

How Problematic is an Unpopulated Hell?

Alex R Gillham

ABSTRACT The Problem of Suffering (PoS) claims that there is a tension between the existence of a perfect God and suffering. The Problem of Hell (PoH) is a version of PoS which claims that a perfect God would lack morally sufficient reasons to allow individuals to be eternally damned to Hell. A few traditional solutions have been developed to PoH, but each of them is problematic. As such, if there is a solution to PoH that is resistant to these problems, then it deserves our attention. In this paper, I develop precisely such a solution. I call this the Unpopulated Hell View (UHV), which claims that Hell exists as a place where eternal damnation could take place, although it never does. First, I explain how UHV solves PoH. Next, I develop four objections against UHV and defend UHV against them. I argue that, although some of these objections do more damage to UHV than others, UHV has satisfying responses to all of them. Ultimately, I conclude that UHV merits consideration as a novel solution to PoH because it is less problematic than the traditional ones.

KEYWORDS hell; problem of evil; problem of suffering

INTRODUCTION

The Problem of Hell (PoH) argues that the two following claims are incompatible: (1) a perfect God exists and (2) some individuals are eternally damned to Hell.¹ A handful of what I call traditional solutions to PoH has been developed in the secondary literature, but each of these faces deep problems. For this reason, if there is a solution to PoH that can avoid some of these problems, then it merits further consideration. The main aim of this paper is to develop precisely such a solution: The Unpopulated Hell View (UHV). According to UHV, Hell exists as a place where eternal damnation could take place, but it turns out that no one goes there.² After developing UHV and explaining how it solves PoH, I turn to the second aim of this paper, which is to explore the problems with UHV. To that effect, I develop four objections against UHV. First, UHV is problematic because it entails that God makes empty threats, which is something that a perfect God would not do. Second, if UHV is true, then God does something without good reasons, which is impossible. Third, UHV must be rejected because if it were true, there would unacceptable limitations on human freedom. Fourth, if UHV is true, then the truly wicked do not receive appropriate punishment for their misdeeds, and this would mark a failure to act justly on God's behalf. I respond in turn to each of these objections. Although some do more damage to UHV than others, I conclude that UHV offers a solution to PoH that is resistant to the problems that more traditional solutions face. For this reason, UHV deserves attention as a solution to PoH.

1. THE PROBLEM OF SUFFERING AND THE PROBLEM OF HELL

The Problem of Suffering (PoS) posits tension between the existence of a perfect God and suffering.³ One traditional version of the argument goes

1. By God I mean a perfect being. This gets at the heart of PoH. If God lacks morally sufficient reasons for damning some individuals to Hell eternally but does it anyway, then God is not perfect, and so a perfect God doesn't exist.

2. An anonymous referee encouraged me to offer a more precise definition of Hell, but this definition suffices for the purposes of this paper. I want UHV to be compatible with competing definitions of Hell. Scholars disagree, for example, about whether suffering in Hell is physical or mental (or both), whether suffering results from the presence of evil or the absence of good, whether this suffering is self-imposed vs. imposed by another, etc. If I were to defend a definition of Hell that is more precise than the one I present here, UHV would run the risk of being incompatible with some of these views. Thus, I simply define Hell here as a place where eternal damnation could take place.

3. PoS takes different forms. Mackie (1955, 200) argues for a version of the logical problem of evil, which claims that it is logically impossible for God to be perfect and evil to exist. McCloskey (1960, 97) argues for a similar logical problem of evil. Rowe (1979, 335–41) argues for the evidential problem of evil, which claims not that a perfect God and evil are strictly

like this. (1) If a perfect God exists, then God is omniscient, omnipotent, and omnibenevolent. Consequently, God knows that there is suffering, has the power to eliminate it, and wants to do so. As such, (2) if God were indeed perfect, then there would be no suffering. For if there were, then God would know how to eliminate it, be able to, want to, and thus God would do so. (3) But there is suffering, so one of three things is the case: either God is not able to eliminate suffering, God does not know how to do so, or God does not want to do so. (4) If God is unable to eliminate suffering, does not know how to do so, or does not want to do so, then God is not perfect. (5) Thus God is not perfect. A specific version of this problem focuses on the suffering that occurs if some are damned to Hell for all eternity. Indeed, if eternal damnation in Hell occurs, it would be difficult to imagine where PoS could be stronger in God's creation, whether this damnation in Hell is mental or physical, whether temporary or eternal, whether the misery the damned experience results from direct torture or simply the absence of God, the suffering that occurs in Hell is likely to be worse than anywhere else. This is the Problem of Hell (PoH). PoH claims that (1) a perfect God would not damn anyone to Hell eternally without morally sufficient reasons for doing so, i.e., without adequate justification. (2) But there are no morally sufficient reasons to damn anyone to Hell eternally. (3) So God does not damn anyone to Hell eternally.⁴ This formulation of the argument for PoH is valid, so its acceptance depends on its soundness.

2. TRADITIONAL SOLUTIONS

There are four (what I call) traditional solutions to PoH, each of which responds to this argument in a different way. The first two make a similar move. The Free Will Defense (FWD) and Retributivist View (RV) simply deny the truth of (2) and claim that a perfect God could have morally sufficient reasons to damn someone to Hell eternally. According to one prominent version of FWD, the possibility of eternal damnation in Hell makes our choices exceedingly important. This places tremendous value on our freedom, which is one of God's aims. In other words, in order to make our freedom exceedingly important, God makes it the case that our choices can result in us being damned to Hell eternally (or eternally

incompatible but that a perfect God probably would not allow the amount and intensity of evil to exist that does. The formulation of the argument for PoH below looks like the logical problem, but I think UHV also works against the evidential.

4. The problem is not solved by saying that we damn ourselves to Hell eternally. The problem really is that God could not have morally sufficient reasons to create a world in which some of us are damned to Hell eternally, no matter how we end up that way.

rewarded in Heaven).⁵ It is the dire seriousness of the consequences of our choices that makes them so important. On one prominent version of RV, God's justice might require the punishment of sins with eternal damnation in Hell. If God were to fail to do so, God would act unjustly, which is impossible. God would be unjust if God did not damn the truly wicked to Hell eternally, but this is impossible since God is perfect.⁶

FWD and RV are similar but face separate difficulties. The biggest problem with FWD is that it remains difficult to see why the eternal damnation of some in Hell is necessary for human freedom to be as important as it needs to be for God's plans to be carried out. Even if we were to concede that the world in which humans are free is the best possible world, it would be unclear why it must therefore be the case that some individuals are damned to Hell eternally. Consider a world similar to the one that FWD posits but different in only one respect: no one is damned to Hell eternally. It seems implausible that a world slightly different from that of FWD contains an unacceptably lower degree of freedom. Even if it did, I doubt that this difference in freedom is enough to justify God's setting the world up such that some individuals do suffer eternally.⁷ The biggest problem with RV is that it takes eternal damnation of some in Hell to be a necessary condition for their being appropriately punished. This involves a disproportionality between offense and atonement that signals an injustice on God's behalf: no amount of finite wrongdoing could justify eternal suffering in Hell.⁸ Ultimately, therefore, FWD and RV face distinct but similar problems. FWD

5. Walls and Swinburne offer this sort of account. Walls (1992, Ch. 5) argues that some of us choose evil definitively, and if God is to respect this choice, God must send us somewhere that will allow us to reject God forever. This is Hell. Swinburne (1989) argues that we can make an "irrevocable choice of character" so that "our will is fixed for bad" (199). God could have morally sufficient reasons for sending such individuals to Hell eternally. Lewis (1944) also appears to defend some version of FWD.

6. Quinn (1988, 99), for example, argues forcefully for a strong version of RV according to which the sin of all humans must be regarded collectively and atoned for, which very well might require eternal damnation in Hell.

7. I do not argue that any of the problems with the traditional solutions that I consider in this paper is decisive. Defenders of each view have plausible responses to these problems. Lewis (1946), for example, defends FWD by claiming that the purpose of Hell is not for God to punish the wicked. Rather, Hell is a self-imposed misery resulting from free choices. Whether these defenses of traditional solutions work is irrelevant. The thesis of this paper is simply that UHV merits consideration because it does not face any of these problems in the first place.

8. Again, this problem is far from decisive. Anselm in *Cur Deus Homo* offers the following reply: since God is infinitely good, any sin against God is infinitely bad, and no finite punishment could atone for it (*CDH*, I.21). Kvanvig (1993) critiques this view by noting it absurdly implies that all sins deserve the same punishment: eternal suffering in Hell.

entails that the eternal damnation of some in Hell is required for humans to be free, whereas RV entails that eternal damnation of some in Hell is required by God's justice.

The third and fourth traditional solutions, Universalism and Annihilationism, agree that God could not have morally sufficient reasons to damn anyone to Hell eternally. Nevertheless, both maintain that God does damn some to Hell, albeit temporarily. According to Universalism, this is because everyone goes to Heaven eventually.⁹ According to Annihilationism, this is because those sent to Hell are destroyed after spending a while there.¹⁰ These views certainly have their attractions. Each can satisfy proponents of FWD and RV in distinct ways. Both can claim that human choices are very important because they might result in some of us being damned to a very miserable place, although temporarily. Both can claim that the truly wicked get what they deserve for similar reasons, maintaining the justice of God's plan. However, each faces substantive problems. Free-will theists take issue with Universalism because it fails to respect what it means for humans to be free. If everyone eventually goes to Heaven, then no one can ultimately reject God. As such, if freedom requires that our choices are ultimately up to us, then Universalism is false.¹¹ The biggest problem with Annihilationism is that it seems inconsistent with God's essentially creative nature. To critics of Annihilationism, it is absurd to say that a being whose nature is to create would destroy humans.¹² The Annihilationist might soften this blow by claiming that God does not destroy individuals after their sentence in Hell, but allows them to go out of existence. However, this poses problems for God's benevolence. It seems implausible that a perfect God would allow us to spend time in a very miserable place, only

9. For defenses of Universalism, see Talbott (1999), Kronen and Reitan (2011), and Adams (1993).

10. Pinnock (1997) calls this the Conditional Immortality View.

11. Kvanvig (2011), for example, describes Universalism as the "view, according to which God finally decides that if one has not freely chosen Heaven, there will come a time when one will be brought to Heaven against one's will" (14). Murray (1999) also argues that Universalists deny a "centrally important feature of human freedom" (55). Proponents of Universalism might respond by conceding that the view is inconsistent with libertarian free will (see Talbott 1990; 2001, 429–33), but maintain its consistency with other notions of freedom. Buckareff and Plug (2005) avoid this problem by arguing for escapism, the view that God maintains an open-door policy toward those in Hell but does not coerce them out of it. Matheson (2014) argues against Buckareff and Plug that if everyone can leave Hell, then everyone can also leave Heaven. Luck (2016) then attacks the soundness of Matheson's reply.

12. Stump (1986), for example, contests the claim of Aquinas that being and goodness are convertible. As such, God would not destroy a being unless it were to promote a greater good elsewhere. Annihilating beings after their sentence in Hell, however, does not do this.

to fade into the darkness of nonexistence after a period of intense suffering, however long it is.¹³

Each traditional solution to PoH faces major problems. Proponents of the traditional solutions are certainly able to reply to these problems. Whether these replies are successful is beyond the scope of this paper. My aim is to show that UHV is attractive as a new solution to PoH, and one of the reasons is that it does not face any of these problems in the first place.

3. A NEW SOLUTION: HELL IS UNPOPULATED

The main objective of this paper is to develop a new solution to PoH: the Unpopulated Hell View (UHV). According to UHV, Hell is a very bad place where the post-mortem, eternal damnation of sinners could take place, although it never actually does. In other words, UHV takes the following conditional to be true: if no one is ever sent to Hell, then no one can suffer there for all eternity. Next, UHV takes it to be true that no one is ever sent to Hell, and so by *modus ponens*, it follows that no one can suffer there eternally. Finally, UHV insists that, if no one suffers in Hell for all eternity, there is no Problem of Hell posing an inconsistency between God's perfection and eternal damnation of sinners. Thus UHV can escape PoH, which argues that a perfect God could not have morally sufficient reasons to damn anyone to Hell for eternity. The point here is that PoH cannot do any damage to UHV because UHV claims that no one is ever sent to Hell. If no one is damned to Hell for all eternity by God, then God does not require morally sufficient reasons for doing so, since one does not require morally sufficient reasons for something that one does not do.¹⁴ Put more formally, the argument for UHV goes like this:

UHV1. Hell is a very bad place where post-mortem, eternal suffering could take place.

UHV2. If no one is ever sent to Hell, then no one suffers in Hell eternally.

UHV3. No one is ever sent to Hell.

UHV4. So, no one suffers in Hell eternally.

UHV5. If no one suffers in Hell eternally, there is no Problem of Hell.

UHV6. Therefore there is no Problem of Hell.

13. Murray (1999) makes a similar objection against Universalism: it cannot explain why humans should go through earthly life given the evil it contains.

14. One might require morally sufficient reasons not to do something, i.e., to neglect doing something that one ought to do. But the presumption here is that damning some to Hell eternally is not one of these things.

Since the argument is valid, the truth of the conclusion depends on whether UHV1–5 are true. To clarify, to say there is no Problem of Hell is to say that there is no Problem of Suffering because of Hell. PoH refers here simply to the inconsistency between God’s perfection and eternal damnation of sinners. UHV might be problematic for other reasons. In fact, this is what I consider in the following section. The argument of this section is simply that UHV is not problematic for suffering-related reasons. It denies that God damns some individuals to Hell eternally, and so it need not explain how God could have adequate reasons for doing so.¹⁵

4. OBJECTIONS AND REPLIES

Although UHV avoids PoH, it faces other difficulties. The aim of this section is to explore these difficulties and develop replies to them. To that effect, I construct four objections against UHV and show how it can respond. The first is the Empty Threats Objection (ETO), which claims that if it were true that Hell exists but no one goes there, then God would make an empty threat. However, God makes no empty threats, so it must be false that no one goes to Hell, in which case UHV must be false. Put more formally, ETO takes the following structure:

ETO1. If Hell exists but no one goes there, then God makes an empty threat.

ETO2. But God makes no empty threats.

ETO3. So it is false that Hell exists but no one goes there.

This argument for ETO simply rejects UHV via *modus tollens*. It is valid but unsound. Although it might be true that God makes no empty threats, the conditional in ETO1 is false, and so the argument does not falsify UHV. If my mother designates a place in the house for time out, but I never end up going there, it might appear that she is making an empty threat. This appearance is misleading. The fact that a threat goes unrealized does not entail that it was empty. For this reason, a defender of UHV might simply reply that ETO1 is false. Although it is true that no one goes to Hell, it does not follow that the threat of Hell is empty. On the contrary, it is possible that one could wind up eternally damned in Hell, but no one actually does

15. I intend for UHV to be consistent with competing notions of Hell and how damnation might happen there. It is not simply the denial of the claim that God damns individuals to Hell eternally. UHV denies that eternal suffering in Hell occurs, whether we damn ourselves to Hell eternally, create our own Hell in which we suffer eternally, etc.

or ever will. It is possible for the threat of time out to be realized, although it was not realized for me, just as the threat of eternal damnation in Hell could be realized, although it will not be for us. Punishments are frequently threatened but do not obtain. This does not mean that threatening them was empty. UHV might plausibly say the same about Unpopulated Hell. In creating Hell, God does not make an empty threat, even though no one will be damned there eternally. The threat is real but unrealized.¹⁶ Of course, this poses another problem for UHV: if Hell exists but no one is damned there eternally and God knows that this is the case, why would God bother creating it?

This is the No Good Reasons Objection (NRO): if God knows that no one will be damned eternally,¹⁷ then God has no reason to create Hell as a place where eternal damnation could take place. If UHV is true, then God does create such a place. Consequently, UHV entails that God does something that God has no good reasons to do. Of course, this is absurd, since God would not do something without having good reasons. The formal argument for NRO goes like this:

- NRO1. If God knows that no one will be damned eternally in Hell, then God has no good reasons to create Hell as a place where eternal damnation could occur.
- NRO2. God knows that no one will be damned eternally in Hell.
- NRO3. So, God has no good reasons to create Hell as a place where eternal damnation could occur.
- NRO4. But if UHV is true, then God does create Hell as a place where eternal damnation could occur.
- NRO5. So, if UHV is true, God does something that God has no good reasons to do.
- NRO6. But this absurd; God does not do what God has no good reasons to do.
- NRO7. Therefore UHV is false.

16. My response to ETO is that the threat of Hell is unrealized, which does not entail that it is empty. One might worry whether it is consistent with God's nature to threaten in the first place. One should feel free to modify ETO to deal with this worry. Perhaps a perfect God motivates us with the incentive of avoiding eternal damnation out of immense love for us, and to motivate us out of immense love for us is not to threaten us.

17. One might wonder whether UHV requires middle knowledge. I do not think that it does. God could know that no one will be damned to Hell eternally without having prevolitional knowledge of all true counterfactuals of creaturely freedom. Craig (1989) offers a middle knowledge solution to PoH. Talbott (1992) critiques Craig's solution.

This version of the argument for NRO provides a valid *reductio* against UHV. It claims that UHV has the absurd entailment that God would do something for which God lacks good reasons, e.g., create Hell as a place where eternal damnation could occur knowing that it will not. Let us return to the time out thought experiment. Suppose my mother hires a contractor to build a house for us. She asks the contractor to devise a room where my time outs could occur, despite her knowing that I will never actually go there for time out. NRO alleges that my mother would be doing something without good reasons. I will never end up doing what it takes to be in time out, and my mother knows this much, so she lacks good reasons to have a room built for this purpose.

The defender of UHV can respond that this is fallacious. Even if my mother knows that I will never have a time out, she could have good reasons to build a room where it might take place. She might build it precisely to motivate me not to behave in a way that would result in my going there. The possibility of going to the time out room might motivate me not to behave in certain ways, and this is only possible if there is a time out room in the first place. The defender of UHV might respond to NRO analogously by rejecting NRO1. God could have good reasons to create Hell as a place where eternal damnation could take place, even while knowing that no one will be damned there eternally. God might do this precisely to motivate us not to behave in ways that would result in our eternal damnation in Hell.¹⁸ In fact, NRO1 would be false if there were only one case in which someone were motivated in the right ways by the disincentive of Hell. If the threat of Hell motivates just one person to behave in a way that earns her salvation, then God has good reasons to create a world in which eternal damnation in Hell could take place, even if God knows that no one will be damned to Hell eternally.¹⁹ However, this response to NRO might generate a separate

18. A referee pointed out that if God creates Hell to motivate us not to behave in certain ways, then God threatens us with Hell, but this must be mistaken because God cannot and does not threaten. I have two replies. First, I do not think that it follows from God's use of Hell to motivate us that God threatens us. Second, I remain agnostic about whether God can or does threaten, but it seems plausible to say that God might threaten us if doing so is for our own good. Neither of these replies is decisive. I am currently preparing a manuscript in which I consider this problem that the referee has highlighted and develop strategies that the defender of UHV can deploy in response to it.

19. UHV need not adopt this particular explanation for why God creates (or allows) Hell despite knowing that no one will ever go there. Indeed, one could avoid the following objection (FO) I consider against UHV with a different explanation. This is only one possible explanation, which I intend to show that NRO1 contains a false conditional. Anyone keen to defend UHV should feel free to substitute their own explanation as to why God creates Hell, or even allows it to exist. Again, I intend for UHV to be compatible with the claims that God

problem for UHV: if God creates Hell as a place where eternal damnation could occur, in order to motivate us not to behave in certain ways, does God unduly impinge upon our freedom?

This is the Freedom Objection (FO): if God creates Hell as a place where eternal damnation could take place for this reason, knowing that no one will go there, then God impinges upon our freedom unduly. Some critics reject Universalism for similar reasons. They claim that if everyone goes to Heaven eventually, some after a temporary period in Hell, this entails that we cannot ultimately reject God. If we cannot ultimately reject God, then we are not ultimately free. FO raises a similar objection against UHV. The formal argument for FO goes like this:

- FO1. If UHV is true, then God takes measures to motivate us not to wind up eternally damned in Hell, e.g., creates Hell as a place where eternal damnation could occur.
- FO2. If God takes measures to motivate us not to wind up damned in Hell eternally, then God limits our freedom in an unacceptable way.
- FO3. If UHV is true, then God limits our freedom in an unacceptable way.
- FO4. But God does not limit our freedom in an unacceptable way, so UHV is false.

This is a valid *reductio* against FO. It alleges that UHV has the problematic entailment that God limits our freedom in an unacceptable way, and suggests that the best way to avoid this entailment is to reject UHV itself. As Universalism is problematic because it requires that one cannot ultimately reject God, this *reductio* suggests that UHV is problematic because it implies that we avoid eternal damnation in Hell because of the measures that God takes. This is bad analogical reasoning, though. A view requiring that we cannot ultimately reject God might place an unacceptable limitation on human freedom, but it is unclear why a view claiming that God influences us in certain ways also does so. The problem with Universalism is that it ultimately eliminates the possibility of rejecting God. UHV does not do this. It simply claims that God takes measures to motivate us not to be damned eternally, although this remains an alternate possibility. Thus the defender of UHV might reply by insisting that it is better to reject FO2. It does not follow from

creates Hell, that God allows us to create our own Hell, that God creates a world in which Hell arises because of Adam's fall, etc.

the fact that God influences us to behave in certain ways that God limits our freedom in an unacceptable way. If this were to amount to an unacceptable limitation on human freedom, then God's sending Jesus to inspire us to live better would also be unacceptable. More generally, this would entail that when someone motivates us to do something, then we do not do it freely. As such, if I were to abide by the speed limit because I might get a ticket for speeding, then I could not freely drive at the speed limit. This is false. Our being incentivized to do something does not entail that we cannot freely do it, and so the fact that God offers us reasons not to do what it would take to wind up in Hell does not entail that we cannot avoid Hell freely.²⁰

I have argued that UHV provides a new solution to PoH. God creates Hell as a place where eternal damnation could take place, perhaps to motivate us to behave in certain ways, knowing that no one will ever go there. A fourth objection, the Justice Objection (JO), claims that God would fail to act justly if no one were eternally damned to Hell. If no one suffers eternally in Hell, JO alleges, the truly wicked are not punished adequately. This objection does not deserve much commentary. God might devise perfectly adequate punishment for the truly wicked that does not require their eternal damnation in Hell.²¹ Universalists and Annihilationists offer arguments for how this happens, although they do so in a way that is inconsistent with UHV. If one were to insist that God must punish the truly wicked in order to be just, one could modify UHV in any number of ways. One might posit something like purgatory to defend UHV against JO. This would allow Hell to remain unpopulated, but it would allow God to send the truly wicked somewhere where they do not experience the joy of Heaven but are not subjected to damnation in Hell, whether mental or physical. God might simply allow the truly wicked to go out of existence; depriving them of entry to Heaven might punish adequately.²² I remain agnostic as to whether

20. One might worry whether the threat of Hell is so strong that it practically eliminates the possibility of going there, as if God were making an offer that we could not refuse. This is similar to Schellenberg's (1993) argument that if God were not hidden, then there would be no nonresistant nonbelief. UHV is resilient to this worry. Even if no one is damned to Hell eternally and God knows this, it is metaphysically possible that we could freely wind up damned to Hell eternally, even if God gives us powerful reasons not to do this.

21. Hick (1966) argues that justice does not require some to be damned to Hell eternally. Adams (1975) makes a similar argument. Sider (2002) argues that this conception of Hell is inconsistent with God's justice. Dougherty and Poston (2008) challenge Sider's argument. Konieczka (2009) offers another challenge to Sider.

22. This is close to Annihilationism. The difference is that, according to this view, God does not send anyone to Hell before destroying or allowing them to go out of existence, which preempts worries about God's omnibenevolence.

God must punish the truly wicked in order to be perfect. My reply to JO is simply that UHV can accommodate competing answers to this question. God's justice and an unpopulated Hell are consistent. I leave it up to others to explain precisely how these two claims work together, although I have provided a few possibilities here in my response to JO.

Fifth, and finally, it might remain unclear whether UHV does enough to convert someone from accepting a traditional solution. I think it does. UHV solves PoH but avoids the major problems with traditional solutions. Universalism places an unacceptable limitation on human freedom. If everyone goes to Heaven eventually, then we cannot ultimately choose to reject God. UHV avoids this entailment. It is consistent with the possibility of ultimately rejecting God, but insists that Hell is not where anyone does this. Annihilationism is inconsistent with God's creative nature or benevolence. If God destroys the wicked or allows them to go out of existence only after a period of misery, then God is either not essentially creative or not omnibenevolent. UHV need not concede that God does either, and thus avoids this dilemma. All UHV requires is that Hell exists but no one goes there. RV claims that God must punish the truly wicked in order to be just. It strikes me as implausible that some must be damned to Hell eternally in order for the truly wicked to get what they deserve, and UHV is consistent with this claim. UHV allows God to punish the truly wicked adequately; it just insists that God does not do this by sending anyone to Hell. FWD claims that God makes it possible that we could be eternally damned to Hell because this makes our freedom very meaningful. It strikes me as implausible that some must be damned to Hell eternally in order for freedom to have its proper value. Even if this is false, it does no damage to UHV, since UHV is compatible with FWD but does not require it. According to UHV, it is possible for us to be eternally damned to Hell, but no one will be. UHV can reply to FWD that freedom can have its proper value without anyone actually going to Hell.

Lastly, one might wonder whether it would be better to respond to the argument for PoH by simply denying that Hell exists. Let us call this the No Hell View (NHV). I know of no thorough treatment of such a view in the literature of the philosophy of religion, but I think that such a view would run into problems or be less attractive than UHV. The biggest problem with NHV is that it seems to make an unfounded inference. PoH shows that a perfect God could not have morally sufficient reasons for allowing anyone to suffer eternally in Hell. FWD and RV simply deny this claim. Universalism and Annihilationism concede this, and thus conclude that no one suffers eternally in Hell. NHV concedes this along with the Universalist

and Annihilationist that eternal suffering in Hell does not occur, but infers from this that Hell must not exist. This inference is fallacious. It does not follow from the fact that no one suffers in Hell eternally that Hell does not exist. In this respect, UHV is the more logical concession to make to PoH. Finally, UHV poses fewer contradictions for primary Christian texts claiming that (1) Hell exists, and (2) some people go there.²³ NHV is inconsistent with (1) and (2), whereas UHV is only inconsistent with (2). Consequently, those intent on devising a solution to PoH that is most consistent with the primary texts of Christianity have good reasons to prefer UHV over NHV.

CONCLUSION

I have argued here that UHV deserves our attention, at the very least because it solves PoH. According to UHV, no one is damned to Hell eternally, so there can be no tension between the claims that (1) God is perfect and (2) God allows some individuals to be eternally damned to Hell. Second, UHV avoids some of the major problems that traditional solutions to PoH pose. The Free Will Defense, the Retributivist View, Universalism, and Annihilationism have enjoyed considerable attention in the literature of the philosophy of religion, even though each of them faces deep problems. Again, this is not to say that these problems are decisive. Proponents of each traditional solution offer replies to these problems, some of which might be successful. But UHV can avoid many of these problems outright since it does not face them in the first place. For this reason, it merits consideration as a solution to PoH. UHV could certainly be problematic for other reasons. The bulk of this paper was spent developing objections against UHV and responding to them. I have argued that UHV can offer satisfying replies to all of these problems. If this is wrong, I hope that this paper initiates a closer examination of UHV. My aim here is simply to show that UHV deserves consideration. It would be a mark of progress to show that the objections

23. One might claim that these passages are mistaken or metaphorical and not to be taken literally, but it seems implausible to me that every passage supporting these claims from the primary texts is to be read in this way, at least if one of our aims is to preserve the truth of sacred texts and maintain that it admits a straightforward interpretation. Then again, I am not a theologian, so I defer to the experts on whether this provides good reasons to adopt UHV. Von Balthasar (1988) points out that while Sacred Scripture and Catholic teaching claim that the Saints are in Heaven, they never declare that any specific individuals are in Hell. He goes on to argue for the possibility that Hell is empty and urges us to pray that this turns out to be the case. UHV can be marshalled to bolster von Balthasar's claim. If UHV is true then it's not only possible that Hell is empty. On the contrary, UHV provides good reasons to believe that no one goes to Hell.

I consider against UHV are insurmountable, or that UHV has devastating flaws that this paper does not address. I welcome this progress, even if it results in UHV being rejected.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Adams, Marilyn M. 1975. "Hell and the God of Justice." *Religious Studies* 11 (4): 433–47. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0034412500008763>.
- . 1993. "The Problem of Hell: A Problem of Evil for Christians." In *Reasoned Faith, A Festschrift for Norman Kretzmann*, edited by Eleanore Stump, 301–27. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Anselm. *Cur Deus Homo*, in *Anselm of Canterbury* (Volume 3). Translated and edited by J. Hopkins and H. Richardson. New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1976.
- von Balthasar, Hans Urs. 1988. *Dare We Hope "That All Men Be Saved"?* with *A Short Discourse on Hell*. San Francisco: Ignatius Press.
- Buckareff, Andrei, and Allen Plug. 2005. "Escaping Hell: Divine Motivation and the Problem of Hell." *Religious Studies* 41 (1): 39–54. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0034412504007437>.
- Craig, William Lane. 1989. "'No Other Name': A Middle Knowledge Perspective on the Exclusivity of Salvation through Christ." *Faith and Philosophy* 6 (2): 172–88. <https://doi.org/10.5840/faithphil19896212>.
- Dougherty, Trent and Ted Poston. 2008. "Hell, Vagueness, and Justice: A Reply to Sider." *Faith and Philosophy* 25 (3): 322–8.
- Hick, John. 1966. *Evil and the God of Love*. New York: Harper and Row.
- Konieczka, Matthew. 2009. "Hell Despite Vagueness: A Reply to Sider." *Sophia* 50 (1): 221–32. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11841-009-0115-6>.
- Kronen, John, and Eric Reitan. 2011. *God's Final Victory: A Comparative Philosophical Case for Universalism*. London: Continuum.
- Kvanvig, Jonathan L. 1993. *The Problem of Hell*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- . 2011. *Destiny and Deliberation*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Lewis, C. S. 1946. *The Great Divorce*. London: MacMillan.
- Lewis, C.S. 1944. *The Problem of Pain*. New York: MacMillan.
- Luck, Morgan. 2016. "Escaping Heaven and Hell." *Religious Studies* 52 (3): 395–402. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0034412515000451>.
- Mackie, J.L. 1955. "Evil and Omnipotence." *Mind* 64 (254): 200–12. <https://doi.org/10.1093/mind/LXIV.254.200>.
- Matheson, Benjamin. 2014. "Escaping Heaven." *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 75 (3): 197–206. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11153-013-9432-3>.
- McCloskey, H.J. 1960. "God and Evil." *Philosophical Quarterly* 10 (39): 97–114. <https://doi.org/doi/10.2307/2960059>.
- Murray, Michael J. 1999. "Three Versions of Universalism." *Faith and Philosophy* 16 (1): 55–68. <https://doi.org/10.5840/faithphil19991613>.
- Pinnock, Clark H. 1997. "The Conditional View." In *Four Views on Hell*, edited by William Crockett, 135–66. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.
- Quinn, Philip L. 1988. "In Adam's Fall, We Sinned All." *Philosophical Topics* 16 (2): 89–118. <https://doi.org/10.5840/philtopics198816215>.
- Rowe, William L. 1979. "The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism." *American Philosophical Quarterly* 16 (4): 335–41.

- Rowe, William L. 1979. "The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism." *American Philosophical Quarterly* 16 (4): 335–41.
- Schellenberg, J.L. 1993. *Divine Hiddenness and Human Reason*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Sider, Ted. 2002. "Hell and Vagueness." *Faith and Philosophy* 19 (1): 58–68. <https://doi.org/10.5840/faithphil20021918>.
- Stump, Eleonore. 1986. "Dante's Hell, Aquinas's Moral Theory, and the Love of God." *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 16 (2): 181–96. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00455091.1986.10717114>.
- Swinburne, Richard. 1989. *Responsibility and Atonement*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Talbott, Thomas. 1990. "The Doctrine of Everlasting Punishment." *Faith and Philosophy* 7 (1): 19–42. <https://doi.org/10.5840/faithphil1990711>.
- . 1992. "Craig on the Possibility of Eternal Damnation." *Religious Studies* 28 (4): 495–510. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0034412500021892>.
- . 1999. "Providence, Freedom, and Human Destiny." *Religious Studies* 26 (2): 227–45. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0034412500020382>
- . 2001. "Freedom, Damnation, and the Power to Sin with Impunity." *Religious Studies* 37 (4): 417–34. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0034412501005777>.
- Walls, Jerry L. 1992. *Hell: The Logic of Damnation*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press.