



THINK
THEISM

Welcome!

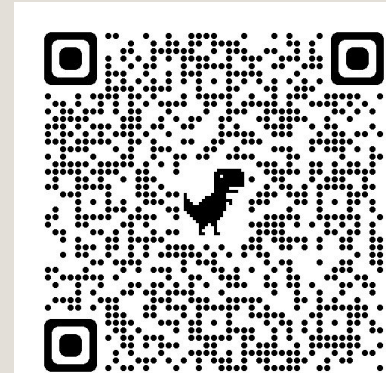
Ratio Christi (“reason for Christ” in Latin) is a community of Aggies brought together with the common purpose that Jesus and his message are worth thinking about.

Weekly Meetings: Thursday @ 8:30pm

RC-TAMU.org



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Ratio Christi
Texas A&M



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Thomistic Institute

The Thomistic Institute exists to promote Catholic truth in our contemporary world by strengthening the intellectual formation of Christians at Texas A&M University, in the Church, and in the wider public square. The thought of St. Thomas Aquinas, the Universal Doctor of the Church, is our touchstone.

Weekly Meetings: Thursdays @ 7:00pm, Rudder 407*

thomisticinstitute.org/texas-am



Secular Students Alliance

The Secular Student Alliance seeks to provide a support network for the atheists, agnostics, and otherwise secular peoples of Texas A&M University.

SSA brings together people from a wide range of religious and ideological backgrounds in order to foster deeper levels of understanding through discussion and dialogue.

Weekly Meetings: Thursdays @ 8:30pm, MSC 2505

facebook.com/groups/TAMUSecularStudentAlliance



Thinking Thursdays @ Texas A&M



7:00-8:00pm

Thomistic Institute
Rudder 407*

8:30-9:30pm

Ratio Christi
MSC 2401

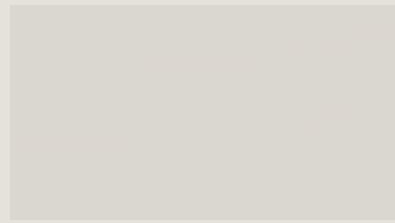
8:30-9:30pm

Secular Students
MSC L526A

10:00-11:59

Rev's American Grill
MSC First Floor

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Think Theism lectures are supported by Ratio Christi @ Texas A&M, but the opinions represented herein do not necessarily reflect the beliefs or values of Ratio Christi. This content is presented to encourage discussion and critical thought about challenging questions.



RATIO
CHRISTI



- Humanity has rejected God, the source of life and goodness.
- Seeking our own ends, we have become victims and agents of evil, death, and misery.
- God, not willing we should perish, entered a covenant of grace to deliver humanity from this miserable state by means of a Redeemer.
- Begun with the Hebrew people, this covenant reached its fulfillment in Jesus who overcame the powers of evil, death, and misery in his death and resurrection.
- Jesus calls for all humanity to turn away (i.e. repent) from evil to the Kingdom of God.

The background features a dark, starry sky. A bright, glowing yellow arc, resembling a rainbow or a celestial body, spans across the upper half of the image. Below the arc, a jagged, purple, wireframe-like landscape stretches across the bottom, resembling a mountain range or a rocky terrain. The overall aesthetic is futuristic and ethereal.

What About Those That Reject the Gospel?

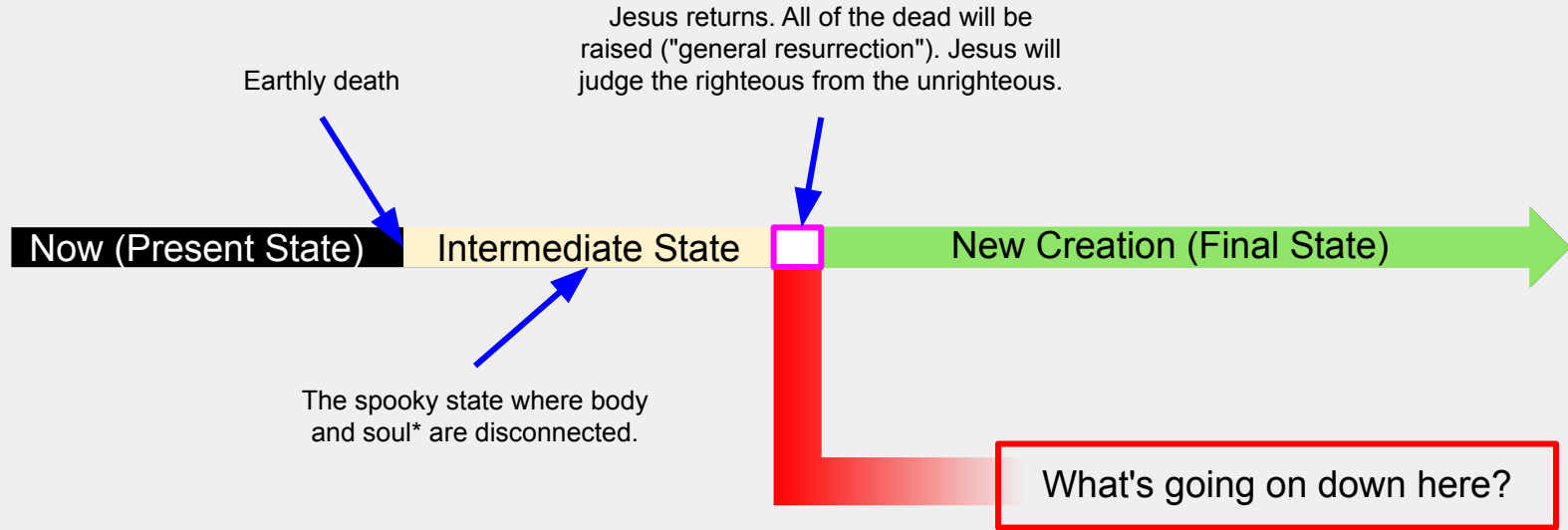
The Problem of Hell

What About Those Who Reject the Gospel?

- **Clarification 1:** We are not discussing those that never hear the Gospel. (See last week's discussion).
- **Clarification 2:** We are not discussing those currently seeking out the truth of the matter.
 - If Christianity is correct, Jesus *is* the truth and rewards those who diligently seek. (John 14:6, Hebrews 11:6)
- **Clarification 3:** Nobody listening to this discussion meets the criteria of "having, in the final analysis, rejected the Kingdom of God".

So, what *are* we discussing?

Christian eschatology (aka "end times") in brief:



"To the unrighteous he will say '***Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire*** prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry and you gave me no food...a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me,...[for] as you did it not to one of the least of these, you did it not to me.' And they will go away into ***eternal punishment***, but the righteous into eternal life." (Matthew 25:41-46, NRSV)

The argument is an objection to the justice of God:

1. Hell is God's way of administering justice for earthly sins.
2. Hell is **infinite punishment equally administered** to all condemned.
3. Infinite punishment for finite sin is **unjust**.
4. Most sins are unequal and all sins are finite.
5. Therefore, God is unjust.

Alvin objects to Christianity based on this issue.
How should Carol respond?



Roadmap

1

Three Views of Hell - Overview

General introduction to three views of hell within Christian theology: eternal torment, conditional immortality, and universalism.

2

Three Passages of Scripture

Critical evaluation of three passages in the hell debate: Luke 16:19-31, Isaiah 66:22-24, and Revelation 14:9-11

3

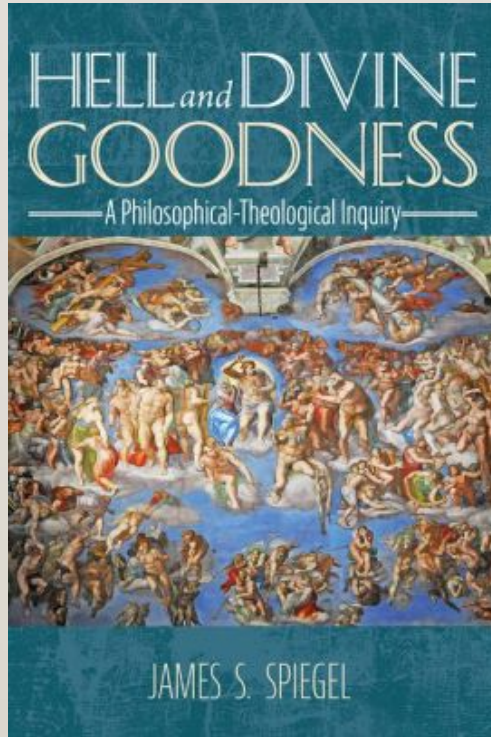
Three Philosophical Responses

Critical evaluation of three philosophical defences: the Status Argument, the Continuing Sin Hypothesis, and Natural Consequence.

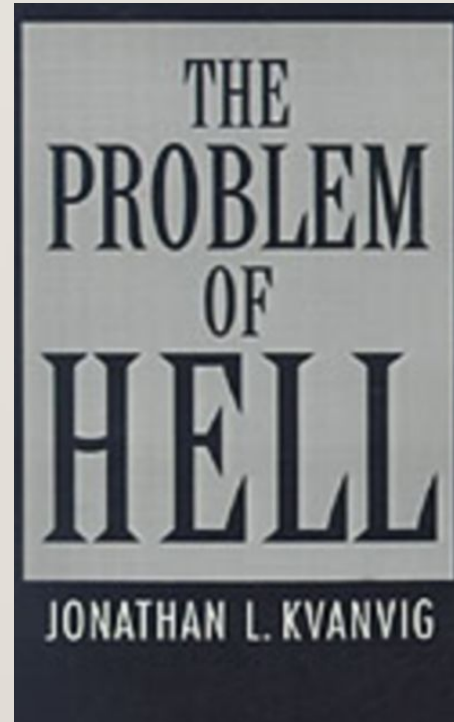


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Resources



**Hell and Divine Goodness:
A
Philosophical-Theological
Inquiry**
James S. Spiegel (2019)



The Problem of Hell
Jonathan L. Kvanvig
(1993)

Roadmap

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Three Philosophical Responses

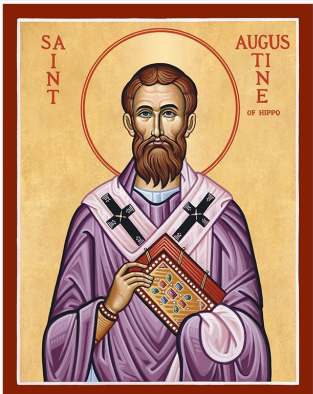
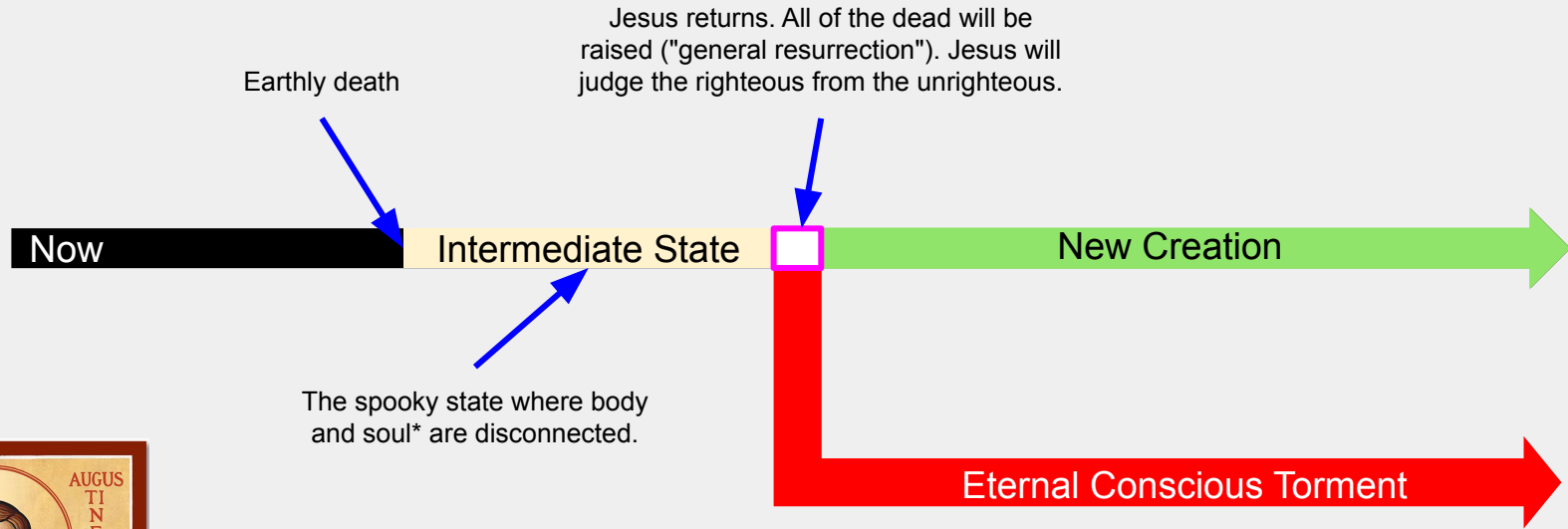
Critical evaluation of three philosophical defences: the Status Argument, the Continuing Sin Hypothesis, and Natural Consequence.



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View 1: Eternal Conscious Torment

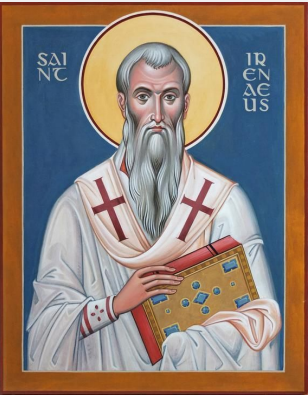
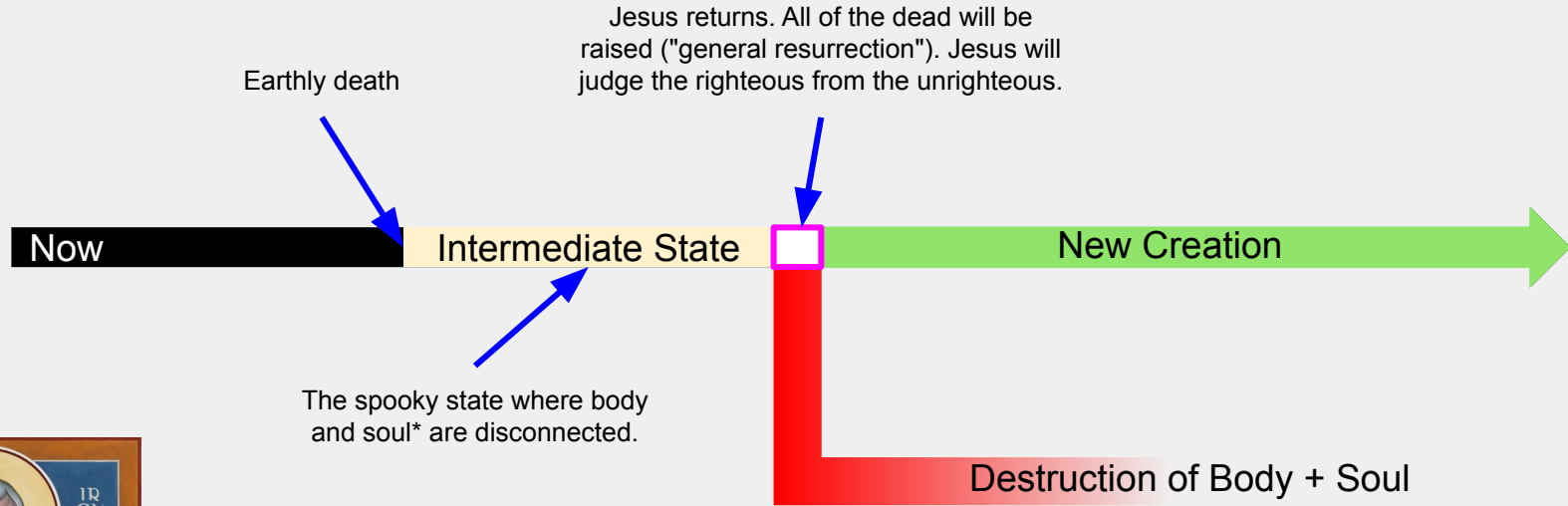
Christian eschatology (aka "end times") in brief:



St. Augustine of Hippo (ca. 354-430 A.D.) articulated that "in that penal and everlasting punishment...the soul is justly said to die, because it does not live in connection with God; but how can we say that the body is dead, seeing that it lives by the soul? For it could not otherwise feel the bodily torments which are to follow the resurrection." (*City of God, XII.ii*). We will refer to this view as "**Tormentalism**".

View 2: Conditional Immortality

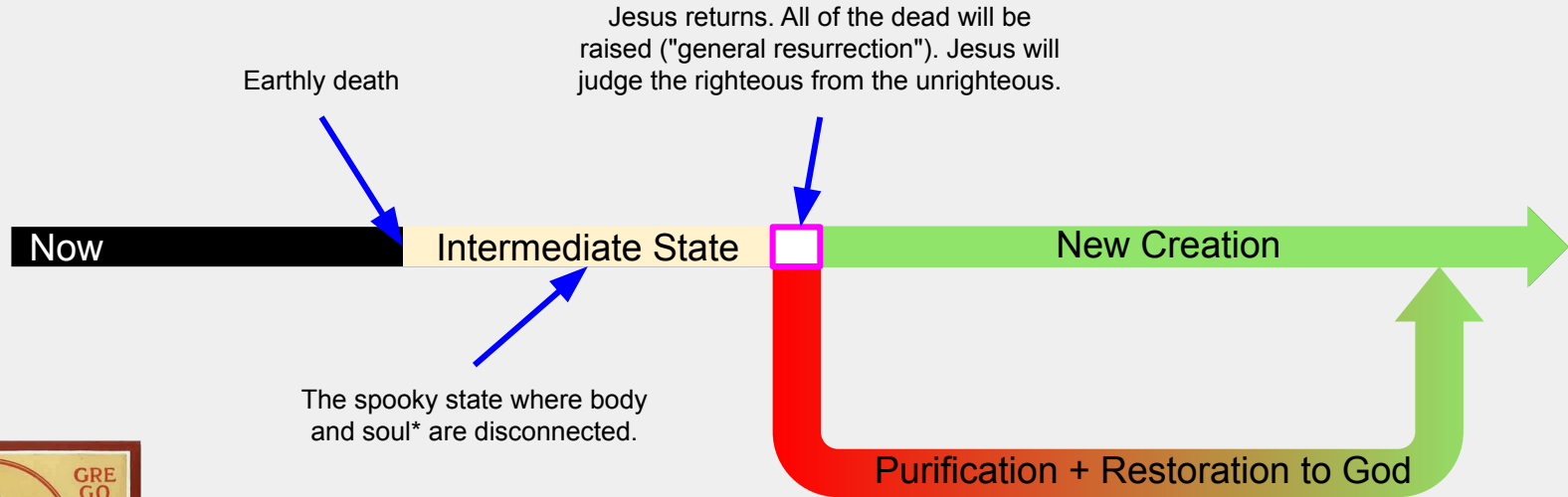
Christian eschatology (aka "end times") in brief:



St. Irenaeus of Lyons (ca. 130-202 A.D.) articulated that those outside of Christ "are deprived of His gift, which is life eternal. And not receiving the Word of incorruption, they remain in mortal flesh and are the debtors of death, not having received the antidote of life." (*Against Heresies*, iii:19:1). In other words, "whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life". In short, immortality is conditional on accepting Christ; rejection of Christ entails destruction. We will refer to this view as "**Conditionalism**".

View 3: Universal Reconciliation

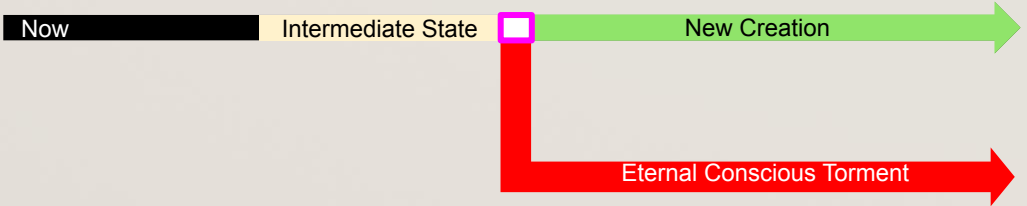
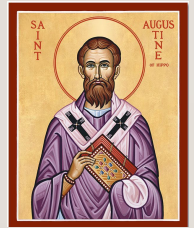
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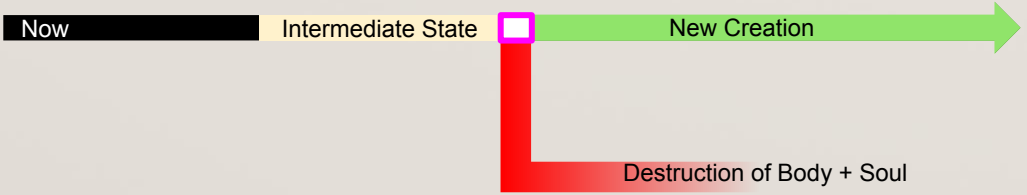
St. Gregory of Nyssa (ca. 335-365 A.D.) articulated that the purpose and nature of hell was for universal restoration of humanity. "[God's] end is one, and one only: when the complete whole of our race shall have been perfected from the first man to the last,...[some] having afterwards in the necessary periods been healed by Fire...to offer to every one of us participation in the blessings which are in Him" (*On the Soul and the Resurrection*). We will refer to this view as "**Universalism**".

Summary: Three Views of Hell

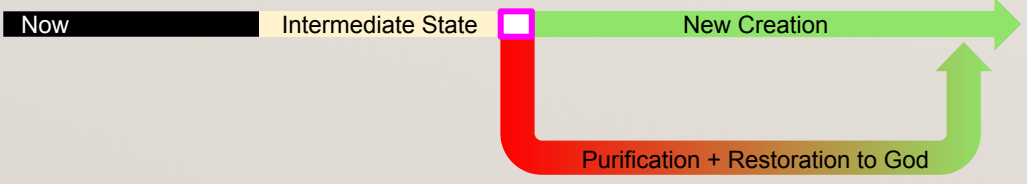
Augustine's
Eternal
Torment



Irenaeus's
Conditional
Immortality



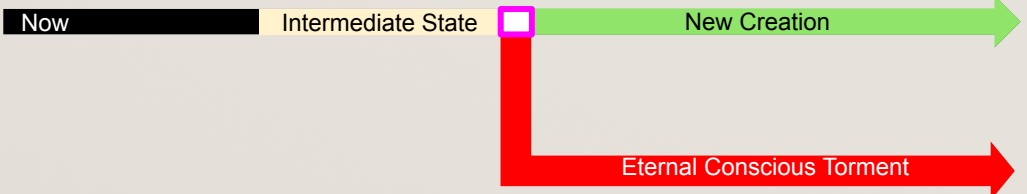
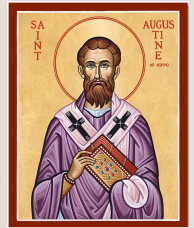
Gregory's
Universal
Reconciliation



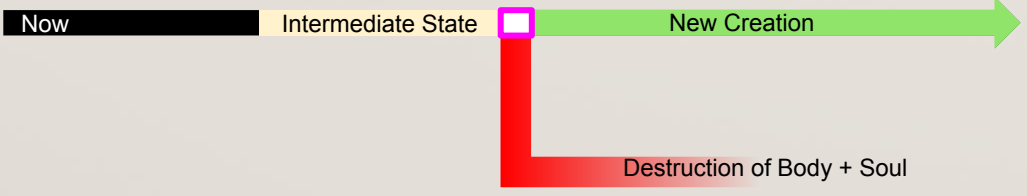
Are there any *clarifying* questions?

Summary: Three Views of Hell

Augustine's
Eternal
Torment



Irenaeus's
Conditional
Immortality



Gregory's
Universal
Reconciliation



Our primary focus will be on the Tormentalist and Conditionalist views.



Why the Interpretive Disagreement?

- There is no single, authoritative literal description of hell in scripture.
- Metaphors have three parts
 - **Target:** the thing being described
 - **Referent:** the thing used for comparison
 - **Sense:** the similarity between target and referent
- There is agreement on the **targets** and **referents** in the literary portraits of hell, but disagreement on the **sense**.



Jesus is the Lamb in the sense that both are sacrifices; not that both have four legs...

Hell is a Fire *in the sense of...*



a *painful* fire?



a *destructive* fire?



a *purifying* fire?



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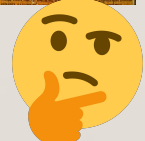
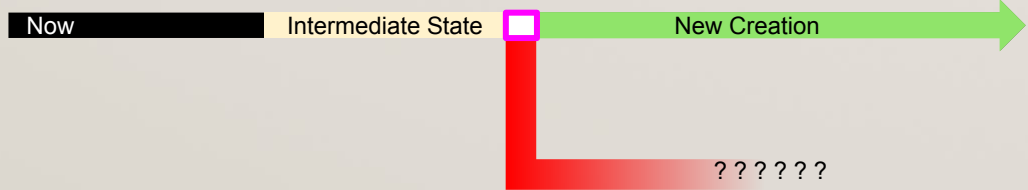


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Dives and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31)

Jesus's parable of the Rich Man (Dives) and Lazarus often comes up, but it is ultimately irrelevant to the question.

- 1. Wrong Genre: Parables are universally not taken literally, especially the setting.
- 2. Wrong Message: Given the context, it is almost certain Jesus is not teaching about the nature of the afterlife.
- 3. Wrong Time: **Even if** (1) and (2) were false, this could only at most be referring to the intermediate state, i.e., consistent with any views.



Are there any **clarifying** and/or **probing** questions?



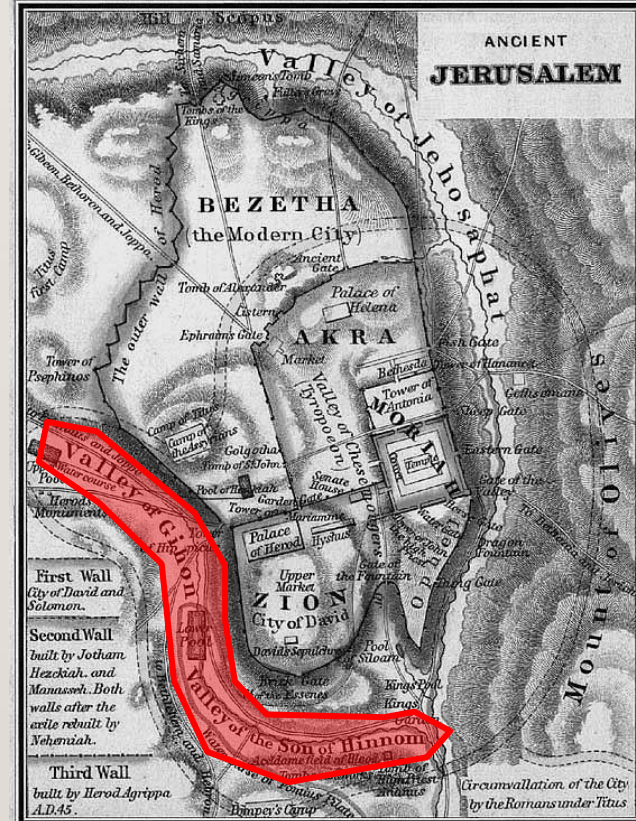
Jesus and the Victory of God (Wright 1996, pg 255): "The parable is not, as often supposed, a description of the afterlife, warning people to be sure of their ultimate destination. If that were the point, it would not be a parable"; quoting from 'The Rich Man and Lazarus: The Parable and the Parallels' New Testament Studies (Bauckham 1991, pg 233, 245ff.) Wright adds "the story" cannot claim eyewitness authority as a literal description of the fate of the dead. It has only the status of parable.' In fact, it directs attention 'away from the apocalyptic revelation of the afterlife back toward

Unquenchable Fire, Undying Worm (Isaiah 66)

"For as the **new heavens and the new earth**, which I will make, shall remain before me, says the Lord; so shall your descendants and your name remain. From new moon to new moon, and from sabbath to sabbath, all flesh shall come to worship before me, says the Lord. And they shall go out and look at the **dead bodies** of the people who have rebelled against me; for their **worm shall not die**, their **fire shall not be quenched**, and they shall be an abhorrence to all flesh." (Isaiah 66:22-24, NRSV)

"If your eye causes you to stumble, tear it out; it is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and to be thrown into hell [*gehenna*], where their **worm never dies**, and the **fire is never quenched**." (Mark 9:47-48, NRSV)

Interpreters agree this Isaianic picture has in view the infamous **Valley of Hinnom**: a physical location known to be the place of great idolatry, e.g. King Ahaz's sacrifice of his children to Moloch (2 Chronicles 23:8). The prophet Jeremiah gives an oracle that God will visit this Valley with such violent judgement it will be known as the Valley of Slaughter (Jeremiah 7:31-34). The Hebrew for "Valley of Hinnom" was later Hellenized into the Greek *gehenna* which is the term used by Jesus on numerous occasions to describe hell.



Unquenchable Fire, Undying Worm (Isaiah 66)

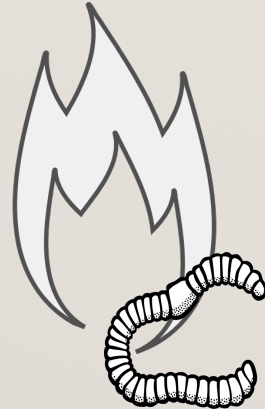
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Referent: Corpses

Sense: Pictorial depiction of death in body and soul, c.f. Matthew 10:28
"Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in *gehenna*"



Referent: Fire & Worms

Sense: Agents of consumption that devour & obliterate anything in its path, c.f. "consuming", "unquenchable fire", reducing to "nothing" whatever it touches (Deuteronomy 4:24, Hebrews 12:29, Ezekiel 20:47-48, Amos 5:5-6)

Assessment: These depictions *prima facie* favor the Conditionalist interpretation. Advocates of the Torment view either concede as much (c.f. G.K. Beale, *Hell Under Fire*, pg 120n23) or allegorize the passage as a generic depiction of God's wrath (e.g. D.I. Block, *ibid* pg 61).

Smoke of Torment Rises Forever (Rev 14, 20)

"Then another angel, a third, followed them, crying with a loud voice, "Those who worship the beast and its image...will be tormented with fire and sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. And the **smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever**. There is no rest day or night for those who worship the beast and its image and for anyone who receives the mark of its name.'" (Revelation 14:9-11, NRSV)

"And the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet were, and **they will be tormented day and night forever and ever**...Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire; and anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire." (Revelation 20:10,14-15, NRSV)

Eternal Torment interpreters take this fairly literally, identifying this as the "resurrection to everlasting contempt" found in Daniel 12.

Conditionalist interpreters point out that this same language is used in the sense of obliteration, e.g. the judgement and destruction of Babylon in Revelation 18-19: "the kings of the earth...will weep and wail over her when they see the smoke of her burning; they will stand far off, in fear of her torment, and say, "Alas, alas, the great city, Babylon, the mighty city! For in one hour your judgment has come." (18:9-10) "[her] smoke goes up from her forever and ever" (19:3). "Babylon the great city will be thrown down, and will be found no more" (18:21).



Summary

"I have to be honest and say, either [view] is possible, and equally orthodox...If I were a betting man (which I am not) I would bet that probably the [conditionalist] view is closer to the truth...But I don't know that I can be sure about this when the evidence is so imagaic and so metaphorical."

- **Ben Witherington III**, Professor of New Testament Interpretation at Asbury Theological Seminary



The argument is an objection to the justice of God:

1. Hell is God's way of administering justice for earthly sins.
2. Hell is **infinite punishment equally administered** to all condemned.
3. **Infinite punishment for finite sin is unjust.**
4. Most sins are unequal and all sins are finite.
5. Therefore, God is unjust.

Alvin objects to Christianity based on this issue.
How should Carol respond?



Alvin the Atheist

Carol the Christian

Retribution Thesis

The Retribution Thesis (RT): The justification for hell is retributive in nature, hell being constituted to mete out punishment to those whose earthly lives and behaviour warrant it. (Kvanvig 1993, *The Problem of Hell*, p. 25)

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Standard Responses

- 1) Status Argument (Appeal to God's Character)
 - a) Rejection of infinite good = infinite sin = infinite guilt
 - i) Transfinite Arithmetic, could "maximal" save it?
 - ii) Maximal Punishment = Torment or Obliteration?
 - iii) Does fundamental analogy work?
- 2) Continuing Sin Argument (Appeal to Ongoing Guilt)
- 3) Respect of Free Choice Argument (Appeal to Natural Consequences)

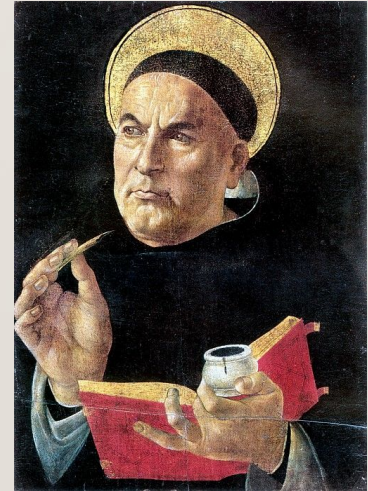
The Status Argument

Prima Secundae, Summa Theologiae Q87.iv "Whether sin incurs a debt of punishment infinite in quantity?"

"[T]he gravity of a sin increases according to the greatness of the person sinned against (thus it is a more grievous sin to strike the sovereign than a private individual), and God's greatness is infinite."

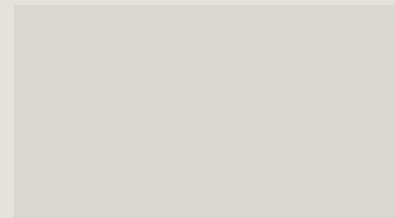
N.B.: this is in the Praeterea, but Aquinas does not appear to refute it.

"I answer that, **Punishment is proportionate to sin.** Now sin comprises two things. **First, there is the turning away from the immutable good, which is infinite, wherefore, in this respect, sin is infinite.** Second, there is the inordinate turning to mutable good. In this respect sin is finite, both because the mutable good itself is finite, and because the movement of turning towards it is finite, since the acts of a creature cannot be infinite. **Accordingly, insofar as sin consists in turning away from something, its corresponding punishment is the pain of loss, which also is infinite, because it is the loss of the infinite good, i.e., God.** But insofar as sin turns inordinately to something, its corresponding punishment is the pain of sense, which is also finite."

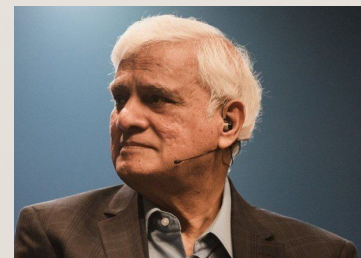


Are there any **clarifying** and/or **probing** questions?

The Status Argument - Some Concerns



1. Transfinite Arithmetic is suspicious
 - a. Actual infinities cannot be formed by successive addition.
 - b. If justice truly demands infinite punishment, this will never be achieved. Maybe "maximal" instead?
2. Why favor the status of the Offended over that of the Offender?
 - a. Counterintuition: If two people of different virtue commit the same sin, isn't the sin of the more virtuous more grievous?
 - b. E.G.: Serial adultery from Trump was excused as "well, we know he's a playboy" but Ravi's actions were lamented.



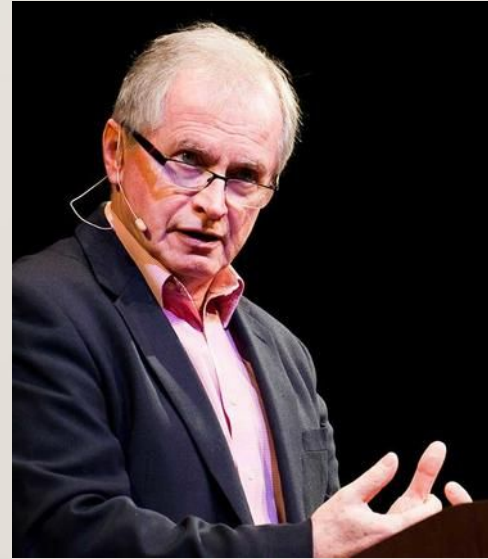
Are there any **clarifying** and/or **probing** questions?

The Continuing Sin Thesis

Stated: Are we to imagine the denizens of hell as contrite? Loving God and neighbour? If not, then they continue to sin and add more time to their sentence, like a prisoner who commits a crime behind bars. (Paraphrase of D.A. Carson)

Some Concerns

1. Seems *ad hoc*
2. Scriptural warrant is purely conjectural, possibly contradicted (c.f. Phillippians 2:10-11)
3. Opens the door to theses not traditionally entertained (e.g. second chances). Where there is evil, there is free will.



Are there any **clarifying** and/or **probing** questions?

The Natural Consequence of Free Will

The genius of Dante's idea of hell is that it finds an intermediate between these two extremes. On Dante's view, what God does with the damned is treat them according to their second nature, **the acquired nature they have chosen for themselves**. He confines them within a place where they can do no more harm to the innocent. In this way he recognizes their evil nature and shows that he has a care for it, because by keeping the damned from doing further evil, he prevents their further disintegration, their further loss of goodness and of being.

- Eleonore Stump



Conclusion & Summary

- **Objection:** Hell is unjust because it is infinite punishment for finite sins.
- This presupposes the **Eternal Conscious Torment + Retribution Thesis (ECT+RT)** interpretation.
- The **Status Argument** and **Continuing Sin Argument** are the standard philosophical defenses of ECT+RT.
- Some ECT advocates reject RT, suggesting Hell is God's respecting creatures' **free will rejection of Him (FWT)**.
- **Conditionalism** is a viable, biblical alternative to ECT with historical precedence (c.f Irenaeus) that is compatible with RT and FWT.