kind of vision then

²⁶⁸ Talbott (1999), p. 176. See also pp. 157–158 and p. 163.

²⁶⁹ This is reminiscent of Hick's account. The restoration process begins only when the individual believes in God's existence and loves God. Without some kind of guidance, the rehabilitation process would not begin. See chapter three, part II, criticism four.

they are capable of freely and happily accepting God. When God, we can imagine, makes His first appearance in hell, of course some sinners will be so bad that they will not be fully informed about God's nature and His intentions towards His human creatures. If the sinners are not 'sufficiently equipped' to appreciate the true God and recognize him as the source of their supreme happiness, then how would the damned know that they are punished instead of hatefully hurt? The kind of punishment which Talbott talks about requires that the wicked person, firstly, accepts the authority of the one who punishes him, and secondly, that he understands that what he did was wrong. If he does not accept the authority of the one who punishes him and the badness of his actions, then he would think that he is unjustly hurt.

I will argue that the forcibly imposed punishment which the damned will have to suffer could have the effect that Talbott argues for—that is, it could lead to knowledge of God's nature and will, and consequently the repentance of the sinners—only if the damned recognize the following. Firstly, they will have to recognize God's authoritative power—that He is the ultimate being and that the intense misery they undergo is a form of remedial punishment. Secondly, they will have to understand that what they did was wrong. In one of his papers however, Talbott says that even if intense misery can reveal that something has gone terribly wrong, it cannot itself cancel the bad consequences of bad choices. It can reveal the true nature of separation, but it may not reveal how to overcome that separation. It can shatter illusions concerning true human needs and the conditions of human happiness, but it cannot by itself teach humans to trust God or to love Him wholeheartedly.²⁷⁰ In response to this, I am inclined to say that without knowing God the damned cannot appreciate their punishment and cannot make amends for their evil acts.

Talbott contends that if God chooses to allow the sinner 'to experience the chosen condition of being separated from every source of human happiness, then the resulting horror will at last shatter any illusion that some good is achievable apart from God'.²⁷¹ However, it is not true that a punishment which is truly unbearable will inevitably shatter the illusions and deceptions which the damned have. It seems that just the opposite would be the case if the damned do not recognize God's authority. And from what has been said so far it is possible that the damned will not recognize the authority of God but might take God's actions to be unfair and believe that the suffering they undergo is unjustly distributed.

²⁷⁰ Talbott (2004), p. 224, footnote 12.

²⁷¹ Ibid., p. 222.

C.S. Lewis in his *The Great Divorce* presents several stories which illustrate well this kind of reaction towards God's authoritative power. I use one here to make my point clearer. According to one of the stories, the traveller, in the story, witnesses the ghost of a man who encounters his murderer. The murderer is not in hell but he has received the beatific vision after he took responsibility for his actions, repented for his sins and asked to be reconciled to God. The murderer is sent to guide and help the ghost man and he asks the ghost man to join him and together reconcile to God. The ghost man, however, replies: 'It's all a clique, all a bloody clique...I'd rather be damned than to go along with you. I came here to get my rights see? ...I did not come here to be treated like a dog...'.²⁷² The ghost man (damned) finds it unfair that his murderer received God's beatific vision and he did not.²⁷³ He finds it insulting that his murderer was sent instead of someone else to help him in his journey to reconciliation. Moreover, he finds it unfair that God did not punish his murderer for taking his life away. This particular member of the damned is in hell for persisting in not recognizing God's will and not forgiving his murderer. As long as the damned does not recognize God's love for those who have repented and have been forgiven for even the worst crimes, and as long as he does not love those who have wronged him, then he can never be reconciled to God.

The above story can help us maintain that the damned would experience the intense suffering and pain they undergo in hell as an unjust and hateful thing in the following circumstances. Firstly, they do not recognize God as the appropriate distributor of punishment. Secondly, they do not realize that their punishment is for their own good. And thirdly, they do not recognize that the only way to escape hell is by realizing the wrongness of their actions. The damned cannot accept and receive forgiveness unless they take responsibility for their evil acts, recognize God as their only source of happiness, and ask for forgiveness. The process of reconciliation can begin only if the damned make a conscious choice to recognize God as the ultimate good. It might be the case that some of the damned would not wish to forget the sufferings and the unfair treatment they (or even their loved ones) have received during their earthly life and so hold a grudge against God. Instead of repenting, they might become angrier and more bitter.²⁷⁴ If punishment is seen

²⁷² C. S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce* (HarperCollins Publishers, 1946), p. 31.

²⁷³ Lewis (1946), p. 31.

²⁷⁴ Walls holds that 'there is nothing that makes such a response (repentance) inevitable. Rather than repent he might be angry and embittered if he believes God allowed the murder of his wife and boy as means of punishment'. See Walls (2004b), p. 226. Also Lewis in some of his stories, such as the story of the mother and her son (pp. 89–94), and the story of the Tragedian, the Dwarf and the Lady (pp. 117–127) shows that some of the damned will be bitter towards God and would rather remain in hell than be reconciled to Him. If the damned do not will joy and love then they will never attain it. In freely choosing one of the seven deadly

as an act of a loving God then it can induce repentance. But if not it will only be experienced as a hateful thing. And if it is experienced as a hateful thing then the damned will not want their wills to conform to a God who is perceived to harm them. If, according to Talbott, human beings have to be fully informed and have to have a minimal degree of rationality in order to be able to recognize God's authority and accept their punishment then lack of these will prevent the damned from appreciating their punishment and accepting God's actions.

I agree with Walls when he maintains that the more the damned move away from God by not recognizing Him as the ultimate source of their happiness and love 'the more [they] harden their hearts and dull their consciences, the more they rationalize their sinful actions, the less they will be inclined to repent and be reconciled to God'.²⁷⁵ If they find God unfair in His dealings with the blessed and the wicked, it is possible that the damned will refuse more and more of the ways in which God attempts to reconcile them to Him. The longer they resist, the easier it may become for them to continue doing so. In this sense, the doors of hell are locked from inside. In this section, I did not argue that Talbott's necessary universalism is false but only that the negation of universalism is consistent. The punishment model which Talbott offers does not guarantee the salvation of all human beings and in particular reconciliation to God which is made out of trust, faith and love in God.

2. Why can we not freely reject God?

As we have seen, Talbott argues that a decision to reject God has to be 'fully informed'. In other words, the decision cannot rest upon ignorance, deception or bondage to unhealthy desires. Given that God wills for His human creatures what they, at the most fundamental level, will for themselves (that is supreme worthwhile happiness), it follows that any person in a position to make a fully informed decision would have the strongest conceivable motive not to reject reconciliation with God.²⁷⁶ Someone who rejects what is best for him—reconciliation to God—without any motive for doing so, but having the strongest conceivable motive for refraining from such a rejection, exhibits irrational

sins (pity, wrong love, fame, beauty, lust, wrath) the damned may wish to remain in hell. See Lewis (1946), p. 109.

²⁷⁵ Walls (2004b), pp. 226–227.

²⁷⁶ Talbott holds that God has the power and wisdom to place every person in a world in circumstances in which they can make a fully informed and positive decision to choose salvation.

behavior. Irrationality is incompatible with free choice. Someone who acts irrationally does not act freely, and a decision to reject God is not free if it is irrational. In this section, I argue that Talbott's argument is not successful in showing that the damned cannot make a free and irrevocable rejection of God. I think that there are two problems with Talbott's argument:

- a. Full disclosure of truth does not guarantee that the sinners will reconcile to God. There is one case widely accepted in Christian tradition in which someone even in the presence of God nevertheless rejected God.
- b. Talbott does not sufficiently explain what 'fully informed' and 'a minimal degree of rationality' mean. They can both be interpreted in such a way that would either make Talbott's account unintelligible or would force him to accept that some sinners will freely reject God.

a. Full disclosure of truth does not guarantee that the sinners will reconcile with God

Talbott argues that only those in heaven can appreciate the full horror of separation from God since they have experienced God's love and wisdom. The inhabitants of heaven find themselves in the best and, as it seems, ultimate circumstances in which their decision to accept God's love and attain it for eternity does not rest upon deception, ignorance or misinformation of any kind. So those who have a full experience of God and have received the beatific vision can never turn away from God.²⁷⁷ However, usually proponents of the doctrine of hell who support libertarian free will respond to Talbott's argument by saying that there is one case widely accepted in Christian Tradition in which someone has made a fully informed decision to reject God—Satan.²⁷⁸ I will use the case of Satan to argue that Talbott's view that no one can reject God once he has a full experience of Him is false.

We can suppose that Satan had made a fully informed decision to reject God. Why suppose that? Satan was in God's presence and if we follow Talbott's argument, someone who is in God's presence and has a full disclosure of truth cannot be ignorant or deceived about

²⁷⁷ Talbott (2004), p. 222.

²⁷⁸ Philosophers such as C. S. Lewis, William L. Craig, Eleonore Stump and others have argued that Satan is a controversial figure in Christian tradition.

God's love, wisdom and intentions. Satan was placed in this situation. If he was in the presence of God and if he had a first hand experience of God's love then he would have the strongest conceivable motive not to reject God. He was able to evaluate what is involved in loving and trusting God and presumably knew that He is the source of supreme happiness. Nevertheless, he did reject God.

Talbott's reply is that Satan's decision to reject God 'hardly illustrates a fully informed' decision.²⁷⁹ Satan still has many illusions which need to be shattered so Satan's decision to reject God was less than fully informed. Talbott seems to hold that by definition no one can ever make a fully informed decision to reject God. As we have seen he argues that even if there is someone who would make a fully informed decision to reject God, he would exhibit an irrational behaviour and as such, his decision to reject God would not be free. Satan acted irrationally and not freely because by rejecting God, Satan shows that he was deluded and self-deceived about what it is best for him. Therefore, his fully informed decision was in fact less than fully informed in that it rested upon some kind of deception because only then he could have rejected God.

What is interesting about Talbott's reply is that he does not say what kind of illusions the ones Satan had are. His answer seems to imply that even in the presence of God some who would have this kind of illusion would not accept God's love. We can assume that these illusions must be of a different kind than regular illusions. Not even God's presence and obvious love can remove them, at least not immediately. The problem that Talbott encounters is that it is possible that some of the damned will make a decision to reject God even if they are placed in the best circumstances if they have this kind of illusion. His system does not guarantee that God will save all human beings in faith, trust and love. Satan was in God's presence and so had first hand experience of God's love and intentions. If those who have a full disclosure of truth and know God's nature can nevertheless make, as Talbott says, a less than fully informed decision to reject God, then there is no guarantee that anyone from the damned will be reconciled to God once God has revealed his true nature and intentions.²⁸⁰ Even in God's presence, some of the damned will not recognize Him as their source of supreme happiness. So there must be something which compels the sinners even in God's presence to turn away from God. I will come back to this in the following section.

²⁷⁹ Talbott (1992), pp. 500–501.

²⁸⁰ This claim creates a problem for those who support a doctrine of heaven. If it is possible that in the presence of God people would still prefer not to reconcile to him we may also say that even the blessed in heaven may not remain blessed for ever even in the presence of God

In addition, if those who are in the presence of God make a less than fully informed decision to reject him then we can say that it is possible that some of the damned who have no direct experience of God will never reconcile to God. Talbott argues that the worst of the damned have no direct experience of God's love *per se* since they have never experienced this kind of love and so cannot appreciate in full what they are missing by rejecting God. The main way in which the worst of the sinners will experience the lack of the good in their residence in hell will be through the infliction of unbearable suffering and 'forcibly imposed punishment'. Suffering and punishment would compel them to recognize that there can be nothing good apart from God and so continuous rebellion can only result in greater misery. This reply, I argued in previous sections, does not guarantee that the damned will have a change of heart. I argued that Talbott's account of unbearable suffering and 'forcibly imposed punishment' does not guarantee that the damned will be reconciled to God. One of the arguments offered in supporting this was that salvation is not possible if the damned never know God completely. If they do not realize that their suffering is for their own good then there is no guarantee that they will accept God as the source of their supreme happiness. Combining this with Talbott's claim that the damned have no direct experience of God it gives us an additional reason to hold that God might not succeed in saving all sinners.

If those who experience God's love and know of God's intentions, such as Satan, can still make a less than fully informed decision to reject God, then there is no guarantee that the damned, who do not possess the same kind of revelation as the blessed do, and so are less than fully informed or are in complete ignorance and deception, will ever accept God. If those who are in the presence of God can still make a less than fully informed decision to reject God, we can say that it is even more likely that the damned who have no knowledge of God would never accept him. From what has been argued, it follows that if those who have experienced God can nevertheless decide to reject Him, there must be something which leads some human beings (the worst of sinners) to reject God even when they have all the information they need not to reject Him. In the following section, I examine what would compel some sinners to turn away from God. Moreover, I argue that the choice that the damned will make to refuse God will be free.

b. What does it mean for someone to have ‘a minimal degree of rationality’ and be ‘fully informed’?

The main flaw in Talbott’s account of choosing something freely—in this case our eternal destiny—lies in his understanding of what it is for a choice to be free. He holds, as we have seen, that someone can make a free choice if, firstly, he is ‘fully informed’, and secondly, if he has ‘a minimal degree of rationality’. Talbott is never clear about what it means to be ‘fully informed’ and what it means to have ‘a minimal degree of rationality’. The fact that he does not explain this clearly leaves this interpretation to us and so it is possible to argue that the damned make a free choice to reject God. In this section, I will look into two interpretations of what it may mean to be ‘fully informed’ and two interpretations of what it may mean to have ‘a minimal degree of rationality’. Both may be interpreted in ways which may force Talbott to reconsider the fact that the rejection of God may be freely made.

Michael Murray in his ‘Three Versions of Universalism’ explains very well two possibilities of what it may mean for someone to be ‘full informed’. I will use this to make my case against Talbott. For someone to be ‘fully informed’ may mean, on the one hand, that one knows all the relevant facts about the decision being made, and holds no relevant false beliefs concerning that decision. On the other hand, it may mean that one knows all the relevant facts about the decision being made and ascribes the proper weight to things known. The latter, says Murray, entails that one has additionally structured one’s desires so that they properly reflect the importance of what is known.²⁸¹

Taking the first meaning of the term, we can say that one can be ‘fully-informed’ but nevertheless reject God. For example, someone can be fully aware that eating lots of fried food, excessive smoking, or lack of exercise can be extremely dangerous for one’s health, and yet he can still freely choose to engage in these activities. These are cases of what is commonly known as weakness of will. The problem presented by these cases is that even if a person holds all and only true beliefs concerning his good, i.e., is ‘fully informed’, it nevertheless does not entail *ipso facto* that he will choose to act in accord with his true good.²⁸² This sense of ‘fully informed’ is the one associated with libertarian accounts of free will, which most universalists, including Talbott, defend.

²⁸¹ Michael Murray, ‘Three Versions of Universalism’, *Faith and Philosophy* 16, no. 1 (1999), p. 10.

²⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 11.

Taking the second meaning of the term, we can say that if someone is ‘fully informed’ in this sense then he cannot reject God freely. Someone who not only recognizes that the ultimate human fulfilment consists in reconciliation with God but also structures his desires accordingly will not ultimately reject God.²⁸³ However, I would argue that someone can be ‘fully informed’ in this sense only if he has already achieved that state of perfection. The moment that someone is ‘fully informed’ in this sense is the moment where a person is reconciled to God. It is the moment where the person comes into communion with God. When a person has his desires structured in such a way this would suggest that he has achieved that ‘level’ where he knows what is best for him, and will act accordingly. For example, we would not call someone a master of the martial arts unless he has reached the mental and physical state corresponding to martial art perfection. To be fully informed would suggest that the person has reached a state of perfection. He cannot be ‘fully informed’ in this sense and still be attempting to be reconciled to God. Being ‘fully informed’, in this sense, is achieved once someone has attained God. Therefore, from this explanation, it seems to me that Talbott must hold that humans are ‘fully informed’ in the first sense.

Having presented the two interpretations of what it might mean to be ‘fully informed’ I turn now to the interpretation of what it may mean for someone to have ‘a minimal degree of rationality’. We can interpret ‘a minimal degree of rationality’ in two ways. Firstly, we may interpret ‘a minimal degree of rationality’ as what a person needs to qualify as a free agent in Talbott’s theological framework.²⁸⁴ Secondly, we may interpret it outside Talbott’s theological framework.

Let us consider the first interpretation. Talbot holds that an essential element for free choice is a minimal degree of rationality. This is what an agent needs in order to qualify as a free agent. If we presume that this is what Talbott has in mind then we can say that as long as choices are made within the framework of achieving the ultimate good, which is God, we can speak of degrees of rationality. If this is the case, Talbott will have to explain where that level is, and what the other levels of rationality amount to. He will have to explain where the line between minimal degree of irrationality and a minimal degree of rationality is drawn, and hence when we can speak of free agency. For example, someone can have a lesser degree of rationality and can still be free in some respect.

²⁸³ Ibid., p. 11.

²⁸⁴ Talbott offers a theological anthropology which is tied to rationality and the understanding of human nature.

In addition, Talbott's theological framework seems to imply that only those who choose and act within this theological framework can be considered to perform free and rational acts. This presents a problem for Talbott because his account implies that those who act outside this theological framework act in a non-free and irrational way. It implies that even those who are religious but nonetheless do not follow the Christian religion, or those who live a moral life but do not have explicit faith in Christ, perform actions that are irrational and thus not free. As we have mentioned, Talbott is a Christian exclusivist universalist. Hence he holds that all human beings will be saved only through explicit faith in Christ and his teaching. Salvation will be the fate of those who recognize God and accept Him through Christ. It is obvious that there are many religious traditions which teach what the ultimate good in each individual's life should be. For example, non-monotheistic religions such as Buddhism speak of Nirvana, a state of mind of perfect peace, whereas monotheistic religions, such as Islam and Judaism speak of reconciliation with Allah and Yahweh respectively. I think that it is unintelligible to hold that the choices of people who follow different religious traditions are not rational and thus not free. Moreover, there are people who live virtuous and moral lives and who do not ascribe to any religious tradition. Could we say without sparking serious objections that any choices these people make are irrational and thus non-free? I would say no. So it seems that if we accept the first interpretation of what it means for someone to have 'a minimal degree of rationality' we can only apply this interpretation in Talbott's theological framework because it cannot be applied consistently out of this framework.

If we stand back from this theological framework and consider the goals to which human actions are directed, goals which are different to the ultimate goal which Talbott talks about, it would be incorrect to hold that actions which are not directed towards the ultimate end—the Christian God—are irrational and thus not free. If we step away from this framework and see how philosophers have explained rationality, we get different views that take different approaches as to what it means to act rationally and freely. In what follows, I look into some approaches of rationality that are relevant to my argument against Talbott.

Here I briefly present three views of rationality: (i) instrumental rationality: a person is required by rationality to take the means that are necessary to achieve a given end. An agent is open to rational criticism to the extent he fails to exhibit this kind of instrumental consistency. (ii) Maximizing rationality: the rational act for a person to take is one that would optimally advance the agent's complete set of ends. A person acts rationally to the

extent he does what is likely to bring about the best state of affairs given those ends. This depends both on his preferences over the results that may be brought about through his actions and his beliefs about the probability of those results.²⁸⁵ And (iii) the satisficing model of rationality: a given action can be rational even when the agent acknowledges that an alternative action would bring about a more valuable state of affairs. In some cases it seems that perfectly rational agents appear to be pleased with states of affairs that are 'good enough' from their viewpoint of their aims and desires, even when they know that the alternatives which are available to them promise a higher return.²⁸⁶

All the above accounts of rationality suggest that rational deliberation is concerned with matters of value—with what it would be desirable to do. It is quite evident that basic human aims in life are rather unclear. People want to develop good relationships with the people they love; they want success, loyalty, good health, etc. Human beings as rational agents have the ability to judge some ends as good or worth pursuing, and hence value them, even though satisfying them may result in considerable unpleasantness for themselves.²⁸⁷ An agent is free when his deliberation is sensitive to his own judgments about what is good/best for him in the circumstances when one acts upon a judgment. Let us consider an example to make the point clear: Alex wants to be a rock star. He finds the life of a musician in a rock band quite exciting. The parties, the fans, the money and the travelling are things that he wants to have and believes that by achieving them he will be happy. Let us suppose that Alex knows or has some idea that by pursuing that kind of life he would have to give up other things, such as having a family of his own and all that comes with that, such as love, trust, friendship, loyalty etc. Nevertheless, Alex decides to pursue the life of a rock star. In this case, according to instrumental rationality, Alex wants to have the life of a rock star and so takes the means necessary to achieve that end and so he acts rationally. According to the satisficing model of rationality, Alex's action is rational even when he knows that an alternative action would bring about a more valuable state of affairs. If we take the maximizing theory, Alex's action could still be the rational one to take. It depends both on his preferences over the results that may be brought about through his actions, and his beliefs about the probability of those results.²⁸⁸ If, on the other

²⁸⁵ The view of maximizing rationality has influenced the development of decision theory and rational choice. Jay Wallace, R., 'Practical Reason', *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Edward N. Zalta ed., Summer 2009 Edition), <http://plato.stanford.edu/>.

²⁸⁶ Ibid.

²⁸⁷ Timothy O'Connor, 'Free Will', *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Edward N. Zalta ed., Winter 2010 Edition), <http://plato.stanford.edu/>.

²⁸⁸ I would like to point out that this approach is not characteristic of those working in a theological context. Like Talbott, great figures of theology and philosophy such as Augustine, argued that a person can act freely only if he is free from lower desires and only desires the ultimate Good (God, Nirvana, perfection, etc.

hand, any decision to refrain from having a family, getting married, having strong friendships and the like, would be contrary to what is worth pursuing when considered from Alex's view on any of these accounts then Alex's decision will be considered as irrational.²⁸⁹ By contrast, by itself Alex knowing that what he chooses—that is the career and the life of a musician—is not the most valuable thing, this does not necessarily suggest that he acts irrationally and so non-freely.²⁹⁰ I would like to strengthen this claim with the following additional case/example.

Now, compare the above case with the following: Alex wants to become a rock star and he takes the necessary steps in achieving this goal. However, he commits himself to a ten-year contract. Once his contract is expired, he would want to settle down, have a family, and experience all those things he would have missed if he had decided to follow a career in music for all the years of his life. I propose this case in order to permit us to make a distinction between two kinds of acts that both are rational and free but that differ in degree. We can say that rationality comes in degrees. I think we could say that Alex's action in the second case has a different degree of rationality than his action in the first case. We can say that in this case, Alex's action is more rational than in the case which I presented above. Here he accepts that the life of a rock star is worth pursuing but at the same time, he knows that a marriage life is worth pursuing as well. So he acts in a way that would satisfy both ends.

The above cases of deliberate actions, however, are different from the following cases: (i) cases in which the agent deliberately chooses to act as he does but is motivated to do so by a compulsive, controlling sort of desire. In cases such as that of OCD, drug and alcohol addictions, and strange psychological conditions, the agent who is vulnerable to these not only displays an irrational behaviour but we can also say that his actions are not free. Consider the following cases: Someone who suffers from OCD, for example, and needs to turn on and off the light before he leaves the house, both exhibits an irrational behaviour and does not act freely. He cannot willingly stop himself from performing these actions. Or imagine a case of a woman who has a strange psychological condition or addiction and she keeps buying herself yellow shoes which she will never wear. These cases show that these people suffer from a kind of compulsion that renders their actions irrational and non-free.

depending on the religion each person follows). An individual acts freely only if he has the ability to choose the True and the Good.

²⁸⁹ Even on the satisficing theory, there is a difference between 'contrary to what is worth pursuing' and 'worth pursuing but not as much as anything else'.

²⁹⁰ It needs to be that Alex accepts that the rock star life is less valuable in his own view.

And: (ii) cases in which an agent's psychology is being externally manipulated by another agent, for example, through a brain implant, such that the agent is caused to make a choice, and act on it, which he previously was not inclined to choose. In both cases, the agent is neither acting rationally nor freely.

Talbott seems to suggest that someone who does not have the kind of minimal degree of rationality which he proposes, cannot act freely in precisely the same way as someone who suffers from one of the above conditions. However, from what it has been argued above, people judge what is good and what is bad for them according to what they value to be the best thing for them in every case. Their judgment of a thing A being better than a thing B, requires that they have a kind of imagination and information which would help them make a decision. For example, in the case of Alex, Alex has certain preferences and he makes a choice in light of those preferences. Alex does exhibit an irrational behaviour in the way that Talbott presents things, but intuitively we do not think Alex is irrational.²⁹¹

Talbott is not sufficiently clear on what form of rationality he bases his argument on. He holds that a free choice is one that is 'fully informed' and the person who makes it has 'a minimal degree of rationality'. If we interpret 'fully informed' in the first sense I have explained above and 'a minimal degree of rationality', in the second sense I have also explained above we can say that someone can choose something which is not the best thing for him and at the same time his choice will be 'fully informed', rational and free. Someone can know all the relevant information he needs to know and holds no relevant false beliefs concerning the decision, and yet prefer not what would be the most valuable thing for him to do whilst at the same time exhibiting the kind of rationality that is enough to say they acted freely.

In the same way we can say that the damned's choice to remain in hell is irrational on one level and rational and free on another; it has its own, as Walls says, 'twisted sort of logic'.²⁹² Talbott claims that some of the sinners, probably the worst of their kind will not have a real conception of God's nature and love and this leads me to hold that these sinners in hell will not be 'fully informed' in the second sense presented above. Even if God makes Himself and His love present to the damned, some of the damned might still choose

²⁹¹ Some philosophers such as Kvanvig, Holten and Walls argue that it is not the case that freedom requires the absence of desires. Most humans are bound with desires, intuitions, goals, etc. More on this see Jonathan Kvanvig, *The Problem of Hell* (Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 81–83. Jerry Walls, *Hell: the Logic of Damnation* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992), p. 131. Wilko Van Holten, 'Hell and the Goodness of God', *Religious Studies* 35, no. 1 (Mar., 1999), p. 49.

²⁹² Walls (2004a), p. 212.

hell in the same way that if, for example, I offer you the opportunity to attend a philosophy class and give a brief explanation of what it is involved doing philosophy, you would rather spend your time in a pub. People value what is the best end for them according to what they regard to be good for them in each circumstance.

Someone could say that adopting a strong notion of being fully informed (according to which one is aware of all the relevant facts and weights them appropriately) and a non-theological notion of minimal degree of rationality (of any of the three varieties mentioned above) can plausibly deliver Talbott's conclusion.²⁹³ This however can be rejected by returning to the Satan example. I have argued in the previous section that Satan had a full disclosure of truth since he was in God's presence and so could have not been ignorant or deceived about God's love, wisdom and intentions. If he was in the presence of God and if he had a first hand experience of God's love then we can say that he was fully informed in a strong theological sense. Nevertheless, he did reject God. I have said above that an agent exhibits a minimal degree of rationality, according to instrumental rationality, if a person is required to take the means that are necessary to achieve a given end. He possesses a minimal degree of rationality, according to maximizing rationality, if he acts in a way that would optimally advance his complete set of ends depending on his preferences over the results that may be brought about through his actions and his beliefs about the probability of those results. And he possesses a minimal degree of rationality, according to the satisficing model of rationality, if he acknowledges that an alternative action would bring about a more valuable state of affairs. We could assume that Satan while being fully informed about the source of ultimate happiness and God's nature he nevertheless preferred something else e.g., self-autonomy.

We can say that even if God makes Himself and His love present to the damned and some of the damned have a real conception of God's nature and love and so will be 'fully informed' in a strong theological sense it may still be the case that they will prefer something different. Again we can say that the choice to remain in hell is irrational on one level and rational and free on another; it has its own 'twisted sort of logic'. Recall for example, C. S. Lewis's stories in his *The Great Divorce*.²⁹⁴ I agree with Lewis when he states that hell is creaturely rebellion against God. The damned are, in one sense, successful rebels to the end and so the doors of hell are locked on the *inside*.²⁹⁵ The

²⁹³ I would like to thank Dr Wynn and Dr Lindsay for pointing out this possible reply to my argument.

²⁹⁴ See chapter four, section 1.c, p. 91.

²⁹⁵ C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (HarperCollins Publishers, 2002), p. 130.

damned have the opportunity to escape hell but no one ever does because there is always something which they prefer to the ultimate good and happiness, and they insist on pursuing it even at the price of eternal misery. The damned have the chance to change their minds and reconcile with God, but in fact most of them, if not, all may prefer their self-autonomy. Milton's Satan is a paradigmatic example of such a decision.

And what I should be, all but less than he
Whom thunder hath made greater? Here at
least We shall be free; th' Almighty hath
not built Here for his envy, will not drive us
hence: Here we may reign secure; and, in
my choice, To reign is worth ambition,
though in Hell: Better to reign in Hell than
serve in Heaven.²⁹⁶

The desire for self-autonomy might be enough to refuse God's love and supreme happiness. In Craig's words, the damned find the price to pay—'bowing the knee to God'—too high.²⁹⁷ Or in Lewis's view, the damned are not interested in what they could have; they are happy with what they are and have. The damned choose some ends as 'good', even if satisfying them may result in considerable unpleasantness for themselves. They do not wish to abandon their selves and so they remain in hell.

Moreover, it seems to me that Talbott ignores another category of people, the category which consist of people who are genuinely evil. I argue that some people act in evil ways and persist in their evils actions out of mere wickedness. It might be the case that some people are just wicked. They act in evil ways just for the sake of acting in evil ways. Even if someone knows that God is the ultimate source of happiness and joy someone's moral character might be such that he would want to rebel just for the sake of rebelling. For example, consider the case of a man who knows that his family loves him; he knows that it is wrong to wind them up and psychologically bully them. Nevertheless, he continues doing so just for the sake of doing it. Talbott will have to accept that it is conceivable that some people are genuinely evil and they act in evil ways just for the sake of acting in evil ways. If this is the case then we can say that such people act freely in rejecting God. The damned in hell, or a least, some may say, the worst of the sinners, may have all the relevant information they need about the source of their supreme happiness. They may not be self-deluded and may be aware of the consequences of their actions. But they may continue to

²⁹⁶ Quoted in Craig (1991), p. 301.

²⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 301.

rebel and act in evil ways just so they can frustrate God's plans. In this sense, their actions are free.

To summarize my arguments thus far: firstly, I have argued that it is possible that some of the sinners even in the presence of God will still make either a fully-informed or less than fully-informed decision to reject God. The reasons behind the decision of rejecting God's love led me to my second argument. I have argued that Talbott is not sufficiently clear as to what it means for someone to be 'fully informed' and to have 'a minimal degree of rationality'. If we interpret them in a theological context, Talbott will have to hold that all other actions that are not directed towards the Christian God are irrational and not free. If we interpret them in a non-theological context Talbott would have to accept that some people can refuse God and still make a choice which is rational (to some degree) and free. If we interpret 'fully informed' in a strong theological sense and 'a minimal degree of rationality' in a non-theological sense then again Talbott will have to accept that some people may be fully informed about God nevertheless refuse while making a choice which is rational and free. Self-autonomy and pure wickedness may be reasons for rejecting God. So the account of freedom of choice which Talbott offers does not guarantee that all human beings will ever freely reconcile to God.

In the following section, I argue that Talbott's view of future afterlives encounters the same problem as Hick's account does; that is, the idea of future afterlives as opportunities for salvation diminishes the importance of human autonomy.

3. Future afterlives and the possibility of human autonomy

Talbot holds that God has the power and wisdom to work with each human being and undermine over time every possible motive that a human being might have for rejecting Him.²⁹⁸ He argues that God can think in terms of a billion lifetimes, a billion different realms and universes and sets of appearances, a billion ways to prevent the choices that other persons make from having the wrong kind of influence upon a given choice that a person makes.²⁹⁹ There will be environments specifically created in such a way that humans can choose freely, experience the consequences of their free choices, and finally

²⁹⁸ Talbott (1990), p. 237.

²⁹⁹ Talbott (1992), p. 507.

learn from experience that God is their ultimate source of happiness. God will permit those who have refused Him by the time of their death to continue to exist in other environments and/or spiritual realms, where they can start over and develop a new and better character, and in which God can progressively remove their false beliefs.

Talbott's account is vulnerable to the same criticism as Hick's account.³⁰⁰ The problem with this view, as in Hick's view, is that even if Talbott allows for freedom of choice in each new created environment, it nevertheless diminishes human autonomy. Recall the labyrinth analogy I presented earlier in chapter three: Imagine that it is now your 20th time in the labyrinth. That would suggest that in all your previous attempts either you have chosen to remain in the labyrinth or you have failed to reach the exit. You decide to reach to the exit but by the time you do so you die. The LSS once more re-creates you to give you another chance. In all your re-appearances in the labyrinth, you were free to choose between the two options. However, did you choose to re-appear in the labyrinth for a second time or for a 20th or even a 21st time? As I have argued before, you did not. Your reappearances in the labyrinth as a result of your failure to choose or reach the exit, are not something that you have chosen for yourself. Can you choose not to reappear in the labyrinth? No, because you cannot make that call. The LSS does. The LSS chooses for you because it is the LSS which thinks that it would be better for you to finally reach the exit and succeed in escaping from the labyrinth. The LSS does not permit you to retain the character which you have developed during your residence in the labyrinth, especially if that character is a vicious one. It does not give you that choice.

The main problem here is that whereas you have freedom of choice during your residence in the labyrinth, and you can choose to either remain there or follow the path that leads to the exit, nevertheless your autonomy is completely ignored. Like Hick, Talbott would allow human beings to make free choices during their existence in the earthly life and in the billions lives to come because union with God can only be achieved voluntarily. However, the 'billion lifetimes, billion different realms and universes and sets of appearances' which God can think of to save all humans denies human autonomy because each individual's eternal fate is entirely independent of the choices he makes and the beliefs and character which he adopts in his earthly existence and post-mortem existences later on.

³⁰⁰ See chapter three, criticism 2

Applying this to the case of the damned, even if the damned are free to act according to the character which they develop for themselves in each future life, they are not free in the sense that they cannot ultimately keep the character that they have chosen for themselves. God blocks the consequences of their actions and thus blocks their autonomy. Autonomy is an essential feature of having genuine creaturely freedom according to libertarians such as Talbott. And if it is an essential feature then God, by blocking the consequences of people's actions, diminishes the value of the freedom which human beings have. Therefore, universal salvation will not be the result of the kind of libertarian freedom which Talbott wants to maintain. If Talbott wants to maintain libertarian freedom of choice, he will have to permit their eternal fate to be based on the choices and the character which they cultivate for themselves in their earthly life and consequently in the lives to come. If he does so then he will have to accept, like Hick, that there is no guarantee that all will achieve salvation, since to have significant freedom humans must be allowed to carry the character that they choose for themselves in the lives to come; or be permitted to retain that character and not be re-created in another world.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I argued that the negation of Talbott's universalism is not inconsistent. Talbott's accounts of human freedom of choice and curative punishment fail to adequately show that salvation is the ultimate fate of all human beings. Firstly, his account of unbearable suffering as 'forcibly imposed punishment' does not guarantee that the damned will repent and accept God's love. I argued that either Talbott can modify his account of 'forcibly imposed punishment' or he can give up his claim that all sinners must eventually reach a point where they can resist God no further. If he modifies his account in such a way as to claim that the intense misery the damned undergo is truly unbearable he will be endorsing the sort of compulsion which he has rejected as inappropriate. Moreover, by accepting this kind of compulsion, he would undermine his claim that repentance and reconciliation to God is not determined in any way. Secondly, I argued that his argument is not successful in showing that the damned cannot make a free and irrevocable rejection of God. The case of Satan's rebellion shows that full disclosure of truth does not guarantee that the sinners will reconcile to God. Moreover, Talbott does not sufficiently explain what 'fully-informed' and what 'a minimal degree of rationality' is. Both may be interpreted in ways which may force Talbott to reconsider the fact that the rejection of God may be freely made. Finally, I argued that his view that there will be future lives for further moral development encounters the same problem as Hick's account; that is, human autonomy is diminished and consequently the kind of libertarian free choice which he has in mind does not play the significant role it should in human salvation.

In the next chapter, I examine Marilyn McCord Adams' account. Adams, like Hick and Talbott, argues that God's love demands that all will be reconciled to him in the end. Her rejection of the doctrine of hell differs from Hick's and Talbott's account in that she argues that human beings' freedom is impaired to such a degree that God would not hold them fully responsible for their earthly actions and so he would not condemn anyone to eternal hell. Moreover, she argues that the horrors of hell are such as to deprive the damned of any positive meaning in their lives, and God's goodness would not allow this to happen.

Chapter Five: Marilyn McCord Adams' Universalism

Introduction

Marilyn McCord Adams attempts to define God's nature and His relationship with His human creatures in such a manner conducive to holding that salvation is the inevitable fate of all His human creatures. She holds that God loves human beings and His love is expressed in His desire not only to enter into personal relationship with them but also to unite with them.³⁰¹ Like John Hick, she endorses the eschatological conviction that God's love can be vouched safely to every human being, and she argues that every human being will eventually achieve union with God and thus salvation. Therefore, there can be no hell as a place of eternal torment and thus a doctrine that defends such a view should be rejected.

Adams bases her account on two distinctive ideas: (i) the category of horrendous evils and (ii) a particular theory of the nature of God, the nature of human beings, and their relationship. She claims that all human beings are vulnerable to horrendous evils due to their limited nature and the environment which they inhabit. Horrendous evils are such that they *prima facie* deprive human lives of the possibility of positive significance and seem to make it impossible for the horror-participants' lives to be great goods to them on the whole. Only God, given the nature of His goodness, can defeat them. Divine love and goodness can be guaranteed to each individual only if God defeats horrendous evils not only within the context of the world as a whole but also within the framework of each individual's life.³⁰² Defeating horrendous evil at the individual level would involve God compensating individuals for their participation in horrendous evils with positive experiences, and a demonstration of how the evils they participated in may be shown to have purpose and meaning.³⁰³ Therefore, the eternal horror of hell, if it existed, would be a horror that would forever remain undefeated and would frustrate God's purpose for His human creatures. To hold this is contrary to her view of the nature of God as love. The latter, she argues compels us to accept that God will save all human beings in the end.

³⁰¹ Marilyn McCord Adams, *Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1999), p. 165; Marilyn McCord Adams, *Christ and Horrors: The Coherence of Christology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 39.

³⁰² Marilyn McCord Adams, 'The Problem of Hell: A Problem of Evil for Christians', in *Reasoned Faith*, Eleonore Stump, ed., (Cornell University Press, 1993a), p. 304.

³⁰³ Adams (2006), pp. 44–47.

This chapter has two parts. In the first part, I outline Adams' view of the human condition. I focus on explaining her concepts of meaning-making, and impaired freedom as well as her account of the category of horrendous evils. The explanation of Adams' concepts will allow the elucidation of her account and an understanding of its role in rejecting the doctrine of hell, as well as a proper examination of her arguments in favour of universalism.³⁰⁴ This prepares the ground for the second part of the chapter where I give two arguments against Adams' universalism. My first argument will focus on Adams' concept of meaning-making, her concept of empathetic capacity and her account of human vulnerability to horrors. I will argue that the model of curative punishment that she proposes does not guarantee that all sinners will be saved. My second argument will focus on Adams' view that all sinners will come to reconcile to God freely. I will show by means of a particular case of horrendous evil that participation in post-mortem horrors damages decision-making capacity in such a way that free choice is not possible and so there is no guarantee that all sinners will be saved in the end. My conclusion will be that Adams fails to effectively show how salvation is guaranteed to each individual person.

³⁰⁴ Marilyn McCord Adams' writings in *Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God* and particularly in *Christ and Horrors* focus on the development of a view of the problem of evil which is based on the Christian Tradition, as she says, which turns away from what philosophers of religion often call "restricted-standard" theism' (p. 3). The argument she proposes presupposes Chalcedonian Christology (p. 53). She holds that God's purposes for human creation are 'assimilative' and 'unitive'. God not only brings about human beings so that they do their best to assimilate the nature of God but also God desires to be united with his material creation and he does so by entering in the form of a single man—Christ. The incarnation, says Adams, 'is conditionally necessary on God's decision to create this world and realize such aims' (p. 189). The Incarnation is the most important part in Adams' approach to the problem of evil, for she argues that only through Christ the horrors of the earthly life will be ultimately defeated (p. 47). Christ defeats horror-participation in three horror-defeat stages. In 'Stage-I horror-defeat', says Adams 'God establishes a relation of organic unity between the person's horror participation and his/her intimate, personal and overall beatific relationship with God' (p. 66). Divine horror participation and divine identification with human vulnerability turns human horror participation into occasion of personal intimacy with God (p. 51). In 'Stage-II horror-defeat' God heals and enables the horror participant's meaning-making capacities so that he can recognise and appreciate some of the positive significance laid down in *Stage I*. (p. 48, p. 66). Finally, in 'Stage-III horror-defeat' God recreates our relation to the material world so that we are no longer radically vulnerable to horrors. God shares human horrors and defeats them through Christ. Christ's human nature allows him to be a horror participant. He shares human vulnerability to horrors by crucifixion (p. 41). Christ defeats Stage I horrors on the Calvary and at the same time, his ante-mortem career denotes the defeat of Stage II and Stage III (p. 68). It will be beyond the scope of this thesis to examine in detail Adams' Christology and this chapter is not dealing with her Christology (All page numbers are taken from Adams, 2006).

Part I

1. The human condition

Adams holds that God loves all human beings and that His love is expressed in His purpose of creating persons; that is, agents who act according to reason, have free-will, and who are capable of entering into a personal relationship and, ultimately, union with God.

³⁰⁵ In order for God to achieve His purpose He did not bring human beings into existence as perfect beings but rather as finite beings with limited capacities. Moreover, God created them in a material world of real and apparent scarcity in which they exercise their given nature and search for Him. Adams' understanding of the human condition develops from her view that humans have been created to be 'meaning-makers'—personal creatures who seek and find meaning in the world around them and in the Creator who grounds existence.³⁰⁶ Adams maintains that the capacity for 'meaning-making' is personal activity.³⁰⁷ She argues that a good life is one that has meaning and purpose. An individual's life experiences, on the one hand, can become organized around some goal or idea that he aims at and, on the other hand, may be 'molded and expended by the individual or collective schemes of others'.³⁰⁸ So an individual's life can be assessed in relation both to his own goals, ideals and choices, and to the 'aims, tastes, values and preferences of others'.³⁰⁹ The external point of view is not sufficient for an individual's life to be a great good to him on the whole but the individual himself must value, and actually enjoy, 'his relations to enough goods and to goods that are great enough'.³¹⁰ An individual's life will have positive value for him if he eventually structures and arranges his experiences in life, and recognizes patterns of distribution of goods and ills around self-transcendent goals or ideals and relationships that he values.³¹¹ In addition, on the basis of

³⁰⁵ Adams (1999), p. 165; Also see Adams (2006), p. 39.

³⁰⁶ A. K. Anderson, 'Marilyn McCord Adams, Christ and Horrors: The Coherence of Christology' (Current Issues in Theology, No. 4), Book Review, *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 64 (2008), p. 163.

³⁰⁷ Adams (2006), p. 195.

³⁰⁸ Adams (1999), p. 145.

³⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 145

³¹⁰ Ibid., p. 145

³¹¹ Ibid., p. 146. Adams approach on meaning-making can lead us think that if the person is really to make meaning then he has to produce some values, in a way that seems valuable from their perspective, and that exemplifies coherency, purpose and self-transcendancy. For example, Alex makes meaning if he helps elderly people who are in need, he thinks that it is good to help people who are in need and he helps them because he wants to help (purpose and self-transcendancy). As for coherency, his meaning making is coherent so long as it all fits with the rest of his life. That is, he does not help people who are in need during the week and then goes out torturing old people for fun on the weekends.

that, he finds reasons to think that his life has positive meaning. So, we can say that meaning-making is the production or gaining of objective value which is also deemed valuable from the perspective of the person producing or gaining the value. Humans use this capacity to recognize and appropriate positive meaning and purpose in their lives and in the world. The capacity for 'meaning-making' is a necessary condition for human happiness. Since God is the source of human happiness, then the capacity for meaning-making is necessary for entering into personal relationship with God and union with Him.

However, the difficulty with this goal, says Adams, is that it is 'prima facie self-defeating'.³¹² Humans' finite nature and the material world in which this nature evolves frustrates and/or destroys our meaning-making capacity. Adams explains the shape of the capacity for meaning-making and human vulnerability to horrors by proposing a developmental picture of human agency.

According to Adams, humans begin their lives in a state of immaturity, weakness and ignorance. Their development as physical and psychological beings is the 'interactive product' of human nature and its environment. Humans gain knowledge of themselves, of others and of the world with difficulty over a long period of time, and through interaction with others who are in the same conditions of immaturity, weakness and ignorance as they are, as well as through their living environment which is a place of real and apparent scarcity and inhospitality. Thus, human beings, who are allowed to exercise their reasoning and will, and thus act according to their nature, are radically vulnerable to evils. From early childhood, humans are confronted with certain types of evil that are overwhelming. They attempt to understand and make progress with their existence by adopting strategies which due to their limitations are imperfect at best. As humans continue to enact imperfect strategies their perception and behaviour becomes distorted to such a degree that they arrive in adulthood in a state, which Adams calls: 'impaired freedom'.³¹³ Thus, acting within the confines of impaired freedom, people inevitably cause suffering to themselves and to others.

³¹² Adams (2006), p. 39.

³¹³ Adams (1999), p. 37; Also see Adams 1993, p. 313. Sin, says Adams, cannot be identified with moral wrong-doing but it signifies 'some sort of impropriety [or fundamental obstacle] in the relation between created persons and God'. It is a 'dysfunction that is derivative from the metaphysical mismatches God has set up in his creation'. See Marilyn McCord Adams, 'Sin as Uncleaness', *Philosophical Perspectives* 5 and *Philosophy of Religion* (1991), p. 7. Human radical vulnerability to suffering and evils, says Adams, does not have its origin in misused created freedom but is a consequence of their given nature and the environment in which they are set. With this argument, Adams rejects defences of the doctrine of hell which hold that human beings have the freedom freely to reject God. Adams defends libertarian freedom of choice but within the limits of created agency.

Such suffering, says Adams, comes in small, medium and large doses but always with an educational purpose. From toothaches to tears, broken limbs to broken relationships, such pain teaches people about themselves and the world. For example, by touching a hot stove we are burnt, or by eating too many sweets our teeth are damaged. Likewise, much of the suffering and pain that results from natural disasters helps people to discover new ways to deal with them and overcome them. Pain and suffering says Adams, ‘are the mother of invention that discovers ways of protecting humankind ... and of overcoming and/or working around various harms’.³¹⁴ Humans use their capacity for meaning-making to find purpose in their lives and to create positive meaning for the evils’ existence. Evils can be seen to be productive of a greater good and in many ways, says Adams, they can trigger a ‘meaningful growth experience’.³¹⁵ However, different situations arise from the vulnerable state which people are in that may cause much suffering to them and others and consequently damage or destroy their capacity for meaning-making.³¹⁶

Adams argues that there are evils in the world so horrendous that humans can barely comprehend them and consequently cannot ‘meaningfully grow’ as a result of experiencing them. Some kinds of suffering are so horrific that they decimate human lives in a way that makes their occurrence seem impossible to justify, and it certain that no good could come of them. Adams calls these evils ‘horrendous evils’ and defines them as:

Evils the participation in (the doing or suffering of) which constitutes *prima facie* reason to doubt whether the participant’s life could (given their inclusion in it) have positive meaning for him/her on the whole.³¹⁷

In the category of horrendous evils, she includes:

[T]he rape of a woman and axing off of her arms, psycho-physical torture whose ultimate goal is the disintegration of personality, schizophrenia, or severe clinical depression, cannibalizing one’s own offspring, child abuse of the sort described by Ivan Karamazov, parental incest, participation in the Nazi death camps, the explosion of nuclear

³¹⁴ Marilyn McCord Adams, *Why Creating Human Beings in a World Like This Seems Like a Very Bad Idea*, Kellogg Lecture (2008), p. 2.

³¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

³¹⁶ Adams (1993a), p. 313.

³¹⁷ Adams (2006), p. 32. Also, see Marilyn McCord Adams, ‘Problems of evil: More advice for Christian Philosophers’, *Faith and Philosophy* 5 (1988), pp. 134–136 and pp. 140–141. Marilyn McCord Adams, ‘Neglected Values, Shrunk Agents, Happy Endings: A reply to Rogers’, *Faith and Philosophy* 19 (2002b), p. 214. Marilyn McCord Adams ‘Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God’, in *The Problem of Evil*, Marilyn McCord Adams and Robert Merrhew Adams, eds., (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 211. Marilyn McCord Adams, ‘Evil and the God-Who-Does-Nothing-In-Particular’, in *Religion and Morality*, D. Z. Phillips, ed., (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1996), p. 113. Marilyn McCord Adams, ‘Horrors in Theological Context’, *Scottish Journal of Theology* 55, no.4 (2002a), pp. 468–469.

bombs over populated areas, being the accidental and/or unwitting agent in the disfigurement or death of those one loves best.³¹⁸

Participation in horrendous evils, according to Adams, overwhelms meaning-making capacity giving to both participants and onlookers *prima facie* reason to believe that the participant's life is marred by horrors and thereby deprived of the possibility of positive personal meaning.³¹⁹

As I have said, the explanation of Adams' concepts is necessary in order to examine her arguments in favour of universalism. Her arguments are based on these concepts of meaning-making, impaired freedom and the category of horrendous evils and to these arguments I now turn.

2. Two arguments for universalism

Adams' first argument focuses on human impaired freedom and responsibility and her second argument focuses on her claim that hell would give conclusive reason that our lives have no positive meaning.

Let us begin with the first argument. Adams argues that humans are not competent enough to bear responsibility for their and others' eternal destiny based on the choices which they have made in their earthly life. Her argument centres on her discussion of the extent of the humans' ability to cause horrendous evils relative to their capacity to conceive of such evils. She begins by making the following observations.

First, she maintains that it is obvious that 'it is comparatively easy for human beings to cause (at least be salient members of causal chains leading to) horrendous evils'.³²⁰ To illustrate this point, she considers the case of the loving father who accidentally runs over his son. Human life, Adams maintains, is full of horrendous evils. Accidents, coincidences

³¹⁸ Adams (2006, p. 33). Also see Adams (1999), p. 20 and Adams (1990), pp. 211–212. Horrendous evils do not necessarily involve 'outrageous injustices' even if some evils do involve injustices towards their victims, according to Adams. This is because not all horrors involve injustices, i.e., the enthusiastic parent who innocently but non-negligently runs over his son is not guilty of any injustice or a mother eating her dead baby's corpse: justice cannot tell us what is so bad about that horror. Furthermore, 'horrendous evils' cannot be defined in terms of 'cold-bloodedness, because it fails to be comprehensive' and again fails to tell us what is so bad about that horror. See Adams (1999), p. 29 and Adams (2006), p. 34.

³¹⁹ Adams (2002a), pp. 468–491 and Adams (1999), pp. 148–151.

³²⁰ Adams (1999), p. 36.

and humanly unforeseeable consequences can make even responsible behaviour, never mind minor negligence, have horrendous consequences.³²¹

Second, she maintains that it is obvious that an individual's capacity to cause suffering (horrendous and otherwise) radically and inevitably exceeds his ability to experience it.³²²

Adams claims that an individual can bring about consequences so devastatingly evil that the individual himself cannot experience them, whether this inability is due to the quantity, or the intense quality of the evil involved. She writes:

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.³²³

Adams argues that where suffering is concerned, the 'capacity to conceive follows [the] capacity to experience, in such a way that we cannot adequately conceive what we cannot adequately experience'.³²⁴ Just as a person who has always been blind can have a lot of descriptive knowledge of colours, he cannot be directly acquainted with them; he cannot, that is, know *what it is like* to experience colour. Humans who have never experienced such sufferings are unable to comprehend what it is like to suffer them. Only direct experience of horrors is enough to help humans appreciate what it would be like to suffer a particular horror. Any theoretical knowledge about horrors is insufficient to explain to humans who lack the relevant experience how bad horrors are. Even if, Adams says, Hitler had enough descriptive knowledge to be in a position to know that his actions had horrendous consequences, the lack of those experiences—starving to death, burning, and so on—left him unable fully to appreciate just how bad his actions were. Moreover, the childless soldier does not have the psychological capacity to experience anything similar enough to what a mother experiences seeing, for example, her child decapitated before her

³²¹ Adams (2008), p. 3.

³²² Adams (1993a), p. 309.

³²³ Ibid, p. 309.

³²⁴ Adams (1999), p. 36.

eyes. These cases lead Adams to conclude that our ability to cause horrors exceeds our ability to understand them.³²⁵

What is important in Adams' argument is her claim that lack of harmful experience deprives someone 'of the capacity empathetically to enter into' what it would be like to suffer a particular harm, even if detailed abstract descriptive knowledge of such harm is available.³²⁶ The development of this empathetic capacity is crucial for a person in order to be able to appreciate the horrendous nature of an evil. This capacity can be developed only if the person has direct experience of the suffering that another one undergoes. This is important to remember because, as we will see as we proceed, Adams will use this to hold that the horror perpetrators will only achieve salvation once they develop this capacity. Adams' approach has some serious problems however, which I examine in part II.

Adams holds that a person cannot '*fully* grasp' how bad the evils are of which he has had no experience.³²⁷ The capacity to empathize is important not only for a person to assess what is bad about suffering but also for the assessment of the degree of the agent's moral responsibility. A person's responsibility, Adams argues, is diminished in proportion to his unavoidable inability to conceive of the relevant dimensions of the action and its consequences. Humans cannot be fully to blame for something to the extent that they know not what they do.³²⁸ In other words, given human beings' nature and impaired freedom some dimensions of horrendous evil are inevitably inadequately conceivable by human beings and so they are not fully responsible for their existence. Human beings cannot be held fully responsible for bringing about horrendous evils.

Adams argues that since God created human beings who are inevitably vulnerable to horrors in an environment of hostility and of limited resources which consequently, increases their vulnerability to horrors, He would not only be primarily responsible, but highly culpable for humans' vulnerability to horrors.³²⁹ Given that God is primarily responsible for human vulnerability to horrors, it is His responsibility to make good out of it and save all humans in the end. God would be cruel in trusting His human creatures, whose nature is limited and freedom is impaired, with their eternal destinies. The horrors of hell are so horrible that it will be difficult for human beings to conceive clearly. So, God

³²⁵ Adams (1993a), pp. 309–310.

³²⁶ Adams (1999), p. 36.

³²⁷ Adams (2006), p. 35.

³²⁸ Adams (1999), p. 38.

³²⁹ Ibid., p. 39.

would not make it the consequence of their bad choices. Humans cannot begin to grasp the reality of ante-mortem horrors that they have not experienced, so it is impossible for them to conceive the torments of hell and everlasting separation from God.³³⁰ As Adams' states,

[D]amnation 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....³³¹

Thus, if those who choose the horrors of hell cannot clearly conceive what is involved in choosing hell then God should not hold them responsible for that choice. God would be cruel to punish the sinners with hell since they do not know what hell is. This leads Adams to conclude that the damned do not really choose hell when they reject God in their earthly life, because they do not have a clear idea what hell is like. So in this sense, human beings do not choose hell with 'fully open eyes'. It is, thus, false to assume that God separates the blessed from the damned based on their ante-mortem moral performances and choices. God would be cruel in setting created persons conditions relative to which they are unlikely to succeed.³³² Therefore, Adams concludes, it is His responsibility to save all in the end and let no one perish in hell.

The second argument which Adams offers is the following. She holds that hell is a paradigmatic horror 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'.³³³ If earthly horrendous evils are such that they deprive humans of the capacity to gain any positive meaning and hence lead them to consider their lives as not worth living, then hell, which is a place of eternal horror and evil, would be a place within one's life good is defeated by evils forever. An everlasting torment in hell in which the perpetrators of horrendous evils get their personal deserts would necessarily intensify the nature of evil and horrors, and God's purpose for His human creatures will be defeated. Eternal punishment in hell would be ultimately negative, giving conclusive reason to human beings to doubt whether their lives could have any positive meaning overall and would bring about 'a total dismantling

³³⁰ Adams (2006), p. 229.

³³¹ Adams (1993a), p. 310.

³³² Ibid., p. 311.

³³³ Ibid., p. 304.

of personality'.³³⁴ Thus, Adams maintains, the eternal horrors of hell would inevitably defeat any positive meaning-making on behalf of the person who suffers its infernal torment.

Adams continues by suggesting that God's love and goodness is shown not only in creating persons who can act according to their nature, but also that God's love requires all humans coming into union with him: a state of ultimate happiness. This happiness, however, cannot be guaranteed unless God restores the positive meaning within each individual's life. As she states:

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.³³⁵

God's goodness means that He needs to repair the meaning-making capacity and He needs to do that by defeating horrors. God's goodness demands that He makes everything good, i.e. individuals and the world as a whole, something inconsistent with an eternal hell.

Adams argues that many evils challenge the worth of humans as persons but in ways that nonetheless can be made good by humans. As she states,

Failures in friendship can be overcome by the offended party's forgiveness and/or by the offender's showing deep and courageous loyalty thereafter. Human courts can vindicate damaged reputations. Work achievements can receive fresh appreciative appraisals. Injured athletes can sometimes be restored to health and win gold medals. Heroic others accept permanent disabilities and devote themselves to encouraging the differently abled.³³⁶

These kinds of evils do not destroy the human capacity for meaning-making but are dealt with in ways that either preserve or enhance the positive meaning of the lives of those who participate in them.³³⁷ Horrendous evils are such that cannot be compensated for in the above way because they consume human meaning-making structures to such a degree that

³³⁴ Adams (1999), p. 47.

³³⁵ Adams (1993a), p. 304.

³³⁶ Adams (2008), p. 3.

³³⁷ Adams (2008), p. 3.

they *prima facie* destroy the positive meaning of the participant's life; positive meaning that can be restored only by the ultimate good—God.³³⁸

In summarizing her arguments Adams, firstly, argues that human beings do not have enough competency to bear responsibility, through their own beliefs and choices, for their own and others' destiny. Horrendous evils are inevitably inadequately conceivable by human beings and so they are not fully responsible for bringing them about. Since they are not fully responsible, God would not place them in hell to suffer eternally. Secondly, she argues that the horrors of hell would give conclusive reason to believe that the life of the damned cannot be a great good to them on the whole. If God's goodness demands the restoration of all human beings' meaning-making capacity by defeating horrors, then God will not permit the destruction of the positive meaning of any horror-participant's life, including the worst sinners.

Redemption from horrors says Adams, involves the recovery and appropriation of positive personal meaning from the worst that human beings suffer, be or do. Horror defeating power is meaning-restoring power.³³⁹ The horrors experienced in the earthly life are hell enough and so the world to come will be horror-free. Humans, says Adams, can hope for some form of post-mortem balancing of horrors suffered in the earthly life. God will compensate all His human creatures for what they have undergone with love. He will be obvious and present as soon as possible after the horror-participant's death and will explain to each individual that all the suffering and pain that he has experienced occurred to prepare him for the moment of reconciliation. However, redemption, according to Adams,

³³⁸ Adams (1999), pp. 30–31. In order to defend the concept of God's goodness and show that it demands the salvation of all human beings, Adams distinguishes two dimensions of divine goodness in relation to creation: (i) 'producer of global goods' and (ii) 'goodness to or love of individual created persons'. She contrasts two dimensions of 'overbalance/defeat of evil by good within the context of an individual person's life'. She asserts that no package of merely created goods could 'balance-off' or 'defeat' participation in horrors. God's goodness to an individual is not obvious only by defending Divine goodness as the producer of global goods, given the nature of horrendous evils. She rejects: (i) Global approaches: Alvin Plantinga holds that Divine goodness is evaluated in relation to God's role as producer of global goods. God goodness is expressed in the world as a whole. According to this approach, it is certainly epistemically possible that the world has a maximally perfect ordering as a whole and still includes hell for some human beings. (ii) Metaphysical goodness: God is good to all human beings simply by bringing them into existence and that the value of existence surpasses 'any disvalue constituted by deprivations of its wellbeing'. The most notable defender of this view is Augustine. And (iii) conditional goodness to created persons: divine goodness to created human beings depends upon human's free response to God's will. God will guarantee to each individual person that his life is a great good to him on the whole and in the end 'except through some fault of their own'. Notable defenders of this view are Richard Swinburne, Eleonore Stump, William L. Craig and Jerry Walls. Also see Adams 'God and Evil: Polarities of a Problem', *Philosophical Studies: An International Journal for Philosophy in the Analytic Tradition* 69, no. 2/3, (Mar., 1993b), pp. 170–173.

³³⁹ Adams (1999), p. 81.

will come through a long and difficult process similar to earthly psychotherapy.³⁴⁰ God's horror defeating power will include effects which lie outside and go beyond any that created powers could produce and this will occur without his actions interfering with human freedom.³⁴¹ Whether someone is a horror perpetrator or sufferer will determine the appropriate method of redemption.

In the case of the horror-sufferers, God will place them in new and nourishing environments where He will help them to recover from horror participation by helping them recognizing their horrendous earthly experiences as points of identification with the crucified God.³⁴² The horror-sufferers in recognizing that in their suffering they have shared this experience with Christ will be glad of the experience and so not wish it away.

In the case of the worst horror perpetrators, God will place them in environments where God will help them to recover from horror participation, as well; however, Adams does not exclude the possibility of terrible suffering for the purposes of rehabilitation.³⁴³ The process of letting go and the enjoyment of something new can sometimes be a painful process, says Adams, and so this will be a process of painful rehabilitation for most of the sinners.³⁴⁴ Horror perpetrators can only obtain beatitude if they develop an empathetic capacity to suffer with those whom they tortured through severe, although curative, post-mortem trials.

The process of reconciliation will continue until all human beings come to union with God in faith and love. Since God loves all His human beings and His purpose is to bring all to His glory, ultimately, Adams maintains, all will be saved

³⁴⁰ Adams view on this diverges from Hick's. Participation in horrors, in Hick's view, can be integrated into that overall development which gives meaning to an individual's life. Horror participation can be taken to be 'educational' and this gives positive meaning to a horror-participant's life. However, Adams holds that horror participation is 'pedagogically inept' as a first lesson because it can damage an individual to such extent that further ante-mortem progress from self-centeredness to God centeredness would be virtually impossible. Moreover, according to Adams, delay in gratification to another life would de-emphasize the importance of the earthly life 'leaving the impression that it would have been better skipped by those whose spiritual development was significantly set back through participation in horrors'. See Adams (1999), p. 53 and Adams (2006), p. 240.

³⁴¹ Adams follows 'classical theology in crediting God with the power to create things other than God *ex nihilo*, as well as the power to reduce them to nothing'. In order for God to defeat horrors or reverse horrors, it would require power which will override natural laws and would include power to produce *supranatural* effects. See Adams (1999), p. 84.

³⁴² As I have said in a footnote 4, at the beginning of the chapter, Adams offers a Christology which emphasizes the unity of human and Divine in the one person Christ who suffered and died for all humans on the cross. She holds that 'God in Christ crucified cancels the curse of human vulnerability to horrors'. See Adams (1999), p. 166.

³⁴³ Adams rejects views which hold that the damned in hell suffer retributive punishment. For more on her arguments against post-mortem retributive punishment see Marilyn McCord Adams, 'Hell and the God of Justice', *Religious Studies* 11, no. 4 (Dec., 1974), pp. 433–447.

³⁴⁴ Adams (2002a), p. 476.

Even if Adams' view seems conceptually coherent at first sight, I will now demonstrate that her account is inadequate in convincing us to accept universalism. The main problems that I scrutinize focus on her account of restorative punishment after death. To this examination I now turn.

Part II

Adams, as we have seen, holds that God creates humans in a world in which they can experience and discover things and make positive meaning of it all. Humans seek and find meaning in the world around them by assigning positive significance to events that occur in their lives and the lives of others. However, human nature and the environment in which it is set makes humans vulnerable to horrors. This drives them to think that there is no future good and no hope in their lives and this damages their meaning-making capacity to such an extent that their freedom is impaired. God's goodness necessarily requires that God will be good to each created person by guaranteeing to him a life that is a great good to him on the whole, and one in which his participation in deep and horrendous evils is defeated within the context of his life. Eternal damnation is a destiny that God will not permit since the eternal horrors of hell are of such a nature that they will give conclusive reason to believe that the life of the damned cannot be a great good to them. Adams, however, permits the occurrence of post-mortem curative punishment. She holds that some of the worst horror-perpetrators may have to undergo 'terrible suffering' in the course of developing an empathetic capacity to suffer with those whom they tortured.³⁴⁵ In developing empathetic capacity, the horror-perpetrators will realize the horrendous nature of their actions and that will in turn lead them freely to repent and freely to be reconciled to God. In this part of the chapter, I argue that Adams' account is weak in defending the claim that all will be saved in the end because her curative punishment model does not guarantee that all horror-perpetrators will achieve reconciliation. I will maintain that:

1. The meaning-making of some horror-perpetrators is damaged in such a way that it cannot be guaranteed that the curative punishment which they will have to undergo would help them in reconciling to God;
2. Adams' argument is unsuccessful in showing that the horror-perpetrators will be able to make a free choice to accept God's love and consequently be reconciled to him.

³⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 476.

1. Horrendous evils and meaning-making

While Adams rejects the eternal punishment of hell, she permits the occurrence of post-mortem curative punishment for the horror-perpetrators. If understanding horrors requires experience in kind, and comprehensive empathetic capacity is a genuine human end, then post-mortem suffering would be useful.³⁴⁶ She holds that

Since the cure for horrors is the making of positive meaning, and the restoration to the horror participant of the capacity to make positive meanings; and since the process of letting go of the old and groping towards the new is and can be a painful process, all horror participants can expect to undergo painful rehabilitation. But whether one is a horror perpetrator or victim will make a big difference to the concrete steps and stages of rehabilitation, as well as to the particular shape of the positive meaning that can be made. Can we even begin to imagine the excruciating process involved in Hitler's developing an empathetic capacity to suffer with those whom he tortured?³⁴⁷

The horror-perpetrators will have to undergo, in Adams' words, 'painful rehabilitation', 'terrible suffering', 'severe post-mortem trials', in the course of developing an empathetic capacity to suffer with those whom they tortured.³⁴⁸ In developing empathetic capacity, the horror-perpetrators will conceive how horrendous it was to produce evils and this will lead them to freely repent and freely reconcile with God. Adams seems to hold that direct experience of a painful experience necessarily generates empathetic capacity. It is not obvious, however, that the post-mortem pain and suffering which the horror-perpetrators will have to experience will generate the empathetic capacity which Adams has in mind. The meaning-making of some horror-perpetrators is damaged in such a way that it cannot be guaranteed that the curative punishment which they will have to undergo would help them in reconciling with God.

What is interesting in Adams' account is that the capacity to empathize can be developed only if someone has the exact experience of pain as the one who originally suffered it. Adams holds that lack of direct experience of a particular horror deprives someone from this empathetic capacity. Since the horror-perpetrator does not have a direct experience of the horror he inflicts on his victim(s), he is incapable of appreciating the horrendous nature of his actions and cannot evaluate horrendous evils as such. It is not enough for the horror-perpetrator to identify imaginatively with his victim's painful situation; that is, it is not

³⁴⁶ Adams (1993b), pp. 326–327.

³⁴⁷ Adams (2002a), p. 476.

³⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 476.

enough just to have the ability to imagine what it would be like for the other to experience pain, sorrow, and so on. Empathetic capacity is necessary for a person to assess what it would be like to suffer a particular harm and how bad it would be to produce it. Only by directly experiencing the horrors he inflicted on his victims, can the horror-perpetrator develop an empathetic capacity and so appreciate the horrendous nature of his actions.³⁴⁹ Once this capacity is developed, the horror-perpetrator will appreciate the horrendous nature of his actions and this will lead him to repent for his actions and ask for union with God. So, for example, Hitler would have to directly experience the horrors he inflicted on his victims in order to fully conceive the horrendous nature of his actions, empathize with his victims and so come to union with God.

It is worth noting that Adams does not explain what it would be for someone to have, in this case Hitler, a direct experience of the horrors he inflicted. Following Adams' claim, if Hitler was to appreciate the horrors which he has afflicted and develop the empathetic capacity it may require that he experiences the scale of these evils, the quantity and the quality of these evils. We can say that there are two ways in which Hitler could experience the evils he inflicted. Firstly, we could say that Hitler will have to experience each and every person's experience. So for example, it may require that he had the background experience of his victims—e.g. had grown up in a Jewish community, been persecuted for years, etc., and then shipped off to a concentration camp to be tortured and then executed. Secondly, she can say that Hitler may need to experience the holocaust in a holistic way. Both approaches however, face problems. In the first case, Hitler by experiencing the evils which each individual suffered would be unable to get the whole experience of the holocaust, that is, he would not conceive the scale of the horror of the holocaust on the whole. In the second case, we can say that only God is capable of having a holistic

³⁴⁹ Adams puts little emphasis on the distinction between the horror-sufferers and the horror-perpetrators when it comes to their vulnerability to horrors. Some philosophers point this out. See, for example, Katherine, A. Rogers, 'The Abolition of sin: A Response to Adams in the Augustinian Tradition', in *Faith and Philosophy* 19, no. 1 (Jan., 2002), pp. 69–84. Daniel Ambord, 'Evil, Meaning and Meaning-Makers', *Ars Disputandi* 10 (2010), pp. 38–49. Adams seems to maintain that horrendous evils cannot be declared horrendous by someone who does not experience them directly. For example, someone who merely observes or studies a horrendous evil such as nuclear war, genocide, child abuse, and severe mental illnesses, but is nevertheless not directly affected by it, cannot conceive the horrendous nature of such evils. Since he cannot conceive it, he cannot appreciate how bad it would be to produce it or suffer it. Therefore, he cannot evaluate horrendous evils as such because he would be incapable of conceiving of said evils. Nevertheless, someone could say that I can declare 'that is a horrendous evil' without fully understanding it. Moreover, anyone who has experienced intense pain can grasp enough what effect an intense-pain causing event would have on someone else. Pain caused by something you have experienced is still pain, and surely nearly everyone knows what pain is. The rest is just a calculation. For example, I cannot grasp all of classical logic or mathematics all at once, but that does not mean that I do not understand classical logic or mathematics. Adams could object that pain cannot be quantified in this way—'chopped up' into segments and counted—but then she will be defending a substantial thesis about pain and anyone who wants to deny that pain is to some extent 'countable' at least he has some work to do to make their case.

experience of the holocaust. It would seem impossible by definition that Hitler would be capable of having this kind of experience. Adams remains silent on how exactly a horror-perpetrator such as Hitler will experience the horrors he inflicted.

Setting this aside, the main difficulty with Adams' account is that it is not obvious that directly experiencing pain generates empathetic feelings. The vulnerability of Adams' account lies in the fact that she does not distinguish between having an empathetic capacity from having the actual experience of empathy or empathetic concern. Let us explain these two. Human beings have the capacity for empathy. That is, they have the capacity to understand the emotional state of another person who is in pain, distress and so on, they have the capacity to understand the perspective of another's feelings. To have an empathetic concern is to respond to a person's perceived emotional state of sorrow, pain, distress etc by experiencing feelings of similar sort. To develop the full capacity of empathy and empathetic concern suggests that you do not only understand that someone is in pain, distress and the like, but also you have empathetic feelings for this person and you act on these feelings.³⁵⁰

Adams seems to endorse this approach as to what it means to develop an empathetic capacity. It is not enough for the horror-perpetrator to identify imaginatively with his victim's painful situation; rather, the horror-perpetrator needs to develop an empathic concern. The empathic concern cannot be produced only by the ability to imagine what it would be like for the other to experience pain, sorrow, and so on, but it can be developed only if the horror-perpetrator has the exact same experience of that pain. This direct experience would lead the horror-perpetrators, according to Adams, to experience empathetic feelings. That is, it will lead them to exercise empathetic feelings, such as compassion, tenderness and the like. Once this capacity is developed, the horror-perpetrator would understand how horrendous his actions were and how they affected his victim(s) and he will want to repent and come to reconciliation with God.

The flaw in Adams' account lies in the fact that she takes for granted that direct experience of pain necessarily generates empathetic feelings or empathetic concern. This direct experience would lead, Adams claims, the horror-perpetrators to develop feelings of compassion, tenderness and the like. Moreover, she assumes that if they have these

³⁵⁰ For more see John Doris and Stephen Stich, 'Moral Psychology: Empirical Approaches', *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Edward N. Zalta, ed. (Winter 2008 Edition), <http://plato.stanford.edu/>. Also Karsten Stueber, 'Empathy', *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Edward N. Zalta, ed (Fall 2008 Edition) <http://plato.stanford.edu/>

feelings they will act on them in such a way that they would repent for their actions and ask for union with God. I argue that direct experience of pain does not necessarily generate empathetic feelings. We can say that people may have the capacity to empathize but they still do not develop empathetic feelings, nor do they experience empathy. In the case of the horror-perpetrators it is not obvious that they will develop this empathetic capacity because, as I am about to argue, they have their capacity for meaning-making damaged in a way that prevents this development. Adams seems to ignore two categories of meaning-makers. Those who use meaning-making for their evils ends and those who have a genuinely evil nature. I argue that the people who belong to these two categories have their meaning-making damaged or corrupted in way that prevents them from developing empathetic feelings.

Adams claims that direct participation in horrors severely damages or even destroys the capacity for meaning-making. Those who experience directly horrendous evils have their capacity for meaning-making either severely damaged in such a way that they cannot conceive how these evils can be overcome; or destroyed in a way that they are no longer capable of finding any positive meaning in their life and in the world in which they live.³⁵¹ From this we can say that since the horror-perpetrator does not have a direct experience of the horror he inflicts on his victim(s), he is incapable of appreciating the horrendous nature of his actions and cannot evaluate horrendous evils as such. Therefore, we can say that his meaning-making is affected differently than that of the victim. So in what way is his meaning-making corrupted?

Firstly, we can say that the meaning-making of some of the horror-perpetrators is damaged because of their life choices and desires. Some horror-perpetrators use meaning-making to justify their evil acts in a way that damages their capacity for meaning-making. Consider the following case: Alex knows that killing or torturing Ben is bad. His aim in killing or torturing Ben is to silence him. In doing so, he would prevent him from giving information about him to others who want to harm him. His goal is to save himself and he reasons that the best way to do that is by making sure that Ben will not give him up. Here we have a case in which the horror-perpetrator has specific goals and acts to fulfil them. He judges that the best way to save his own life is by silencing his victim at any cost. Contrary to that of the horror-victims, a horror-perpetrator's capacity for meaning-making is damaged or

³⁵¹ Adams does not sufficiently explain how the horror-perpetrator's meaning-making is damaged or destroyed. It seems that she suggests that all horror-participants have their meaning-making capacity damaged and some times destroyed in the same way. As I am about to show this cannot be the case. Adams' failure to make this distinction explicit makes her account vulnerable to my criticism.

corrupted (as Adams would probably agree) because of the choices he makes, the values he has and his unwillingness to abandon his false beliefs.³⁵² What he takes to be valuable and the reasons he uses to justify this, is what leads to a kind of twisted and corrupted meaning-making. If the horror-perpetrator's meaning-making is corrupted by acting in evil ways, then he will continue making bad meaning. In continuing to make bad meaning he cannot conceive of the suffering he inflicts on his victim in the right way. If he cannot experience the suffering and pain which he inflicts in the right way, then he cannot accept that he has done wrong properly. And since he cannot accept that he has done wrong properly he will continue having corrupted meaning-making.

Secondly, Adams does not consider cases where horror-perpetrators are genuinely evil. In the chapter on Talbott, I argued that Talbott ignores the category which consists of people who are genuinely evil. It seems that Adams ignores this category as well. I argued that some people act in evil ways and persist in their evil actions out of mere wickedness. They act in evil ways just for the sake of acting in evil ways or just because they enjoy acting in evil ways. They know that what they do is wrong and that their victims experience pain and suffering, nevertheless, they continue doing it. For example, consider cases in which someone enjoys bullying and psychologically manipulating others for his own amusement. People who belong to this category take pleasure in the pain and suffering of others or they are gratified through the infliction of pain and humiliation. Or there are cases where the horror-perpetrator knows that his victim is in pain and suffering, nevertheless, he continues to inflict pain just for the sake of inflicting pain. Adams will have to accept that it is conceivable that some people are genuinely evil and they act in evil ways just for the sake of acting in evil ways.

With the help of these two categories I will argue that even if the horror-perpetrators have the capacity to empathize by experiencing directly the horrendous evils which they have inflicted on their victims this, however, does not entail that they will experience empathy. If some horror-perpetrators' nature carries this kind of twisted meaning-making or if some horror-perpetrators' nature is genuinely evil it is not obvious that they will develop the capacity to empathize. If they do not develop this capacity, it is difficult to see how they would repent for their actions and ask for forgiveness. If they do not develop this capacity

³⁵² Remember that the horror-victim's capacity for meaning-making is damaged in such a way that they cannot conceive how evils can be overcome; and the capacity is destroyed in such a way that they are no longer capable of finding any positive value in their life and in the world they live in.

then they cannot reconcile to God. If some of the horror-perpetrators do not reconcile to God, Adams' universalism fails.

From what we said above about Adams' view of empathetic capacity, recall that on her view it is required that the horror-perpetrator have an actual experience of empathy in order to repent. He has to have empathetic feelings of compassion, tenderness and the like. These feelings, I argue cannot be simply generated by direct experience of horrors. In the case of the first category of horror-perpetrators their corrupted meaning-making may prevent this development because they have various and conflicting desires. As I have said these people are ones who continue to make wrong meaning because they have already corrupted their meaning-making through their choices and desires. If they carry this kind of nature in the afterlife, it is not obvious that they will abandon their beliefs and not resist experiencing empathy. For example, in order to understand what his victim suffered Alex would have to be tortured and maybe killed in similar circumstances. However, if Alex thinks that what he did during his earthy life was justified and that acting differently would have cost him his life, he may not develop empathetic feelings for his victims. He may not be willing to abandon his beliefs even if he can understand that his victim went through excruciating pain. He will interpret the suffering in his own maladapted way and so it need not lead to empathy. Since his beliefs and desires are severely corrupted we may say that there is no guarantee that he will empathize with his victim. In the case of the horror-perpetrators who have a genuinely evil nature, it is even more difficult to see how they would develop empathetic feelings for their victims. It seems quite possible that a horror-perpetrator who inflicted pain on his victim just for the sake of inflicting pain or because it amused him would not develop feelings of compassion.

Having empathetic feelings, and acting upon them, requires that a person already has his capacity for meaning-making in a working order. The meaning-making capacity of the horror-perpetrators is not enabled in a way that will permit the exercise of these feelings. Actual experience of empathy can be prevented by the horror-perpetrators' damaged or corrupted meaning-making. For a person to be able to feel compassion requires that the person who acts in such a manner has already attained a level of morality and spirituality that will permit this. This would imply, in Adams' account, that the person has his capacity for meaning-making already restored to some extent. A horror-perpetrator whose meaning-making capacity has been restored and feels permanent compassion for his victims will allow us to say, and probably Adams will agree, that it will be conceptually and psychologically impossible for him to continue acting in evil ways and not repent.

Repentance will be assured. However, if some horror-perpetrators retain this nature and their twisted meaning-making into the life to come then there is no guarantee that they will develop the capacity to empathize. Their insistence on their evil choices and corrupted desires and beliefs prevents the development of empathic capacity. The horror-perpetrators are in such a state of damaged meaning-making which it prevents them from exercising their empathetic capacity. If they do not develop this capacity, which is essential in the case of the horror-perpetrators for reconciliation they will not be reconciled to God, and if they do not, then Adams' universalism fails.

Adams could reply to the above criticism by claiming that, at the moment of death, God makes Himself present to all human beings and informs them that He loves them. She argues that one may think that God would have to make sure that His human creatures know that He loves them and that 'many misunderstandings of Divine intentions will have to be cleared up'.³⁵³ She holds that we should expect nothing less than that God would make sure to 'break through' as soon as possible after the horror-participants' death and be so obvious and present as to convince at least some fragments of themselves of the following general truths:

That love is, was, and always will be God's meaning; that beloved by God is who we are, have been, and always will be; that horrors never were and never will be final; that God was never aloof from our horror-participation, neither was, is, nor ever shall be aloof in relation to us, because we are created for mutual indwelling; that God is powerful enough and resourceful enough to make the plots resolve, so that everything will be right.³⁵⁴

She furthermore maintains that:

Even the horror-perpetrators will be able to forgive themselves knowing that their evil acts did not separate them from the love of a God who identified with them on the cross. They will also be assured by the knowledge that God has compensated their victims....Finally they will be amazed and comforted by Divine resourcefulness...to force horrors to make positive contributions to God's redemptive plan.³⁵⁵

³⁵³ Adams (2006), p. 239.

³⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 240.

³⁵⁵ Adams (1999), p. 167. Adams argues that by virtue of endowing horrors with a good aspect, God makes the victims' experience so meaningful that they would not wish it away. This enables the perpetrator to accept his participation in horrors as part of a good and worthwhile life. Present participation in horrors is already meaningful because they are partially constitutive of the most meaningful relationship of all. The Incarnation, she says, already endows participation in horrors with a good aspect that makes way for their defeat, 'even if participants do not yet recognize or appropriate this dimension of meaning'.

The horror-perpetrators thus, having cognitive contact with the Divine love would assist them in thinking that suffering horrendous evils has an objective good-making aspect.³⁵⁶ That is, the horror-perpetrators will know the reasons for their punishment and that God has a place for all in His kingdom. Adams maintains that once the horror-perpetrators accept these truths and the reasons for their punishment then the process of enabling and healing their meaning-making capacity will begin and so, consequently, will the process of reconciliation to God. However, even with this reply Adams' account does not escape my criticism.

Even if God informs the horror-perpetrators of the aforementioned truths and reasons for their experience of punishment, that does not guarantee the salvation of all horror-perpetrators. I do not deny that if God informs the horror-perpetrators of His existence and His purpose for them that this would affect some of them, and assist in their first steps towards the healing process and to reconciliation. Nevertheless, the problem with Adams' reply lies in this: the fact that God informs the horror-perpetrators about His presence and His purposes does not necessarily entail that they will accept these truths and the reasons for their punishment and consequently accept God's love.

Firstly, in the case of the worst villains who are genuinely evil it is not obvious that God would successfully convince some fragments (whatever this may be) of themselves of the aforementioned general truths. It may be the case that even if they know that God loves them and it is best for them to be reconciled to Him, the character which they have acquired for themselves may be such that they will want to refuse God just for the sake of refusing Him. Adams claims that the horror-perpetrators will forgive themselves for committing horrendous evils. But this can only happen if the horror-perpetrators accept that they did something really bad. In the case of those who are evil it may be the case that they will persevere in their evil nature and find no reasons to forgive themselves because in their view they are fine as they are and they can live with the evils they have committed in their earthly life. In short, it is—to say at least—unlikely that an individual who is genuinely evil would be impressed by God's presence and so begin the rehabilitation process. It may well be that some of the horror-perpetrators have all the relevant information they need about the source of their supreme happiness and they may also be aware of the consequences of their actions. However, they may still continue to refuse God and act in evil ways just so that they can frustrate God's plans. So the fact that their victims

³⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 162.

are compensated or that God has ways to redeem horrors would be of no importance to them.

Moreover, at least in the case of the horror-perpetrators, it seems clear that information is not meant to be what does the work in Adams' curative punishment model; this is the role played by experiences of horrors. In the case of the worst sinners, the ones who are genuinely evil, we can say that if, on the one hand, God's presence does not affect them and if, on the other hand, their meaning-making prevents the development of empathetic feelings then it is not obvious how these horror-perpetrators would come to repent and be reconciled to God.

Secondly, if some of the horror-perpetrators have a severely damaged capacity for meaning-making, and if direct experience of horrors damages or destroys meaning-making, then it is not obvious how the horror-perpetrators will accept the reasons for their punishment and come to make positive meaning from their suffering. Consequently, it seems legitimate to ask: how can they accept God? Direct experience of horrendous evils destroys the meaning-making of the one who suffers them. In the case of the horror-perpetrator this would suggest that it would destroy his meaning-making in the same way as it destroyed the capacity of meaning-making of his victim(s). Moreover, as we have seen, Adams holds that direct experience of horrendous evils destroys meaning-making capacities in such a way as to lead the victim to question whether his life is worth living. So the horror-perpetrator through experiencing horrors may question whether his punishment has any positive meaning because direct experience of horrors destroys meaning-making.

The horror-perpetrators may not *accept* the reasons for their punishment, or they may not *understand* the reasons for their punishment. Someone can realize that the suffering he undergoes is for his own good if he already has his meaning-making capacity restored, let us say, in some fashion. To enjoy a meaningful experience of the divine love through the medium of punishment, an individual's meaning-making capacities need to be in good working order. That is, they must be able to accept and understand the reasons behind their experience of pain and suffering and also they must be able to value their experiences in such a way as to find it good. The fact that the horror-perpetrators, firstly, will not have their capacity for meaning-making healed and enabled and secondly, will have to undergo excruciating punishment in order to empathize with their victims' suffering, makes it difficult to see how they will have a meaningful experience of God and thus accept the

reasons for their punishment and be convinced that God loves them. The horror-perpetrator not only has to conceive the full extent of the horrendous nature of his evil acts and their seriousness by directly experiencing these evils but also he has to recognize the reasons for his punishment and through it the experience of the ultimate good—God. If the worst of the horror-perpetrators have their meaning-making severely damaged or destroyed, and if infliction of horror destroys meaning-making, then it is not obvious how they would come to recognize God as a loving Creator, accept their punishment and reconcile with Him. It seems that they will not accept or understand the reasons for their punishment. If they do not accept the reasons for their punishment due to their corrupted nature and the experience of pain, they may experience their suffering as an unjust and hateful thing. If the wicked do not have their meaning-making capacity enabled and healed, then there is no guarantee that they will be convinced of God's love.

Thus, there is an inconsistency in Adams position. The horror-perpetrators would have to have their meaning-making capacities in good working order to be able to have a meaningful experience of the divine love but also experience of divine love is required for the healing of meaning-making. Damaged or destroyed meaning-making, on the one hand, and participation in horrendous evils, on the other hand, are supposed to prevent this sort of experience of the divine. If the horror-perpetrators do not have this kind of experience which is required for enabling and healing meaning-making and also have to experience the pain and suffering which they have caused, then there is no guarantee that their meaning-making capacity will not remain damaged or destroyed. If their meaning-making capacity is severely damaged or destroyed, then the horror-perpetrators may not accept the reasons for their punishment and would experience the horrendous evils and pain as an unjust and hateful thing. This may lead to even more damaging of human meaning-making in such a way that it seems plausible that some of the sinners will be driven away from God and thus not be saved in the end.

Adams could reply to this criticism in two ways. She could maintain, firstly, that God would repair severely damaged or destroyed meaning-making capacities. God could restore the horror-perpetrators' meaning-making capacities in such that they could become convinced of the aforementioned truths and be able to feel compassion and thus be able to repent for their evil actions. However, the question is not whether God could do this, but whether he could do so without altering their personalities by miraculous transformation. Secondly, she could maintain that God can continue offering many opportunities for

restoration and reconciliation in many lives to come and so there will be a time in the distant future when all will be saved.

Let us begin with the first approach. Let us remember that Adams' universalism is based on her confidence in the restoration of sinners' meaning-making capacities. This kind of restoration is a personal task; that is, it is up to the individual to recognize and assign positive meaning to his sufferings and to his life. Meaning-making is a process which begins from 'inside' the individual and it is not something which can be achieved through instant transformation of character. As we have seen in part I, Adams holds that the horror-perpetrators' meaning-making capacity will be enabled and healed through a long and difficult process, not instantaneously. The damned cannot accept and receive forgiveness unless they take responsibility for their evil acts, recognize God as their only source of happiness and ask for forgiveness. The process of reconciliation can begin, first, if the horror-perpetrators develop their empathetic capacity, and second, if they make a conscious choice to accept the reasons for their punishment and recognize God as the ultimate good. From this we can say that Adams cannot consistently hold that God would alter the worst sinners' personalities by miraculous transformation. I argued that the worst sinners not only display a critically damaged meaning-making capacity but also that their nature is fixed in such a way that they cannot act otherwise. If the horror-perpetrators display the kind of character which damages or destroys the capacity for meaning-making, and if God cannot achieve this restoration without radically changing their personality, then we can maintain that it is not guaranteed that the horror-perpetrators (at least the worst kind) will be saved. However, if Adams resorts to the claim that for some there will be a mysterious instant transformation, then she would also be required to explain why this transformation did not take place earlier (probably during the horror-perpetrators' earthly lives) or why God created evil people who cannot have their meaning-making capacity restored without divine intervention in the first place.

Moreover, as we have seen, Adams holds that vulnerability to horrendous evils impairs human freedom. An individual's freedom can be restored once his capacity for meaning-making is enabled and healed through a meaningful experience of God. Nevertheless, the horror-perpetrators will have to directly experience the horrors which they have inflicted on their victims in order to develop an empathetic capacity, which in turn will enable their meaning-making and lead them to request reconciliation with God. Reconciliation with God will be the outcome of free surrender to God's will and love. The horror-perpetrator chooses God freely after recognizing and assigning the positive meaning of his curative

punishment and accepting God's love. From this again we can see that Adams cannot consistently accept the possibility of instant transformation of character because she would thereby be diminishing the importance of freedom of choice in her account of what is involved in accepting God.

Alternatively, Adams could reply to my criticism and hold that the future lives of the horror-perpetrators will be as many as are required for the restoration of their horror-perpetrators' meaning-making capacities. She maintains, as we have seen, that God in reconstituting the fragmented self of the horror-perpetrators would engage in a long and arduous process rather than to complete the task in a twinkling of-an-eye.³⁵⁷ Such a reply would be unsatisfactory, however, because Adams also holds that horrors on earth are hell enough so God will not prolong these in the lives to come. If some horror-perpetrators' meaning-making is severely damaged or destroyed, then God would have to prolong their residence in the afterlives until they become children of God. However, if continuation and meaning-making restoration requires the direct experience of the horrors which the horror-perpetrators have inflicted on their victims, and if the horror-perpetrators capacity for meaning-making is destroyed, then it would suggest that the afterlives of the horror-participants would consist of more horror than their earthly lives. If the wicked have their meaning-making capacities damaged or destroyed and if the suffering they undergo is of an excruciating nature, then it may be the case that instead of developing an empathetic capacity and accepting God's love they would become angry and would not easily, or at all, develop regret for the things that they have done. And if more horror experience leads to greater damage of human meaning-making capacity then there is no guarantee that some of the wicked will never come to God.

In the following section I return to the subject of free will. I argue that experience of horrendous evils diminishes human free will in such a way that the victim of horrors cannot freely come to God. I examine a particular type of horrendous evil—depression—which is especially relevant to my argument for it demonstrates that, in at least some cases, suffering diminishes free will. I support this claim by introducing the concepts of decisional capacity and consent and also by focusing on a particular view of mental disorders taken from Carl Elliot.

³⁵⁷ Adams (2006), p. 239.

2. Human freedom and reconciliation

In this section, I argue against Adams' claim that all horror-perpetrators will come to reconcile to God freely. Adams, as we have seen, holds that reconciliation with God will be the outcome of free surrender to God's will and love. The horror-perpetrator chooses God freely after recognizing the positive meaning of his curative punishment and accepting God's love. I examine a type of horrendous evil—depression—and I show that direct experiences of such an evil impairs its victims competence and decisional capacity and so diminishes his free will. This example of something many people experience should cause us to view Adams' claims with extreme scepticism.

Let us begin with defining decisional capacity. Typically, decisional capacity can be defined as the ability to make decisions. For the purposes of our discussion in this section, the notion of decisional capacity will be limited to health care contexts and particularly those cases of depression where decisions to consent to or refuse treatment are concerned.³⁵⁸ So, in this case, decisional capacity can be defined 'the ability of health care subjects to make their own health care decisions'.³⁵⁹ I will use Elliott's argument that severely depressed patients may not be competent to consent and so cannot be considered accountable for their decisions, to argue that some horror-perpetrators lack the competence to consent and so cannot make a free choice to reconcile to God.

Three conditions are typically said to determine the validity of an individual's consent. It must be properly informed, free of coercion and the individual must have the ability to make the particular decision. The latter condition is sometimes referred to as 'competence' on the ground that what is at issue is 'the ability to perform a task'. And it is sometimes referred to as 'capacity' since the task in question involves the capacity to make a decision.³⁶⁰ What one counts, however, as competence to consent depends on what one counts as the capacities relevant to the task in question. Decisional capacity is often divided into four or five sub-capacities. These are (1) understanding: the ability to understand the facts involved in the decision that is about to be made; (2) appreciation: the ability to appreciate the nature and significance of the decision that one is faced with; (3) reasoning: the ability to reason and manipulate information rationally is crucial for

³⁵⁸ Questions of this kind of capacity often extend to other contexts such as the capacity to stand trial, or make decisions related to finances. See Louis Charland, 'Decision-Making Capacity', *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Edward N. Zalta, ed. (Fall 2008 Edition), <http://plato.stanford.edu/>.

³⁵⁹ Ibid.

³⁶⁰ Ibid.

understanding and appreciating the issue in a decision; (4) choice: the ability to express or communicate an intended decision; and (5) the possession of values and goals: decisional capacity requires ‘a conception of what is good’ because weighing the risks and benefits of various alternative choices requires values.³⁶¹

Adams holds that humans have impaired freedom because of their nature and the environment in which they live, and as such cannot be fully responsible for their evil actions. She holds that someone can choose God with ‘fully open eyes’ once his freedom is repaired and he knows all the relevant information about his actions and its consequences. Taking into consideration the above conditions for decisional capacity we can say that an individual makes an informed decision once he has taken in all the relevant information and weighed it according to his goals.³⁶² Let us see how Adams’ approach of freely choosing God looks when set alongside the above claims. Firstly, we can say that an individual takes in the relevant information in knowing that God is love and that his punishment is necessary in order to develop into a child of God. Secondly, he weighs this information according to his goals and values; in this case, he would value God’s love and the good from his punishment to be the best possible outcome for him. Finally, knowing all the relevant information and recognizing what is ultimately best for him he would make a free choice to accept God.

Adams, as we have seen, holds that experiencing horrendous evils damages meaning-making. An individual’s freedom can be restored once his capacity for meaning-making is enabled and healed through a meaningful experience with God. Nevertheless, the horror-perpetrators will have to directly experience the horrors which they have inflicted on their victims in order to develop an empathetic capacity. For example, if someone manipulated his partner into such a degree that it led him/her to depression, then the horror-perpetrator will have to have direct experience of that pain and suffering and consequently he will have to become depressed to be able to evaluate properly the horrendous nature of his actions and their consequences. Adams classifies depression as a horrendous evil. As a horrendous evil depression will have to be directly experienced by those who have produced it in their victims. In my view, this presents a serious obstacle to Adams’ account of free response to God’s love and of the process of rehabilitating punishment. The

³⁶¹ Ibid.

³⁶² Carl Elliot, ‘Caring About Risks: Are Severely Depressed Patients Competent to Consent to Research?’ *Archives of General Psychiatry* 54, no. 22 (1997), pp. 113–116. <http://ovidsp.tx.ovid.com/>. The article was accessed online and its pages were not numbered.

problem is that in cases where the horror-perpetrator has to suffer depression he will be incompetent to consent to the process of restoration and so cannot choose God freely.

Elliott's work on severely depressed patients' competence in consenting to or refusing treatment will assist me in showing that the horror-perpetrators who directly experience depression are incapable of making a free choice to accept God for which they can be held accountable for. Elliott challenges the claim that depression leaves intact the ability to reason, to deliberate, to compare and evaluate and holds that depression may well impair someone's competence to consent to treatment, and most importantly, it can impair his ability 'to evaluate risks and benefits'.³⁶³ From this he argues that depression is a disorder that impairs an individual's mental abilities such that 'he is not a morally responsible agent' even if he shows competence.³⁶⁴ A person who suffers from depression can make decisions but usually we would not hold him accountable for his actions. Why is that? Elliot thinks that an individual's intellectual ability is not the only thing that is relevant to decision-making: his emotional state can also affect his decision. For example, the criminal law in some jurisdictions recognizes so-called 'crimes of passion'. Those who perform crimes under severe emotional stress and mental illnesses such as schizophrenia or multiple personality syndrome usually are not judged fully accountable for their actions. Moreover, it is not hard to see that when we are angry or sad or in despair, we act in ways which do not reflect our character. Elliot says that:

In emotional extremes, we value, think, and behave differently-sometimes so differently that we might later believe that the decisions we have made are not decisions for which we can be held completely and unproblematically responsible.³⁶⁵

The important part of this is that he holds that in assessments of competence one must take into account the emotional factors surrounding a decision. He argues that there are cases in which the patient understands the effects of treatment, nevertheless may 'still fail to appreciate fully just how the treatment would affect his health'.³⁶⁶ As we have seen earlier,

³⁶³ Ibid.

³⁶⁴ However, it is evident that people sometimes make decisions which are considered highly irrational by others. So a theory of decisional capacity must allow for the fact that individuals can make this kind of decisions. An example that is often used to illustrate this decision is the refusal of life-saving transfusion due to doctrinal religious reasons. See Charland, 2008. This suggests that even if an individual is competent in making a decision, he knows all the relevant facts about the task in-hand he can nevertheless be stubborn or unreasonable. However, because 'we recognize that a person generally has the right to make even unsound decisions, a judgement about competence ensures that whatever decision a person makes, it is truly his decision: a decision for which he can finally be held accountable'. See Elliot, 1997.

³⁶⁵ Elliot, 1997.

³⁶⁶ Ibid.

decisional capacity involves the capacity to be able to appreciate the consequences of your choices, it ‘involves a deeper comprehension of how the decisions will affect’ your life.³⁶⁷ A depressed person, may have his cognitive, rational decision-making abilities so disrupted that, for example, he can convince himself that his situation will never change and may refuse treatment on the ‘unrealistic belief that it will not help him’.³⁶⁸ On the other hand, there are patients whose cognitive reasoning powers are intact but their ability to weigh risks and benefits is compromised. As Elliott states, this is,

the depressed patient who is capable of understanding all the facts about his illness and the research protocol in which he is enrolling, and who appreciates the risks and the broader implications of the protocol on his life, but who, as a result of his illness, is not motivated to take those risks into account in the same way as the rest of us.³⁶⁹

Severely depressed patients are not in the best position to make important decisions about their welfare, particularly ‘given the sense of hopelessness and worthlessness’ that characterizes them.³⁷⁰ It seems reasonable, says Elliott, to worry about their decision-making.

Elliott concludes that, firstly, an individual who suffers from depression has values, beliefs, desires, and dispositions that are dramatically different from when he is healthy to the extent that it is unclear whether the decisions he makes are ‘authentically’ his.³⁷¹ The individual who suffers from depression is in such a mental state that his behaviour and choices do not seem to be truly his. Secondly, severely depressed patients do not display the minimal degree of self-interest (concern for their own well-being) that is ordinarily found in other people and are not best positioned to judge their own interests. A severely depressed person would fail to consider his interests in deciding whether to consent to treatment, and so we cannot really say that this person is accountable for consenting to it.

In the light of these, consider again Adams’ claim that all horror-perpetrators will freely accept God’s love. Adams argues that the horror-perpetrators can only begin to appreciate the horrors which they have inflicted on their victims if they have direct experience of these horrors. In having both direct experience of the horrors and knowledge of God’s purposes for them, they would be able to understand and fully appreciate the significance

³⁶⁷ Ibid.

³⁶⁸ Ibid.

³⁶⁹ Ibid.

³⁷⁰ Ibid.

³⁷¹ Ibid.

of the decisions that they are faced with, and using their reasoning they will value what is good and pursue it. However, in cases in which horror-perpetrators have to experience depression in order to empathize with their victims, two problems arise for Adams' account.

Firstly, since the horror-perpetrators will experience depression their meaning-making might be damaged in such a way that they cannot recognize anything good from their experience. I have argued earlier that in the case of the horror-perpetrators, their meaning-making will not only be damaged from the horrors which they will have to experience (post-mortem) but also it is already damaged from their deployment of evil for meaning-making in their earthly lives. If they cannot accept God's love and their punishment because of their evil nature, and if being a victim of depression can lead someone to fail to appreciate how God's ways would affect his life, it is not then obvious how the horror-perpetrator's meaning-making can be healed and enabled. As seen above, the horror-perpetrator may convince himself that his situation will never change, and may refuse God's love on the false belief that nothing that God can do can help with his situation.

Secondly, and most importantly, we have seen that what is involved in reasoning about a particular course of action and reaching a decision is weighing the risks, benefits and consequences of proposed options.³⁷² Patients who suffer from depression are not able to value risks and benefits in the way people who do not suffer from this mental disorder can. If depression impairs an individual's capacity to take into consideration his own welfare and so value his experience, it is not obvious how the horror-perpetrator would come to value the experience given by God. The horror-perpetrator may be able to understand all the facts about his illness, that is, the horrendous nature of this evil and the purpose of suffering this horror. He may also be able to appreciate the benefits, the risks, and the broader implications of suffering this evil. That is, he may be able to appreciate the risk of not choosing God—misery and pain and he may be able to appreciate the benefit of the curative punishment and God's love. However, as a result of suffering depression, he would not be motivated to take those risks and benefits into account in the same way the rest of us would. Since the horror-perpetrator would be in some cases severely depressed, he would fail to consider his interests given the sense of hopelessness and worthlessness that would characterize him.

³⁷² Charland, 2008.

Depression, in the case of horror-perpetrators can alter their values, desires and beliefs and thereby impair their decision-making capacity in such a way that we cannot hold that they freely accept God. When a person finds himself in a state of depression he cannot see any positive meaning in his life. He ceases to have goals and he can no longer imagine himself being in a better state than the one he already finds himself. Consequently, this affects his perception of future possibilities. Since he has no future goals and sees no positive meaning in his life, all possibilities cease to be significant. The most important aspect of depression is not only that the subject does not see any future good in his life but that he is unable to do so. This aspect of depression diminishes free will. The question which inevitably arises is whether he can be considered accountable for his decision, that is, whether 'his' decision is truly his. Since the evaluations which inform decision-making are caused and imposed by the disease, they will not be authentically chosen by the victim.³⁷³ If the decisions the horror-perpetrator makes are not truly his, then Adams cannot hold that the horror-perpetrators will make a free choice to reconcile to God for which he can be held accountable. Moreover, if severely depressed horror-perpetrators are incompetent to consent and are placed in a situation in which their decisional capacity remains impaired, there is no guarantee that they will not become worse than they already are. Exposure to a situation in which they are incompetent to recognize the horrendous nature of their actions and God's love would give them more reasons to question the latter.

If God permits this kind of horrendous evil to be experienced by some of the horror-perpetrators then it is not clear how the wicked person's meaning-making capacities can be restored since experience of depression diminishes any possibility of finding any positive meaning in one's life. If the horror-perpetrators meaning-making capacity is distorted because of the infliction of this particular horrendous evil, then not only he will be unable to find some good in his suffering, but also his free will would be diminished because he does not have the kind of meaning-making capacity which will allow him to decide how to respond well to this suffering. It may be the case that there will be some cases in which the horror-perpetrators not only have their meaning-making capacities severely damaged but also have their free will diminished in such a degree that it is not clear how some of them will make positive meaning of their suffering and come to reconcile to God freely. And if some of the damned are not capable of exercising their free will then we can say that not all will achieve salvation through free response, and so Adams' universalism fails.

³⁷³ Ibid.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I argued that Adams' arguments in favour of universalism fail to show how salvation can be guaranteed to each individual person. I argued that her account of curative post-mortem punishment does not guarantee that all horror-perpetrators will be saved. I defended this claim, firstly, by arguing that direct experience of pain does not necessarily generate the empathetic capacity that Adams defends and so it is not obvious that all horror-perpetrators will develop such a capacity during the rehabilitation process. Moreover, I argued that if, on the one hand, the horror-perpetrators' meaning-making capacity is damaged or destroyed and, on the other hand, the suffering of horrors destroys meaning-making, then it is not guaranteed that they will recognize the curative nature of their punishment and God's love. From these, I concluded that it is not obvious that all horror-perpetrators will achieve salvation. Secondly, I focused on Adams' view that all horror-perpetrators will reconcile with God freely. I argued using the key example of depression that the model of curative punishment that she proposes does not guarantee that all horror-perpetrators will freely reconcile to God.

Chapter Six: Conclusion

1. The thesis in summary

I began this thesis with a discussion of the nature of the doctrine of hell and an explanation of the problem which hell creates for the Christian religion. I focused particularly on the claim that the doctrine is morally indefensible. The problem of hell arises once someone affirms a traditional conception of God, a being who is omnipotent and all loving, together with a commitment to an eschatological picture of human lives and history. The problem of hell creates a dilemma for the Christian theist who would have to either accept that the doctrine of hell is morally indefensible or reject the teachings of Christ in the New Testament.

Attempts to avoid undermining Christianity itself led Christians to respond to the above dilemma in two main ways: on the one hand, some have argued that the doctrine is morally defensible and have offered various alternative accounts of hell's nature and different interpretations of what it is involved in someone choosing hell. On the other hand, others have argued that Christ did not in fact teach the doctrine of hell, at least in its traditional form. In order to show this, a persuasive alternative interpretation of the key texts in the New Testament is required to show that those texts which appear to speak of eternal damnation in hell do not in fact do so. As I have explained, this is one strategy deployed in defence of universalism.

In the second chapter of the thesis, I provided a brief historical background of the doctrine of hell in order to trace its development in the last few centuries and to identify the main problems and criticisms against it. From there I mapped out the key arguments which universalists offer against the doctrine. These are founded in an understanding of the doctrine of God and of God's nature, in particular, the idea that God is a God of love. I considered the universalist accounts of John Hick, Thomas Talbott and Marilyn McCord Adams because I take these to be the most interesting contemporary approaches to the doctrine of hell and to the problem of hell. However, I argue that even if universal salvation is an idea that most of us would want to endorse, the arguments that these philosophers offer in supporting their accounts do not show that salvation is the fate of all human beings. Our examination of the problem of universalism has yielded some

important conclusions with respect to the accounts considered—it is now time to review these conclusions.

John Hick rejects the doctrine of hell in favour of Christian universalism, at least, this is his approach in his early writings. He defines God's nature as love and argues that the ultimate purpose for humanity is to be saved. The relationship that God has with His human creatures is such that God will be able to fulfil His purpose. His universalism is defended by an appeal to a theodicy which is eschatological in character. All earthly evil and suffering can be justified if God reconciles all to Himself. In chapter three, we saw that Hick's theodicy is characterized by two central themes: 'soul-making' and 'progressive lives' after death. Each individual's salvation depends on its voluntary response to God's love. God's purpose cannot be achieved without the voluntary co-operation of human creatures. Hick argues that most human beings are not ready to follow God by the time of their death and, in order for God to fulfil His purpose, He has to give them further opportunities for development. If God's plan to create fully developed persons is to succeed, then He will have to guarantee its success. If there is a continuous life after death that provides possibilities for reformation and continuing transformation for all those who have not yet attained God, it follows that God will eventually succeed in His purpose of winning all humans to Himself in faith and love. The important part of Hick's account is that all humans will be saved in the end, without God having to override the significant freedom which He has given them.

In chapter three, I argued that Hick's arguments in favour of universalism fail to convince us in accepting that all will be saved in the end. The problems that his account faces focus mainly on his view that humans have genuine freedom, and on his notion of progressive afterlives. For Hick freedom does not only consist in humans being free to act in evil ways but also that they are autonomous in such a way that their actions affect their lives and the environment in which they live. In response to Hick, firstly, I argued that if he wishes to maintain that human beings have genuine freedom, he will have to permit their eternal fate to be based on the choices they make and the character which they cultivate for themselves during their earthly lives and later on in their afterlives. If he does so, then he must concede that there is no guarantee that all people will come to God in faith and trust. Secondly, I argued that his notion of progressive lives does not guarantee that all will be saved in the end. The nature of the future worlds and environments, as he has described them, gives us good reasons to hold that it is possible that some of the sinners will deliberately continue either to sin or choose salvation for reasons which are not compatible

with God's plan for salvation. Thirdly, since the environments in the afterlives are similar to the earthly one there should be opportunities of dismissal and refusal similar to these available in the earthly life. If a person can exercise his freedom of choice in such an environment then there is no guarantee that he might choose not to be reconciled to God in any life, so Hick's afterlives are not necessarily progressive. Finally, I argued that the notions of 'epistemic distance' and 'God's hiddenness' which Hick deploys in an attempt to secure human freedom are both compromised in his view of the progressive afterlives.

The following chapter focused on Thomas Talbott's account. Talbott rejects the doctrine of eternal hell in favour of Christian universalism or necessary universalism. He argues that it is not only true but it is necessarily true that every human being will end up in heaven; it is impossible that any of God's human creatures will be damned. No one, despite God's best efforts, could freely and irrevocably reject God and thus separate himself from God forever. Talbott's account, as we have seen, hinges on three important ideas: (i) the identification of God's nature with love; (ii) an understanding of what constitutes a 'fully informed' and free choice in accepting or rejecting God; and (iii) the notion of restorative punishment after death as 'forcibly imposed punishment'. Human creation is, firstly, a process whereby God brings all human beings into being as independent rational agents who can exercise their moral freedom and choose freely one-way or another in the environment in which they are set. Secondly, it is a process whereby God transforms His human creatures into children of God and reconciles all to Himself and to each other. Since God is love, and also the source of human happiness, He will seek to promote this kind of happiness in every human being in such a way that they will voluntarily and joyfully submit their wills to Him. Talbott's thesis gains force with three arguments. Firstly, he argues that it is incoherent and logically impossible for someone to make a free and irrevocable choice to reject God. There is no coherent motive to reject God. Someone who has the best motive to embrace God's love, but nevertheless rejects Him, exhibits the kind of irrational act which is incompatible with free choice. If a person is not 'fully informed' then he is no position to reject the true God, and if he is 'fully informed' then he is incapable of rejecting God. Secondly, God would not permit the damned to be lost forever because the happiness of the blessed depends on the happiness of the damned. Thirdly, he argues that the kind of punishment that sinners will have to experience in temporary hell will be such that it will help them to repent for their sins and be reconciled to God.

The main problems in Talbott's account are centred on his view of restorative punishment and what it means to make a free choice to accept or reject God. Against Talbott I argued

that his account of unbearable suffering as ‘forcibly imposed punishment’ does not guarantee that the damned will repent and accept God’s love. Either he would have to modify his account of ‘forcibly imposed punishment’ or he would have to give up his claim that all sinners must eventually reach a point where they can resist God no further. If he modifies his account in a way that permits him to claim that the intense misery the damned undergo is truly unbearable, he will then be endorsing the sort of compulsion—threat with a sword—he has rejected as inappropriate. Moreover, if he accepts that ‘threat with a sword’ may be the kind of punishment which sinners will experience, he would then undermine his claim that repentance and reconciliation with God is not determined in any way. Secondly, I have argued against his claim that no one can make a free choice to reject God. I proposed a case widely accepted by Christian tradition—Satan’s rebellion—to show that, even if a sinner has full disclosure of truth, it is nevertheless not obvious that he will be reconciled to God. Talbott’s argument becomes even more problematic because he does not sufficiently explain what ‘fully-informed’ means. He also fails to explain his notion of ‘a minimal degree of rationality’. These omissions permit us to ask Talbott to reconsider the force of his objection to the claim that the rejection of God may be freely made. Finally, I have argued that his account encounters the same problem as Hick’s account; that is, human autonomy is diminished and consequently free choice does not play a significant role in human salvation.

The third universalist account I examined, in chapter five, was that of Marilyn McCord Adams. Adams rejects the doctrine of eternal hell in favour of Christian universalism. In endorsing the eschatological conviction that God’s love can be guaranteed safely to every human being, she argues that every individual will eventually achieve union with God and thus salvation. She bases her account on two distinctive ideas: the category of horrendous evils, and, an account of God’s nature and human nature. She argues that all human beings are vulnerable to horrendous evils and that this is an obvious fact. Horrendous evils are such that those who experience them have their meaning-making capacity destroyed and their lives are thus deprived from any positive meaning. The recovery from such horrendous evil can be achieved only by something supremely good, and this supreme good is God. Divine love and goodness can be guaranteed to each individual only if God defeats horrendous evils, not only within the context of the world as a whole but also within the framework of the individual participant’s life.³⁷⁴ The latter defeat would involve God giving to horror-participants lives that were great good to them on the whole and

³⁷⁴ Marilyn McCord Adams, ‘The Problem of Hell: A Problem of Evil for Christians’, in *Reasoned Faith*, Eleonore Stump, ed. (Cornell University Press, 1993a), p. 304.

within which horrors were made meaningful.³⁷⁵ God would not permit some of His human beings to be eternally damned in hell since the eternal horror of hell would be a horror that would remain undefeated. Since God loves His human creatures, He would not create persons within whose lives horrendous evils remain undefeated, whether in the earthly life or the future life. Therefore, God will save all human beings in the end.

In my analysis of Adams' view, I argued that she fails to convince us accept her arguments in favor of universalism because her account of curative post-mortem punishment does not guarantee that all horror-perpetrators will be saved. Firstly, I held that the horror-perpetrators' meaning-making capacities are damaged in a different way than are those of the horror-sufferers. The distinction between these two groups of meaning-makers, and my explanation of how the horrendous evils affect the horror-perpetrators, led me to argue that is not obvious that the excruciating pain that the horror-perpetrators would have to experience will help them to develop the capacity to empathize. In some cases, the meaning-making capacities of the worst of the sinners are so damaged that it would be difficult to see how they could even make sense of their suffering. Secondly, her view that reconciliation with God will come about freely after the worst of the sinners have experienced the same pain and suffering that they have inflicted on their victims is not well defended. I maintained that there is no guarantee that all sinners will freely choose God given that some of them will not be able to do so since their meaning-making capacities will be too severely damaged. I argued using the key example of depression that the model of curative punishment that she proposes does not guarantee that all horror-perpetrators will freely reconcile to God.

As we have seen, the three accounts of universalism considered here face similar problems. They raise questions about divine and human nature, the nature of human freedom in relation to God's omnipotent love, and the nature and success of post-mortem punishment. Hick and Talbott have to explain how human autonomy is preserved in the lives to come in order to show that libertarian human freedom is important for each individual's salvation. Adams, on the other hand, has to show that the damned in hell will be able, despite the horrendous evils which they will experience, freely to accept God's love. Moreover, the accounts which all three philosophers propose of the afterlife punishment do not guarantee either that all will choose to reconcile to God or that their choice for reconciliation will be the product of love, faith and trust.

³⁷⁵ Marilyn McCord Adams, *Christ and Horrors: The Coherence of Christology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 44–47.

The result of my analysis of these universalist accounts in the last three chapters is to reveal the key weaknesses at their heart. The weaknesses began to emerge when I examined the positions of each individual philosopher. Now I argue that these weaknesses are problems for all defenders of universalism. They fatally undermine the plausibility of all universalist views. In the following section, I consider again some of the most serious problems for universalism. I then suggest an alternative approach to the doctrine of hell—one which might be able to avoid the problems surveyed in this thesis—but only at the cost of giving up universalism's key claim: that all will be saved in the end.

2. Problems universalism must solve

The main problems that universalists must resolve concern: (a) the notion of libertarian freedom; (b) the nature of the afterlife worlds; (c) the notion of curative punishment; (d) interpretation and translation of key scriptural texts; and (e) the nature of God as love.

a. Libertarian view

Most universalists, if not all, affirm a kind of libertarian freedom of choice. Libertarian freedom is thought to be important not only for morally significant choices but also for genuine personal relationships. Taking libertarian freedom seriously universalists hold that all will reconcile with God freely in trust, faith and love. I have argued throughout the three core chapters of the thesis that universalists cannot consistently hold this view of freedom and at the same time affirm universal salvation. In supporting universal salvation they are committed to the claim that whatever human beings do, they will, nevertheless, enjoy fellowship with God. Universalists will have to find a way to argue that God does not rob His human creatures of their freedom while He attempts to reconcile them to Himself.

It might seem that one way for the universalist to avoid this difficulty would be to hold that people do not have libertarian freedom but compatibilist freedom. Compatibilism holds that free will is compatible with some degree of causal determinism. However, if libertarian freedom were to be denied, and universalists were to hold that freedom and

determinism are compatible, then things would not be entirely trouble free for universalism. If God has given human beings compatibilist freedom then, following John Mackie, one could ask: why did God not create humans in such a way as to always choose good in their earthly lives? Moreover, if it were in God's power to create a world in which human beings are free to choose the good in their earthly life and consequently are free to choose God instead of hell then someone would wonder why God did not create all human beings in heaven in the first place. Furthermore, in explaining why God did not create all in a heavenly state from the beginning, a universalist might say that it is because it is more important for humans to develop a good character for themselves through overcoming difficulties and challenges. For these reasons, universalism cannot support a compatibilist view of freedom but require a libertarian view.

There is a tension if not a contradiction in affirming both the certainty of universalism, on the one hand, and a libertarian view of freedom, on the other. A clear commitment to libertarian freedom leaves open the possibility that not all will be saved. If universalists hold onto a libertarian view of freedom, then they will be forced to admit the possibility that some of the damned will continue refusing God's love.

b. Nature of the afterlife and intermediate worlds

Universalists hold that God will not cease helping people and guiding them in the life to come. Most human beings die without ever knowing God. If God's plan is to save all then He will give to sinners more opportunities in further lives to continue their moral development and find and love God. Of the universalists considered in this thesis, only Hick attempts to give a detailed account of what the next worlds will consist in. Other universalists, may shy away from providing details about this in order to avoid further questions which would inevitably arise about memory and personal identity.³⁷⁶ They affirm that the environments in the next worlds will be such that they will compel the sinners freely to join God through some kind of curative punishment for the sins which they have committed in their earthly lives. Moreover, the environments of the future lives will be designed to nourish all humans and help them transform into children of God.

³⁷⁶ For more on this see Ducasse C. J., *The Belief in a Life After Death* (Charles C Thomas Publisher), 1961. Paul Badham, *Christian Beliefs about Life After Death* (The Macmillan Press, 1976). *Immortality*, Paul Edwards, ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1992). Terence Penelhum, *Survival and Disembodied Existence* (Routledge and Kegan Paul, New York: Humanities Press, 1970).

The main problem with this characterization of the next worlds is that it portrays them as far too similar to the current earthly environment. These future environments will be places with challenges to overcome through pain and suffering. If this is the nature of the environments in the afterlives, and if humans have the kind of libertarian freedom which universalists affirm, then universalists will have to accept that there is the possibility that salvation will not be every single person's eternal fate. There are two reasons for this: Firstly, there is no guarantee that some sinners will refrain from committing evils acts. Knowing that they can continue existing and knowing that whatever they do they will eventually be saved might give them more reasons to continue doing what they are doing, acting in ways contrary to God's will. Secondly, although it may be the case that in the presence of severe punishment and challenges to overcome some of the sinners would decide to join God, their decision would be based on their wish to escape punishment and not on feelings of trust and love towards God.

The universalist would have to give a better account of what would be different in the afterlife environments which would lead even the worst sinners to act in good ways, repent and be reconciled to God. They would have to explain what element the next worlds have that would necessarily lead sinners to come to God. One suggestion could be that God would be obvious in the afterlives thus making sure that all humans know that He exists and that it is best for them to follow Him. However, this reply would create a problem for universalists as we have seen in Hick's account. If they want to hold onto a libertarian view of human freedom then they cannot claim that God will be obvious. The only way that humans can make free and autonomous choices is if God and His purpose for creation are not obvious to them.³⁷⁷ Moreover, a question that inevitably emerges if someone claims that God would be obvious in the post-mortem lives would be why God has been hidden in this current life. Why did God wait until the occurrence of the post-mortem lives to reveal himself? If human freedom is essential in the earthly life, and if it remains essential in the lives to come, God would have to remain hidden from His human beings in their future lives, in the same way as He has been hidden from them in their earthly life.

On the other hand, if universalists hold that God is hidden in the lives to come another problem comes up. I have argued that the worst of the sinners would not have a different nature in the afterlives than the one which they have in their earthly lives. Their perception of what is good would be twisted, and if instant transformation of character is off the table for universalists, this distorted nature would be carried into the immediate future life. If

³⁷⁷ On the distinction between freedom and autonomy, see chapter three, part I, section 1.

their nature is severely corrupted, and if the environment in which they would have to exercise this nature is similar to the earthly one, and if God remains hidden, it is difficult to see how the worst kind of sinners would come to understand God's love and thus repent for their crimes. So it is not obvious how the worst of the sinners would ever begin the process of restoration and achieve salvation.

Another task for universalist positions then would be to give a more detailed or careful presentation of the nature of the afterlives. To do so they may have to give arguments regarding human memory and personal identity. However, offering and examining arguments of that sort may well lead to problems that are even more difficult to solve because arguments about human memory and personal identity after death are themselves highly contentious. Another approach, that some have tried, is to give some detail about what kind of experiences the damned would have in the lives to come and to explain the kind of punishment that would take place. Nevertheless, as we see in the next section, this strategy also fails.

c. Curative punishment

As we have seen, universalists do not deny that there might be some kind of punishment in the afterlife and some of them have argued that the punishment might be as severe as the pains and suffering someone would have been afflicted with on the traditional view of hell. What makes the universalist's view different from the traditional account of punishment in hell is that they hold that the punishment inflicted is not retributive in nature but curative. Pain they argue, following Origen, cures. The main problem with this view is that it is not obvious that pain cures and if pain does not cure then universal salvation is not guaranteed. There must be some arguments or evidence which would establish the curative efficacy of pain and punishment. Here I suggest the more obvious things that universalists would have to show if their arguments are to guarantee salvation for all human beings. Firstly, they will have to explain how the worst sinners will come to realize that their punishment is for their own good. Secondly, it has to be shown that severe physical and mental punishment lead to moral amendment. Thirdly, universalists have to show that the character which emerges from severe punishment can be legitimately called virtuous.

Let us begin with the first point. It seems that universalists fail to show how the villain in the lives to come is in a mental state such that would permit him to understand the reasons behind his punishment. The sinners, as I have said above, carry their evil nature with them into the next lives. If they did not recognize what was good for them and which actions it would have been good to perform during their earthly life, and also, have a twisted idea of what is good and what is bad then it seems likely that they would not understand the reasons behind their punishment and so experience it as a hateful thing. But perhaps a more important point relevant to the whole process of restorative punishment is that the legislator who aims to cure the worst villains, in this case God, would have to be recognized as such. The sinner has to have some idea of the nature of the person or entity that inflicts the pain and suffering. That is, God has to be recognized as the appropriate distributor of punishment. The curative process of punishment would only begin if the sinner accepts the punishment which is inflicted on him by accepting firstly, the reasons for him been punished and realizing the wrongness of his actions and, secondly, that the person who punishes him is the appropriate distributor of punishment. Universalists then will have to give a better account of what makes it the case that the sinners will realize that their punishment is for their own good and that God loves them.

Secondly, even if we did agree that it is generally necessary, and so acceptable, to inflict cruel punishment on the worst kind of villains, it would still be difficult to argue or affirm that severe physical pain and/or the mental sufferings of remorse and of feelings of guilt in themselves lead to moral amendment. There is little doubt that prolonged suffering interferes with a person's life-in-action. If the punishment in the afterlives will be excruciating and its duration will last according to the needs of each sinner, we may argue that the punishment might be harsh and in such a degree that would produce a neurotic state in which the person who experiences the pain and suffering can no longer see any future possibilities for change.³⁷⁸ In short, the case that severe physical or mental punishment leads to moral amendment is yet to be made.

Thirdly, another more radical method of attacking the value of curative punishment as a punishment which deters the damned from continuing to sin and compels them to repent is to argue that the resultant behaviour may not legitimately be called good or virtuous. An attitude that is arrived at through the coercion of excruciating punishment would not be as

³⁷⁸ While discussing Adams account in chapter five I offered an argument against her claim that all sinners will come to embrace God freely. I argued that in cases of severe forms of depression it is not obvious that the victim of such in her own words, 'horrendous evils' would be able to exercise its freedom. See chapter five, part II, section 2.

worthwhile as an attitude which has been formed willingly. So virtue induced as a result of such excruciating punishment would seem to be unworthy of the name. I have argued in all three chapters that even if the curative punishment which the damned will have to undergo may bring about repentance, their repentance would be unlikely to be genuine. Fear or boredom might be the reasons behind the sinners' repentance, and if this is the case, repentance is not made through love, faith and trust in God. If the reasons for obeying God are fear of punishment or hope for reward and the wish to evade punishment, I argue that it adds nothing to the moral value of good conduct; on the contrary the damned have been put in a position in which it is even more difficult to attain a pure love and submission to God's will.³⁷⁹

Even granted that the damned must be reformed, is such excruciating suffering necessary and inevitable? To answer this question positively universalists have to demonstrate that the kind of punishment which they envisage would have the required curative effects. Unless they provide substantial grounds to convince us that punishment remedies the sinners' disorder of the character, then there is no good reason to accept a curative theory of punishment.

d. The interpretation and translation of particular texts in the scriptures

In the second chapter of the thesis, I pointed out that one of the main reasons why the doctrine of hell remained unchallenged for so long and why a Christian could not easily refrain from believing it is the hard-to-deny fact that the doctrine is preached in the scriptures. Someone could, of course, say that what is in the scriptures should have no bearing on the philosophical debate about the fate of sinners. But this argument cuts both ways. We have seen that those who support universalism do base their arguments on particular interpretations of the scriptures. For example, one of the main arguments which they proposed in favour of universalism is based on the interpretation of the Greek word *αιώνιος*. They argue that the Greek adjective *αιώνιος*, that is translated in English Bibles as 'eternal' or 'everlasting', literally means 'age enduring'. It has been claimed that this word need not mean eternal or unending and, in fact, there are passages in the scriptures which

³⁷⁹ For example, Aristotle and Spinoza have denied any moral value to actions performed through fear. Moreover, Walker says that the only thinker that applied this principle to the doctrine of hell was Shaftesbury. See D. P. Walker, *The Decline of Hell: Seventeenth-Century Discussions of Eternal Torment* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1964), pp. 167–177.

speak of a mystery which is ‘age enduring’ and which can come to an end. So punishment in hell can be taken to be ‘age enduring’ and not eternal.³⁸⁰

I suggest that a further investigation into the translation and interpretation of these passages may be promising in shedding light on whether universalism is definitively preached in the scriptures. Defenders of universalism would have to demonstrate that the claim that all will be saved in the end is clearly there in the text. This seems unpromising though as the evidence so far available in favour of universalism is not as strong as the evidence in favour of a doctrine of hell. Future research will also have to investigate why the early Christian fathers did not include the Testament of Paul and other testaments (which are categorized as, what is known as, apocrypha) in the main teaching of Christian religion.³⁸¹ The Testament of Paul, for example, provides the greater amount of passages which support universal salvation. If this investigation into the translation and interpretation of the Christian texts is ultimately unfruitful then defenders of universalism will have to support their position by arguments which reject the doctrine of hell on philosophical and moral grounds; such an approach, as I have argued in previous chapters, does not succeed.

e. Is universal salvation necessarily an expression of God’s love?

Universalism maintains that God’s love for His creation is inconsistent with the claim that God does not wish to save all of it. The argument focuses on two claims: that if God truly loves a human being then He desires to save it; and if God truly loves all human beings then His desire will be to save them all. If God is by His nature love, then God must love all humans and desire their salvation. Universalism cannot begin to support the salvation of all human beings unless it defines God’s love in these terms. If God’s nature is not in fact the one that universalists propose then their argument does not hold.

There has been a sustained attempt throughout the centuries from many Christian philosophers and theologians to reconcile a doctrine of hell with God’s loving nature. Aquinas has made one of the most well known attempts to reconcile God’s love with a

³⁸⁰ See for example, Thomas Talbott, *The Inescapable Love of God* (Universal Publishers, 1999), p. 86.

³⁸¹ For more see Alan E. Bernstein, *The Formation of Hell: Death and Retribution in the Ancient and Early Christian Worlds* (UCL Press, 1993). Jacques Le Goff, *The Birth of Purgatory*, Arthur Goldhammer, trans., (London: Scholar Press, 1984). Robin A. Parry and Christopher H. Partridge, eds., *Universal Salvation? The Current Debate* (Paternoster Press, 2003).

doctrine of hell, and it has been recently modified and developed by Eleonore Stump.³⁸² Philosophers in this tradition argue that hell flows from God's love. Stump, for example, holds that by properly defining God's goodness we can reconcile it with the doctrine of hell. The key point is that God's loving nature can be defined in such a way that would not be inconsistent with a doctrine of hell. So the universalist would have to not only define God's love in such a way as to exclude the possibility of eternal hell but also give better accounts of the nature of curative punishment and human freedom, as well as of God's omnipotent love.

3. A different approach to the doctrine of hell

Up to this point, this final chapter has focused on a brief summary of what has been discussed in the earlier chapters of this thesis. In particular, I have summarized the main positions of John Hick, Thomas Talbott and Marilyn McCord Adams. I sketched out the main difficulties that their accounts present and pointed out that they each face similar problems; these problems focus for the most part on their accounts of the nature of curative punishment and human freedom. From there I argued that these are problems which all universalist positions have to deal with. Above, I distinguished five problems which, in my view, make universalism a weak position to defend and I have considered and rejected several ways in which the universalist could defend his position. The possible approaches which the universalist might adopt to solve the problems reviewed here cannot be endorsed without compromising further other claims to which universalists are committed. To conclude this thesis, I do not attempt to offer an argument in favour of the doctrine of hell. To do so would require a thesis on its own. Instead, I indicate how one might defend the claim that hell is compatible with a loving God and the further claim that it is a self-chosen condition. In doing this, while drawing on the support of other non-universalists, I introduce some of my own ideas about the nature of the suffering in hell and human freedom.

³⁸² See Eleonore Stump, 'Dante's Hell, Aquinas' Moral Theory, and the Love of God', *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 16, n. 2 (1986), pp. 181–198. Eleonore Stump, 'Love, by All Accounts', *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association* 80, no. 2 (2006), pp. 25–43. Eleonore Stump, *Aquinas* (Routledge, 2003). Eleonore Stump, 'Suffering, Theodicy, and Defense', in *Wandering in Darkness - Narrative and the Problem of Suffering* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010). Eleonore Stump and Kretzmann Norman, 'Being and Goodness', in *Being and Goodness*, Scott MacDonald, ed. (Cornell University, 1991), pp. 98–128.

Any understanding of hell must begin with an understanding of the nature of God and show how hell issues from God's nature. On this point, I agree among others with Jonathan Kvanvig, Eleonore Stump, C. S. Lewis and Jerry Walls. Christianity holds that God created the world and human beings out of love. Creation was not something that God had to do, but was the result of His goodness. So when discussing the relationship of God with His human creatures the most important thing we have to consider, as most theists claim, is His goodness. His love and goodness are the characteristics on the basis of which Christian tradition explains why God created human beings. God's goodness and His love towards human beings are displayed not only in creation but also in salvation. Christianity hopes for the salvation of all humans and the ultimate triumph of God's purpose. However, the hope of the salvation of all people combined with a doctrine of eternal hell inevitably compromises God's goodness and love. I would like to hold that God's attitude towards human beings is that of love and that hell is an expression of God's love. I am inclined to say that the doctrine of hell is concerned with the ultimate nature and consequences of an individual's actions and decisions and the relation of those actions and decisions to the nature and the purposes of God.³⁸³ We might say that those who defend a doctrine of hell are really defending something else: namely, a robust view of human freedom.

I follow the Biblical and theological conviction that God freely creates persons in His own image so that one day they may freely choose a life of fellowship and love with Him.³⁸⁴ God loves human beings by allowing them to be independent and rational agents who can choose to unite with God using their given freedom. Since humans have such a nature, they have the capacity to enjoy, as Talbott puts it, supreme happiness through a relationship with God. A life apart from God would deprive any human being of access to this kind of happiness. Nevertheless, the fact that God has given human beings the freedom of choice does not guarantee that they will all choose reconciliation with God. Human freedom can only be fulfilled in love and obedience in God. However, within the finite nature and environment in which humans have been set by God, they can also resist and cling to the bondage of unhealthy desires. Thus, an individual who chooses a life apart from God and denies the personhood that has been given to him by God also denies God. Those who support universal salvation and those who support the Christian dogma of hell hold that salvation is a personal and 'relational phenomenon'.³⁸⁵ If love is understood in terms of the

³⁸³ Rowell makes this point as well. See, Geoffrey Rowell, *Hell and the Victorians: A study of the nineteenth-century theological controversies concerning eternal punishment and the future life* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), p. 219.

³⁸⁴ Hick, Talbott and Adams hold the same view.

³⁸⁵ Nigel M. de S. Cameron, *Universalism and the Doctrine of Hell* (Paternoster Press, 1992), p. 31.

relationship between God and His human creatures then God's omnipotent love cannot only not force a person to be reconciled to Him but also it cannot guarantee the success of the relationship. Loss of heaven and the absence of God would be the inevitable consequence of the willed rejection of God's love.

If human freedom was not important and autonomy was insignificant in the interactions between God and human beings, then we could hold that God would have a good reason to override His human creatures' freedom if what awaits them without this intervention is eternal damnation. In the course of examining Hick and Talbott's accounts on freedom, I have argued that God cannot override human freedom and so we cannot conclude that freedom and autonomy are of little significance. What remains then is to give an account of hell that not only shows God's love towards the sinners but also recognizes the significance of human freedom. Since the capacity of freedom and autonomy is important, we should accept that an individual could choose damnation.

In the introduction of the thesis, I said that hell is traditionally conceived as a place of excruciating physical punishment. It has been pictured as a place of unending fire 'where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth'.³⁸⁶ By giving a different account of the misery in hell, we could perhaps avoid the criticism that hell is a place of retributive punishment and arbitrary torture. I will do so with the help of the views of other philosophers such as Lewis, Stump, Walls and Kvanvig while trying to stay as close as possible to the doctrine of hell which traditional Christianity— both Eastern and Western—preaches.

Hell was portrayed through the writings of St Augustine and St Aquinas as a place of excruciating physical suffering. However, in later times, hell was also portrayed as a place or state of spiritual misery. Several writers, such as Dante and Milton, depicted hell as a fire which burns on the inside rather than the outside of all sinners' souls.³⁸⁷ Virgil, for example, in Dante's *Hell* says to one of the blasphemers:

“O Capaneus, since thy proud insolence
Will not be quenched, thy pains shall be the
more;
No torment save thine own hot rage could be
A fitting cautery to thy rabid sore.”³⁸⁸

³⁸⁶ Matthew 8:12 and 18:9.

³⁸⁷ See chapter one on the different kinds of fire which Augustine talks about.

³⁸⁸ Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy. Hell*, Dorothy L. Sayers, trans. (Penguin Books Ltd., 1949), Canto XIV, pp. 157–58.

Since the misery of hell is presented as something which begins from the human heart or character, Walls and Lewis argued that the misery of hell stands in clear continuity with our earthly experiences. We can thus hold that the kind of misery experienced in hell is the natural consequences of living a life of wickedness and evil and allowing vicious feelings and emotions to shape one's character.³⁸⁹ C. S. Lewis endorses and defends this view. Lewis believes that every moral choice human beings make moves them one-step closer to heaven or hell. Hell and heaven begin on earth through the free choices that humans make. Hell is only a state of mind. By 'state of mind', he means that hell is experienced from within. It is not just a place, but it is something that sinners create for themselves. The wicked person does not wish to surrender himself to God's will but to something else. Lewis characterizes this as 'self-absorption', a state in which the damned makes the best of what he finds there, and what he finds outside the system of self-giving is hell.³⁹⁰ For example, when Lewis describes hell in *The Great Divorce* he says that the sinners create for themselves houses and cities to protect them from the constant rain (in Hell) just by thinking about them. However, they never find peace because the houses cannot keep the rain out.³⁹¹

In addition to this notion of hell as the natural consequence of human evil actions, hell is also sometimes taken to be a place where the misery and pain that sinners suffer is the result of the actions of the other damned. Stump makes a case for this, holding that hell is a place provided by God for the damned in which they can still act and will in accordance with their evil nature. On this view, hell is not a place of punishment inflicted by God but it is 'the condition to which the soul reduces itself by a stubborn determination to evil, and in which it suffers the torment of its own perversions'.³⁹² The pains and suffering imposed on the damned are not imposed by God, but are the result of those who surround them in hell and what they do to themselves. Moreover, Walls holds that the damned will inflict physical pain on one another. He writes that 'those whose characters have been shaped by

³⁸⁹ Jerry Walls (1992), p. 143.

³⁹⁰ C. S. Lewis *The Problem of Pain* (London: HarperCollins Publishers, 2002), p. 158. Lewis says that 'Every state of mind, left to itself, every shutting up of the creature within the dungeon of its own mind-is in the end hell'. See Lewis, *The Great Divorce* (London: HarperCollins Publishers, 1946), p. 70. For further study of Lewis' view see C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (London: Fontana Books, 1955), C. S. Lewis, *Christian reflections*, Walter Hooper, ed. (London: Bles, 1967), Jerry Root, *C.S. Lewis and a problem of evil: An Investigation of a Pervasive Theme* (Pickwick Publications, 2009).

³⁹¹ Lewis (1946), p. 10.

³⁹² Alighieri (1974), p. 68.

violence may continue to feed on violence in hell. Again it is simply the natural consequence of violence to engender further violence'.³⁹³

However, as we have seen, hell is not only widely regarded as a place of *poena sensus*; it is also thought to be a place of *poena damni*. Hell is a place where God is absent. It seems that the real unutterable horror is that the damned are left alone. Lewis, for instance, describes hell as like the cold and dark of outmost space. It is a place where in a final and total separation people are eternally starved of God's presence.³⁹⁴

We might say that hell results from human self-centeredness and the interaction of the damned with each other. By interaction I mean the sinners' dealings with other sinners who have more or less the same character as they have. Maybe the harm that they would undergo would be mental rather than physical. Interaction with others who have the same nature as them would make them realize that there is no future good and, at the same time, provide them with the false belief that they cannot change their hellish situation. The misery that they suffer is one that emerges from the damned's incapacity to open themselves to God's love.³⁹⁵ The damned are in eternal misery because they are still covetous, proud, and loveless. God does not inflict hell on the damned but it is in part the absence of any action by God. In N. Berdyaev's words, hell is a state in which the wicked are powerless 'to come out of' themselves; it is a state of 'absolute self-centredness, dark and evil isolation, i.e. final inability to love'.³⁹⁶ Hell is eternal misery due to the nature that sinners have freely shaped for themselves. I agree with Lewis that hell is creaturely rebellion against God. The damned have the opportunity to escape hell but no one ever does because there is always something which they prefer to joy and reality and they insist on pursuing it even at the price of misery. Lewis holds that the damned are, in one sense, successful rebels to the end; the doors of hell are locked on the *inside*.³⁹⁷ They are not even close to self-abandonment and they enjoy forever the horrible freedom they have demanded, and are therefore self-enslaved.³⁹⁸

³⁹³ Walls (1992), p. 152.

³⁹⁴ Lewis holds that there are not second chances after death. See Lewis (2002), p. 126.

³⁹⁵ The horror in hell may come from bitterness of remorse and hopeless self-condemnation. If hell is the final place of the damned then the remorse which comes in a life with no possible future is different than the remorse as it is experienced in life. St. Augustine said that the soul in hell is tortured by sterile repentance. The damned would hesitate to follow God. See St Augustine, *The city of God* (Demetrius B. Zema and Gerald G. Walsh, trans., Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1950), XXI.

³⁹⁶ As cited in Rowell (1974), p. 218.

³⁹⁷ Lewis (2002), p. 130.

³⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 130.

We might conjecture that the damned have been so long involved in their state of self-deception that they have become evil or self-deceived by nature.³⁹⁹ Since the damned in hell act contrary to the nature which God has planned for them, and God is absent from their lives, we might say that the damned are nothing more than what Dante and Lewis describe as ‘shades’. In hell the damned are nothing more than a ‘shade’ or a ‘ghost’. Each lacks noteworthy substance. Lewis says:

To enter Heaven is to become more human than you ever succeeded in being on earth; to enter hell is to be banished from humanity. What is cast (or casts itself) into hell is not a man: it is ‘remains’. To be a complete man means to have the passions obedient to the will and the will offered to God: to have been a man—to be an ex-man or ‘damned ghost’—would presumably mean to consist of will utterly centred in its self and passions utterly uncontrolled by the will.⁴⁰⁰

On this view, a damned soul is nearly nothing: It is the ultimate unreality of being. The wicked are not persons; they have become the sin which they have chosen. Hell is a place where human potential is dried up, there are only ghosts. Their ghostly nature is the result of their self-absorption. Heaven is the real world and hell is the ‘shadowlands’, as Lewis says, where everything is immaterial and in flux. The shades which are in hell are self-obsessed and self-referential.⁴⁰¹ By rejecting God, the damned come to the place where they no longer have a self to give, and this place is hell. Stepping away from God, and a community with God, their humanity is drastically dismissed. They have surrendered their will completely to their base desires and chosen decisively against union with God. As Lewis says, the characteristic of lost souls is ‘their rejection of everything that is not simply themselves’.⁴⁰²

We might further conjecture that God’s love is shown to sinners by permitting them to act according to their nature. If human freedom and autonomy are significant, God will consider the sinners’ freely chosen actions and thus permit them to damn themselves. Violating their freedom and bringing them to his glory without their consent, would be to

³⁹⁹ J. Walls (1992) and J. Kvanvig (1993) argue that pride is what motivates the damned to reject God. Also see Charles Seymour, *A Theodicy of Hell* (Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2000), C. Seymour, ‘On Choosing Hell’, *Religious Studies* 33, no. 3 (Sep., 1997), pp. 249–266. C. Seymour, ‘Hell, Justice and Freedom’, *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 43, no. 2 (April, 1998), pp. 69–86.

⁴⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 127–128.

⁴⁰¹ In most of Lewis’s literary work, we see that the wicked are always presented in the same way. They have a tendency to set aside morality for the sake of utility, they have no respect for the sanctity of human life, and they do not accept reality as they find it but prefer remaining undeveloped, remaining shadows. The unredeemed characters are self-centred and selfish and they have always an excuse by which they attempt to cover the truth about themselves. See Lewis (1946), pp. 39–41.

⁴⁰² Lewis (2002), p. 125.

violate the personhood which He gave them in the first place. The damned would be deceived in hell but this self-deception is something which is self-inflicted. And if the damned are self-deceived they can only begin the process of restoration by deciding for themselves to change their mind and follow God. I do not deny that there may be the possibility that some sinners after a long period of time would come to repent for their sins if they still have freedom in hell. However, for the worst sinners this may be something that would never occur since their views of good may be so severely damaged that they would not be able to act in any other way than the way they are already acting.

I do not claim to have argued for the view of hell outlined here. I have merely given some indication of how a doctrine of hell could be made compatible with belief in an all-loving God. Of course, I think that a doctrine of hell can be better defended if its proponents assume that all humans have libertarian freedom of choice that God would never override. A full defence of the doctrine would require strong arguments as to why most of the sinners would rather remain in hell than choose to be reconciled to God.

4. Conclusion

In this thesis, I have attempted to show that universalist accounts do not give us adequate grounds to reject a traditional Christian doctrine of hell. I began by setting out the doctrine of hell and examined briefly its development through the centuries. I then identified the main reasons behind the move for its abandonment. In chapters three, four and five, I presented and examined three universalists positions. There, I have shown that each fails adequately to defend the claim that God will save all human beings. I have also shown that each fails to give us compelling grounds to reject the view that some people will reject God's love for eternity. I argued that the main problems faced by universalist accounts of John Hick, Thomas Talbott and Marilyn McCord Adams lie in their views of post-mortem curative punishment and human freedom. In this final chapter, I have summarized five main problems that every universalist would have to have to respond to while defending his account. As I have shown, the three accounts examined here all fail to respond adequately to these problems.

The debate between universalists and defenders of the traditional doctrine of hell has recently heated up again after centuries of inactivity. Nevertheless, many issues demand

further scrutiny—particularly, issues around the ideas of curative punishment and human freedom. Accepting a doctrine of universal salvation amounts to a denial of the seriousness of human choices. We cannot affirm the seriousness of human choices and at the same time consistently hope for the salvation of all human beings and the fulfilment of God’s purposes. The Christian God wills the salvation of all His human creatures, and Christians rightly hope for everyone’s salvation. However, as I have demonstrated, universalist accounts are inadequate to establish that salvation is humanity’s only eternal fate.

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